



STUDENT ASSIGNMENT survey summary

Council for Children's Rights



Council for
Children's
Rights

Spring 2016

Council for Children’s Rights

student assignment survey summary

Would you support a student assignment plan that redrew school boundaries?

In February 2016, Council for Children’s Rights (CFCR), with support from several local agencies committed to advancing education, circulated a 4-question survey asking whether respondents would support a student assignment policy that included redrawing school boundaries. The goal of this project was to both supplement Charlotte-Mecklenburg School’s larger student assignment exploration and to inform CFCR’s advocacy. The present document thematically summarizes 953 responses from people with and without school-age children in 43 zip codes.

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background

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education committed to making a decision in 2016 about whether Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools' (CMS) school assignment policy will change for the 2017-2018 academic year. A number of considerations prompted this decision, including overcrowding, lengthy bus rides, and increases in the number of high-poverty, high-minority schools. The school board experienced pressure from the community as the number of high minority, high poverty schools grew from 12 to 53 within ten years of moving to its current school assignment policy in 2001-02 and redrawing school boundaries. Foundational to the current plan is parental choice between a home school (close to the family's residence), zone schools in designated feeder areas, magnet programs with specialized curricula, and schools outside the feeder zone. Options under consideration for changes to the student assignment policy include 1) redrawing school boundaries, 2) altering bus routes, and 3) increasing magnet utilization in the district.

In February 2016, CMS released a 22-question survey to garner public input on student assignment, which received 27,000 responses. Around the same time, Council for Children's Rights, with support from several local agencies committed to improving education, circulated a 4-question survey asking whether respondents would support a student assignment policy that included redrawing school boundaries.

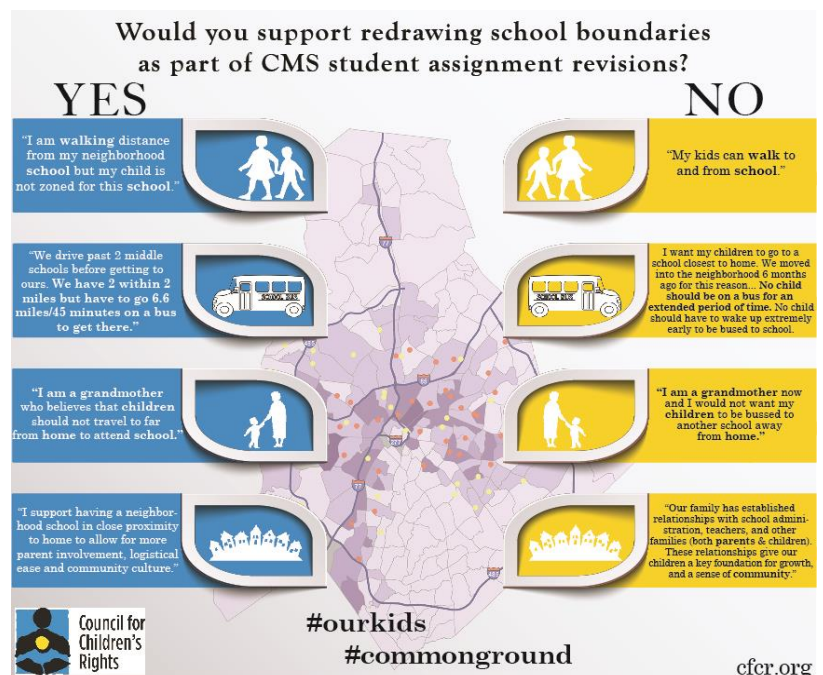
purpose

Of the three options under consideration, redrawing school boundaries is often cited by members of the community as one of the more acceptable options and is suggested as central to a multi-pronged approach. In order to supplement CMS's larger inquiry and to inform CFCR's advocacy for the reduction of high poverty, high minority concentrations, CFCR endeavored to focus its question on that proposed solution and to pose the question free from assumed value.¹ The purpose was to elicit conscious opinions and subconscious belief systems held by residents about school assignment and our community.

results

CFCR received 953 responses from people with and without school-age children in 43 zip codes. Responses vary in length from a single sentence to several pages, which, when compiled, total 57 pages with standard fonts and margins. Responses were reviewed by both internal and external parties with varying backgrounds and experiences with qualitative data. Themes were independently identified, then compared, and broadened collectively.

