

Lakeside High expansion worries some DeKalb parents

EDUCATION By [Marlon A. Walker](#) - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



1



Lakeside High School

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Parents concerned about DeKalb County School District plans to expand Lakeside High School say 2,500 students will not fit the current property, citing ongoing traffic congestion and flooding.

The parent group has started a website, [EducateDeKalb.org](#), laying out its case challenging the

expansion of the school. The parents said new construction, or repurposing of existing facilities, should be more thoroughly examined in this case and several others.

“I’m bothered there seems to be no overarching strategic facilities plan,” said parent Debbie Miller, who is part of Educate DeKalb. “I’m kind of perplexed. How do you take a school system by design with primary and secondary schools in their neighborhoods, and superimpose mega schools on these same pieces of property served by single-lane roads? Either you transform the whole system, or you work with what you’ve got ... which is not what is happening.”

The DeKalb County Board of Education, in a 6-1 vote, approved recommendations for more than 600 projects funded by the Education Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax, which included \$26 million to expand Lakeside’s capacity from 1,800 to 2,500 seats. According to the ESPLOST document, the expansion would make room for 38 classrooms, other building space and parking spaces.

The work is expected to be complete by 2022.

District data show about 2,165 students currently enrolled for the 2018-2019 school year, with 1,778 students attending.

“The key question is not about adding 300 more students to Lakeside’s current enrollment, but what an optimal number of students is for this location given the property size and road infrastructure,” [the group said on its website](#). “Given the experience during the 2017-18 school year so far, it would seem that number is LESS than 2,200, not more.”

Dan Drake, the district’s interim chief operations officer, said a feasibility study on the site — as well as a traffic impact study and an emergency response review — is coming in the next few weeks, with information on how the added enrollment could affect getting in and out of the area, for residents or emergency responders.

Drake added that the school’s Construction Advisory Committee, which includes residents and parents, has been instrumental in some studies getting done, contributing greatly to the process.

“We’ve heard all their concerns,” he said, adding that the Construction Advisory Committee “has given the community a venue to have these discussions.”

Traffic already is an issue around the school, with thoroughfares and residential roads backed up for hours around first and last bell. On a typical day, some school buses routinely show up near the end of the first period, which also impacts attendance at nearby Henderson Middle School, whose students use the same buses. Parents have said they attend fewer and fewer sporting events and other activities at the school to avoid getting caught in the onslaught.

“The reality is our input is limited,” said Barbara Arne, a member of Lakeside’s Construction Advisory

Committee and Educate DeKalb. “We have all our questions and comments sent to the district through the principal, and we’re only allowed two members to attend official (district) meetings, such as the walk-through with the architect and schematic meetings.”

The parents say they have met with or written to district officials more than a half dozen times over the past year with their concerns. Several of the district’s high schools are facing the same challenges, with similar solutions proposed, including Chamblee Charter High School and Dunwoody High School.

DeKalb County Board of Education member Stan Jester said expanding the schools will put pressure on facilities inside the schools, including cafeterias, gymnasiums and resource centers.

“It seems like the district went down the route of the cheapest solution ... to build seats at schools rather than build a new school,” he said.

Jester said administrators balked at the idea of building a high school in the Doraville area, saying it would create a cluster of mostly minority students, like the schools that feed into Cross Keys High School.

“That being said, we do have 18 clusters and Cross Keys is the fourth-highest performing cluster,” Jester said. “There are 14 other clusters that wish they were Cross Keys.”

Concerns about Lakeside High School expansion

The parents group Educate DeKalb worries about the appropriate size of the student population, lack of notice to residents about the potential impacts on them, traffic congestion and flooding. The school district says a feasibility study and traffic impact study are coming in the next few weeks and that its Construction Advisory Committee includes residents and parents, who have had “a venue to have these discussions.”

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DeKalb County is never proactive - any feasibility study should have been done years ago and it sounds like DeKalb wants to do one now for the Lakeside expansion. DeKalb is reactive in the worst ways - they pretend to listen to parents, ignore parents' concerns, and do what the school system planned on all along. The DeKalb County school system does not care if parents get mad or frustrated. If you pull your kids out to send them to private school or homeschool, that's fine with them.

1

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