Much like [CMS's guiding principles](#) for this process, unveiled May 2016, there is common ground on all sides of the argument. **Both proponents and opponents of adjusting school boundaries share the belief that children should attend schools close to home.** Another idea resonating across the board is that **boundary alterations are tantamount to busing**, despite the two being offered as distinct approaches to student assignment. Opponents vehemently contend that *forced*



¹ While a larger, more rigorous qualitative approach would have been ideal for CFCR to pursue, the time constraints necessitated brevity.

busing is bad for students and families because it will increase travel time and limit family participation with schools. Even folks who favor revisiting boundaries qualify their support by stating that children should not be bussed longer distances to accomplish diversity.

Across the board, respondents identified and struggled with other issues facing the district and community beyond diversity, such as: concentrations of poverty, inequitable distribution of resources, teacher pay, family involvement, and housing policies. The following identifies main themes and quotes from supporters, opponents, and those who remain unsure.

main themes²

Within each stance, several themes emerged, including many that resonated with all three positions (listed in bold below). Themes are presented in descending frequency for each position, where categories with at least 10 responses are included in the table below.³ Many of the quotes were so rich that they touched on several themes; inclusion in this report was based on length and substance. In order to maximize space for community responses, analysis is limited to the explanation of themes and explores only the top themes for each position.⁴

Support	Oppose	Not Sure
more equality/equity	purchased home/chose residence for school	depends on new boundaries/plan
more diversity	support schools close to home/neighborhood schools	need more information
current boundaries don't make sense	boundaries work for me	support schools close to home/neighborhood schools
support schools close to home/neighborhood schools	won't solve the real problem	boundaries work for me
overcrowding	boundaries=busing	won't solve (the) real problem
boundaries should be revisited periodically	maintain community/relationships	more equality/equity
	disruptive	boundaries=busing

support

Overwhelmingly, supporters call for *more equality and more equity* across the district, stating that resources are not evenly distributed across schools. They contend that unequal distributions of families with diverse

Far too many schools in CMS have become racially segregated, and far too many schools have an extremely high proportion of students living in poverty. Separate is not equal.

I support the redrawing of school boundaries because they are currently segregating children of color and lower socioeconomic groups. Most schools in CMS are either performing great or low performing. The differences between schools just a few miles away from one another is striking and often the result of arbitrary boundary lines cutting off the wealthier families from families with a lower income. The families that are stuck going to the low performing schools don't have the option to send their children to private schools. It's unfair that they must continue to be unhappy with their home school because they live in a more marginalized area.

backgrounds, teachers/staff, funding, and opportunities lead to the stark differences in school performance.

I believe it would allow for equitably distributed districts. Children should grow up seeing diversity and learning to love others from all types of backgrounds.

It has always struck me as bizarre that CMS has a narrow wedge of super desirable schools, and a much larger area served by high poverty schools. The solid, average, affordable zonings seem to be missing. I don't know if this is due entirely to neighborhood schools, or due to the rise of "school grades" and internet message boards, or something else altogether (probably all). I hope that the school board will welcome this opportunity for a new way forward.

Certain schools get more or better resources. Surrounding neighborhoods of schools are more supportive than other schools. I think redrawing the lines would diversify schools and give other students a chance at schools with newer/better/more resources.

² See Appendix B for theme definitions and examples.

³ See appendix for frequency data.

⁴ All responses are available upon request.

In addition to wanting more equitable distribution of resources, supporters call for **more diversity** in our schools, stating that children need exposure to diverse cultures in an environment that more accurately reflects the larger Charlotte-Mecklenburg community.

Currently Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools are extremely segregated. This harms my son and everyone else--it restricts diversity and creates high poverty schools that decrease opportunities and increase crime.

I support redrawing school boundaries in a manner that promotes a district that is more socio-economically and racially diverse while promoting safety and academic achievement.

I intentionally opted out of my neighborhood school because of its lack of diversity. It is only 10% poor and is considered one of the best schools in the district.

However I wanted my children at a school more representative of the real world, and that's why I chose a magnet school with more diversity. You can absolutely redraw lines to make every school more diverse without breaking up neighborhoods or having long bus rides.

We need to create schools that have diversity of income and race to prepare students to work in the real world.

Diversity in our schools helps all children and will help to close the achievement gap in our lowest performing schools.

Finally, many supporters argue that the **current boundaries don't make sense**, forcing a significant portion of the student population to travel long distances and undermining the notion of neighborhood schools.

Some students live closer to one school but are assigned to another, which makes no sense. I know it's an effort to embrace diversity and balance the mix of students but making a student ride the bus across town when they live down the street from a different school is not the way to fix the problem. If the schools were equivalent from a quality perspective, it wouldn't matter as much which school a student went to, and the entire student assignment boundaries problem would be a non-issue, with the added benefit of students spending less time on the bus and being able to go to school with their neighbors and friends, causing fewer tensions in the classroom.

Our neighborhood schools are approximately 8 miles vs a closer high school that is 2 miles. Our neighborhood should be zoned for the schools closest to our neighborhood.

The schools closest to us are not the schools that serve our neighborhood. Our "neighborhood" high school - Harding - is about 10 miles away, even though we are less than 2 miles to Myers Park and 4 miles to South Meck.

Our home high school is 12 miles from our home. That makes no sense!

I do not feel that the neighborhood schools represent the "neighborhood." For example, Quail Hollow Middle is NOT an example of the neighborhoods nearby/within walking distance. The cut off line should be Hopeton Road and Park Rd Extension, and Beverly Woods and Huntingtowne should feed Quail, not Carmel. Also, Westinghouse/South Blvd should not feed Quail.

oppose

Overwhelmingly, opponents argue that they **purchased** their **home** or **chose** their **residence** for the **schools**. This argument is not only supported by notions of sacrifice, financial and family planning, and parent choice but also with concerns about how changes would impact property values.

Do not mess with our property values when the name of the game has been to purchase high in order to get into desired schools.

Lots of people bought homes based on current school assignment, new assignment will create lots of uncertainty.

My wife and I moved to our neighborhood because of the school district. If the boundaries are redrawn that would not be fair to the families who purchased where they live because of the assigned schools. If parents are not happy with their child's school then they can re-locate to a neighborhood with the assigned schools that they choose. The power of choice and free will.

I'm tired of CMS doing things like this. People move here and buy their houses just to be in a certain school, only to have the boundaries changed? Just like the busing with magnets -- I had to move just to get within the 5 mile radius so I could WORK (single mom) and support my child, then you went and changed it back to having busing for all students. You are messing with peoples' LIVES here.

I bought my house with schools in mind and a negative drawing of school rankings would both force me to move and could negatively impact my home value.

We worked hard, saved money and made many sacrifices to make that happen. It would be a slap in the face to have CMS turn around and decide that our children will not attend these schools. People of all socioeconomic backgrounds can attend these schools. We are not wealthy but we did what we had to do. In this area anyone can attend a 'better performing school'. It is a matter of doing the work to get there (looking for affordable housing- of which there is an abundance in this area). There is housing available for all income levels. If you want your child to attend these schools make sacrifices to get them there, just like the rest of us did.

It's disruptive, confusing and unnecessary. We paid a premium on our house to live in a neighborhood with good schools for my kids and so they can attend school with fellow friends in the neighborhood, interfering with that dynamic would be absolutely disruptive and stressful on the kids and families overall. Instability will only lead to more residents choosing to live outside of Mecklenburg County!!

Closely related to the idea that folks purchased their homes or chose to live in neighborhoods because of the schools is the idea that the **current boundaries work** for them. A significant portion of the opposition simply stated that they like their current school, its degree of diversity, and the education their child is receiving.

Opponents also struggled with the assertion that redrawing boundaries **won't solve the real problems** facing our district and our community.

The issues that the Board wants to fix will not be remedied by boundary changes. Cooperation between City Council and other government agencies to help address funding needed to improve teacher salaries to attract quality teachers to lower performing schools. Increase parent and volunteer involvement in lower performing schools, maybe sharing volunteers with better performing schools. Where our kids go to school is not the root cause of the problem.

I think redrawing boundaries is just rearranging chairs.

Things have been tried in the past and they have not worked in terms of increasing school performance. I think you need to put more resources into lower performing schools and maintain the level of service in the higher performing schools. Shuffling kids is NOT the answer.

I do not believe the school boundaries are causing the issues CMS is facing, and redrawing boundaries would be expensive and draw litigation. CMS should work on

increasing accountability of students and parents with regard to classroom behavior, completion of school work and cooperation with teachers; in addition to stressing the importance of parent participation in the classroom and outside of the classroom. These steps should be followed and results evaluated before making the drastic measure to change school boundaries.

Redrawing the boundaries without meaningful action to address neglect, the inter-generational poverty, and inadequate health care will only change where students most in need of support, care, and tailored instruction go to school. Redrawing boundaries simply assumes if you change schools, the children in greatest need will have their needs met. Education for school staff and community resources to meet those children's needs are crucial to changing the school to prison pipeline and enhancing educational outcomes. If the chicken crosses the road, he is on the other side; however, the chicken can only be successful on the other side of the road if there is corn and a hen house.

While not singularly one of the top themes, ***maintaining community and relationships*** is often cited as part of the aforementioned arguments.

Children grew up school, their schools environment turn into their communities they learn live and learn together if you change their school they will lose the idea of community and the feeling of belonging to a community and also we do not want them to drive hours when they do not need to. please keep our children in their current schools.

It will effect [sic] the kids with the friends and teachers they have already established a learning experience with

Our school is a community and we have built a strong PTA that enhances the educational experience for all students and teachers. Redrawing boundaries would break up a system that is working well and contributes to the overall success and community of our school.

remain unsure

Unsurprisingly, the overwhelming response from folks that remain unsure is that they would ***need to see the new boundaries***, the ***plan*** for implementation, and the overall ***goal***.

It depends on what the policy intends to achieve. I do think that some change is essential, and am looking to the Board of Education to provide strong leadership on what we can do to reduce schools with a disproportionately high concentration of students whose families struggle with poverty. At the same time, changing assigned schools is an emotional issue for every family it touches. I would like to see such changes accompanied with greater choice for all families, so that families feel like they are part of the decision and in control of the options available to their family, not that their children's future are subject to a confusing and highly political districting process.

I do not know what priorities will take highest prominence. Stability and wide community support are critical and fundamental to the long term success of CMS. I have a fear that we could lose sight of that in the face of other objectives.

In theory, I am fully supportive of making our schools more racially and socioeconomically diverse. However, I can't endorse until I feel confident that there is a fair, well thought out and sustainable plan that will provide my children with a comparable alternative to what they currently have at our home school. If you can guarantee me out new school assignment is equal in quality and proximity (within 5 miles of our house, very possible to do based on where we live), then I can support reassignment.

It depends on how it affects my kids and their school. Their school is the closest one to home so I don't want them moved but it already has 2900 students and don't want it to get any bigger.

It would have to limit travel time and address overcrowding. I am supportive of attempts to diversify schools under those parameters

Clearly, many factors are under consideration and our community is struggling with how best to solve a large problem, often weighing both moral and economic arguments.

My children attend great schools and are very happy. They are receiving a top-notch education at CMS schools. At the same time, I am concerned about all the children in our area who do not have the same opportunities that my children have. And I worry about the lack of understanding that comes when communities are isolated along racial and socioeconomic lines. When child poverty, and the many challenges that go along with it, is concentrated in certain schools, there is no way those schools can adequately educate their students without an overwhelming influx of resources. I wonder what the families in the high poverty schools want. Do they want to be able to send their children to schools outside their neighborhoods, and do they think it would be a good thing for children from other neighborhoods to come in? If so, then I think we need to make that happen -- either by redrawing boundaries or allowing choice. And if choice means schools in my area have to take more students, then that's fine with me. If this is not the answer, then take some resources from my children's schools, and some of the extraordinary teachers, and put them at the high poverty schools. I am not sure that will solve the problem of concentrations of poverty if it's what families facing socioeconomic challenges want, we need to make a stronger effort to make it happen.

Next steps

With opponents and proponents advocating for neighborhood schools, our community must begin by defining critical terms such as *neighborhood* and *community* for this process and in general. What is a neighborhood school? Is it a school within a neighborhood, in proximity to a neighborhood, attended by students from the same neighborhood, or something else entirely?

Folks are clamoring for schools that are close to home and foster community/relationships. However, many fail to recognize that current boundaries often force families far from what they consider their community. Furthermore, we cannot discuss the boundaries of a neighborhood without taking into consideration the social, political, and economic factors and conditions that influenced the creation of the neighborhood in the first place. Communities segregated by race and income-level are not natural phenomena but, rather, products of history and policy.⁵

Recognizing this fact, many folks acknowledge that simply changing student assignment won't solve many of the problems facing our communities: concentrations of poverty, inequitable distribution of resources, teacher pay, family involvement, and housing policies. That said, concentrations of poverty exacerbate most issues facing our schools; key indicators of school quality (safety, teacher retention, teacher quality, academic performance, graduation rates, physical facilities, pupil-teacher ratios, etc.) have negative relationships with segregation.⁶

Along with solidifying a definition of the neighborhood within this process, we must also consider the negative impact that grading schools (A-F) has on the potential of the entire district by effectively labeling schools as either *good* or *bad*. While this grading system may help identify areas for improvement and give communities a tool with which to hold schools accountable, it can also undervalue student growth, negatively impact property values/sales, and stigmatize entire communities. Furthermore, school-level aggregation may mask root causes for academic performance. Finally, the assigned grades do not come with the resources or funding to improve the issues identified.⁷

CFCR is dedicated to working closely with CMS and other community organizations to tackle these issues facing children and families in our community using community perspectives, data, and research.

⁵ Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Siegel-Hawley, G. (2013). City lines, county lines, color lines: The relationship between school and housing segregation in four southern metro areas. *Teachers College Record*, 115(6), 1-45.

⁶ Siegel-Hawley, G. (2014). Race, choice and Richmond Public Schools: New possibilities and ongoing challenges for diversity in urban districts. *Urban Review*, 46(4), 507-534. doi:10.1007/s11256-014-0277-6

⁷ Glynn, T. R., & Waldeck, S. E. (2013). Penalizing diversity: How school rankings mislead the market. *Journal Of Law & Education*, 42(3), 417-500.; Howe, K.R. & Murray, K. (2015). Why School Report Cards Merit a Failing Grade. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved May 2015 from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/why-school-report-cards-fail>; Jacobsen, R., Snyder, J. W., & Saultz, A. (2014). Informing or shaping public opinion? The influence of school accountability data format on public perceptions of school quality. *American Journal Of Education*, 121(1), 1-27.

Appendix A: Data Tables^s

Support	n
more equality	138
more diversity	92
current boundaries don't make sense	39
support schools close to home/neighborhood schools	27
overcrowding	25
boundaries should be revisited periodically	13

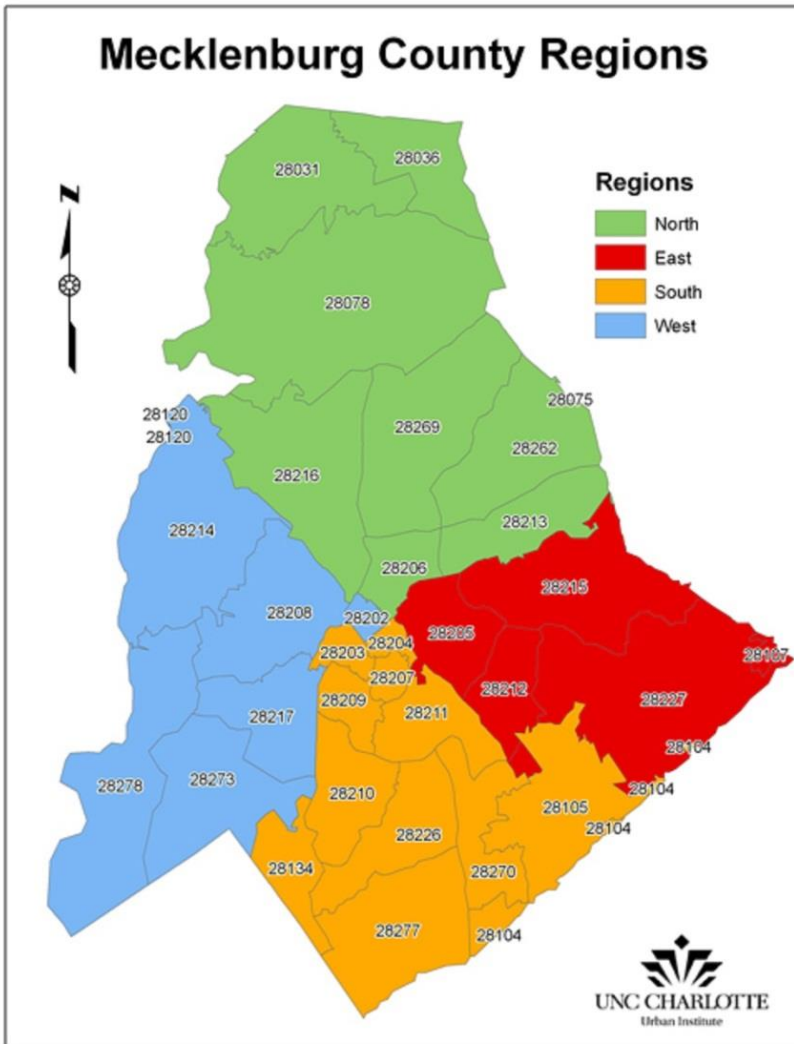
Oppose	n
purchased home/chose residence for school	154
support schools close to home/neighborhood schools	138
boundaries work for me	105
boundaries=busing	66
won't solve the (real) problem	58
maintain community/relationships	29
disruptive	19

Unsure	n
depends on new boundaries/plan	58
need more information	28
support schools close to home/neighborhood schools	21
boundaries work for me	12
won't solve the (real) problem	11
more equality/equity	13
boundaries=busing	11

^s Support, Oppose, Not Sure tables are non-exclusive; quotes may be counted twice if they support multiple themes

zip	n	%
28210	135	14.19%
28277	127	13.32%
28211	89	9.34%
28226	87	9.14%
28270	80	8.39%
28078	60	6.27%
28209	55	5.78%
28205	54	5.67%
28105	35	3.67%
28203	30	3.15%
28207	30	3.15%
28216	22	2.31%
28269	15	1.58%
28214	12	1.26%
28227	10	1.05%
28204	10	1.05%
28031	16	1.67%
other Meck	61	6.40%
Outside Meck ⁹	25	2.62%
Grand Total	953	100.00%

Support redrawing boundaries	n	%
I'm not sure	174	18.3%
No	454	47.6%
Yes	325	34.1%
Grand Total	953	100.0%



	Support	Opposed	Are unsure	total
Folks with school-age children	165(26.1%)	349(55.2%)	119(18.8%)	633(100%)
Folks w/out school-age children	158(50.5%)	101(32.3%)	54(17.2%)	313(100%)
left blank	2(28.6%)	4(57.0%)	1(14.3%)	7(100%)

⁹ Most of these responses were provided by folks who stated that they moved of Charlotte and cited school related concerns as one of the driving factors; only two stated that they were never residents.

Appendix B: Theme definitions and examples

theme	definition	example
boundaries should be revisited periodically	boundaries should be revisited periodically taking into consideration time, growth, change	<i>School boundaries should be redrawn every so often to analyze area needs as neighborhoods develop and change over time.</i>
boundaries work for me	the boundaries work for me and I like my current assignment	<i>We are happy with where our house maps to for schools and would not want that to change.</i>
boundaries=busing	boundary changes are tantamount to forced busing	<i>There is no reason for kids to have to get up even earlier to go to a school farther away when there are schools within minutes from their house. There are districts for reasons.</i>
current boundaries don't make sense	the boundaries do not make sense in the way that they are currently drawn	<i>Our middle school is quite far from our home. The bus pulls in one hour after school is over. There are 2 middle schools MUCH closer.</i>
depends on new boundaries/plan	my support depends on the boundaries, implementations, and objective	<i>I am not opposed to redrawing boundaries, but I cannot say yes or no without seeing the revised boundaries and the logic for the redrawing.</i>
disruptive	changing boundaries is disruptive for children and families	<i>Let's take advantage of current school assets and not bring disruption to families that in many cases have made long-term commitments to their current schools.</i>
maintain community/relationships	I would like to maintain and foster participation in my community and the relationships established in my school and neighborhood	<i>I want my children to be in school with the neighborhood children they play with and know (and parents we know). I want their time as children to be spent playing and learning - not riding a bus all over town.</i>
more diversity	students need exposure to diverse cultures	<i>Too many of our schools are re-segregated which is bad for all children. Diversity in school attendance is best for all groups.</i>
more equality/equity	more equitable distribution of people, funding, teachers, opportunity, and resources is needed	<i>To better allocate resources and quality education to all children</i>
need more information	I need more information about why and how/I was not aware this was under consideration	<i>I don't know all of the issues around this topic...or enough to make an informed opinion.</i>
overcrowding	many schools are overcrowded/need to prevent additional overcrowding	<i>Because the number of students is growing and we need to be sure we prevent overcrowding in growing communities.</i>
property value	changing boundaries may negatively impact the value of my property	<i>I would not because of the drop in property values and the cost to the taxpayer for bussing [sic]. Families have chosen to live in the districts they are currently in. This will help a handful, but hurt the majority.</i>
purchased home/chose residence for school	I purchased my home or chose to live where I do because of the assigned school	<i>We bought our home based on the fact where the kids would be zoned for certain schools.</i>
support schools close to home/neighborhood schools	wants children to attend school close to home but response do not expressly mention the current boundaries	<i>I feel that children should go to their neighborhood schools. My children do not need to travel to a school further away just so others can come and attend the school in my backyard. If that was to happen my children would leave CMS.</i>
won't solve the (real) problem	changing boundaries won't fix the real problems facing our community and our district	<i>We need to Address the problems in broken schools, rather than just redistributing the problem.</i>



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