

Boundary Changes and BCPS Goals and Strategic Initiatives: Academics, Safety, Communication, and Organizational Effectiveness

From time to time and in order to support BCPS goals and initiatives, it becomes necessary to change the student attendance areas – or boundaries – of our schools. In recent years, persistent and widespread overcrowding, particularly at elementary schools across the county, has been a trigger for boundary changes. BCPS has a number of strategies to help support schools as community and student populations naturally increase and decrease in size. However, sometimes these strategies – such as alternate room use inside the building, limits on special permission transfers, and the placement of relocatable classrooms – reach the limits of their effectiveness. This is when we consider more permanent and intensive measures such as boundary changes.

Systemwide instructional goals can also be a trigger for boundary changes. Our ability to ensure opportunities for all children to access programs and services that meet their needs and to offer educational options to families may sometimes best be supported by boundary changes. When possible, boundary changes may also be an effective way to help support community continuity through alignment of elementary, middle, and high school boundaries.

The BCPS boundary change process is intended to be as supportive as possible of students, families, staff, and the greater community. The process is guided by [Board of Education Policy and Superintendent's Rule 1280](#). Below are some frequently asked questions about boundary changes in BCPS that we hope will encourage community understanding and support of this important function.

- **When does BCPS consider boundary changes?**
 - When construction of a new school or addition to an existing school adds student capacity to a region to help resolve overcrowding.
 - When school closures or consolidations are deemed appropriate ([See Policy/Rule 1290](#)).
 - When enrollments can be balanced among a group of schools to resolve overcrowding without new construction.
 - To help create continuity for students by improving alignment of elementary, middle, and high school boundary areas.
 - To help support access to academic and instructional opportunities across the system.

- **Does BCPS redistrict frequently?**

We recognize that boundary changes can be disruptive to students and concerning to families; therefore, we engage in the process only when it is evident that a boundary change may help support one or more of the considerations noted above. We are also guided by the principle that, to every extent possible, a child will not experience a boundary change more than once while attending any one BCPS school.

- **How are new boundaries determined, and how long does the process take?**

The boundary change process has four phases and takes approximately one year to complete. BCPS Boundary studies may be conducted in either the spring or fall and are typically completed at least four months prior to going into effect:

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Phase	Duration	Description
Planning	2-3 months	A steering committee of principals, staff specialists, and community superintendents carefully assess the considerations that have triggered the need for a boundary change and identify key outcomes, timelines, and potentially affected schools.
Study	3-5 months	A committee, co-chaired by a community superintendent(s) and with representatives from each potentially affected school, meets regularly, reviews detailed maps, examines student enrollment data and other information, and presents a range of options to the greater community for consideration and input.
Decision	2-3 months	The superintendent presents the committee’s recommendation to the Board of Education. The Board holds a public hearing to gather input and then votes to adopt a new boundary. BCPS school boundaries cannot change without Board approval.
Implementation	3-5 months	After the adoption of a new boundary by the Board, the steering committee plans and implements effective communications with all affected community members to ensure a smooth implementation of the new boundary.

- How will I know if my school is involved in a boundary change process?**
Typically, principals will let their communities know that their school will be involved and represented in a boundary study process at the start of the boundary change planning process and about three to five months prior to the convening of the boundary study committee.
- Who serves on the boundary study committee and what is their role?**
The boundary study committee is appointed by the superintendent with input and recommendations from community superintendents and school principals. The committee consists of equal representation from all involved schools and may include parents, teachers, and other community stakeholders. Principals serve as nonvoting members and provide information to support the process. Committee members are asked to be as open as possible and to resist representing their personal interests and instead focus on the interests of all children that will be affected by the boundary process. Members commit to attend typically between four and seven meetings and spend time both in and outside of meetings carefully considering information and providing relevant insight into neighborhood considerations. They also attend the community public information session to help explain the committee’s work and engage in conversations about boundary change considerations.

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- **How can I get involved in the boundary study process?**

BCPS offers many ways to get information and engage in the process:

- Let your PTSA president or principal know that you are interested in serving on the committee—schools may not be able to accommodate all requests. Volunteers should be confident in their commitment to time required and to serving the interests of all involved schools.
- Visit the BCPS Web site regularly to view all information that is provided to the committee and other updates regarding the process.
- Watch boundary study committee meetings online – live as they happen and recorded for later viewing.
- Attend boundary study committee meetings – meetings are open to the public; however, participation is limited to committee members.
- Attend the public information session to review in detail the committee’s draft recommendations and engage in conversation with staff and committee members about boundary change considerations.
- Participate in the online survey to provide input and comments on the committee’s draft recommendations.
- Email comments and suggestions to the boundary study committee. An email address can be found on the boundary study website. All email comments received are public record and are logged and posted to the website, including your name but not your email address. Please avoid including personal information (e.g. phone numbers, student names, etc.)
- Attend Board meetings and participate in general public comment and/or write to the Board.
- Attend the Board’s public hearing specific to the boundary change decision under consideration.

- **What do members of the boundary study committee consider as they develop a recommendation?**

To develop a recommendation that is implementable, effective, and successful, the boundary study committee may consider:

- Efficient use of available space and other resources.
- Long-range enrollment and capacity needs.
- Natural boundaries such as reservoirs and rivers and major infrastructure barriers such as railroad tracks and highways.
- Elimination of existing satellite boundaries (attendance areas of schools that are not connected to the main boundary).
- Supporting effective feeder school patterns.
- Minimizing the number of times any one student is reassigned.
- Phasing in boundary changes by grade level for high schools and for all schools based on when construction projects are complete and ready for new students.
- Maintaining diversity among all involved schools.
- Other considerations that may be specific to the goals of a particular boundary change.

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- **Is there any provision that would allow my child to stay at our current school after a new boundary goes into effect?**

BCPS does not typically exempt addresses from a boundary change process. If a child will be a fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth, eleventh, or twelfth grader when a new boundary is implemented, students are permitted to stay at their current school under the special permission transfer provision and process. Please note that transportation is not provided. ([See BCPS Policy/Rule 5140](#)).

- **How are the boundaries for elementary, middle and high schools related?**

Boundaries at each level – elementary, middle, and high – are independent from each other. However, when possible, BCPS attempts to align boundaries so that either an entire school zone or neighborhoods of families within the zone can stay together as they progress to the next level school in their community. This said, boundary changes at each level are independent of the others. Changes in elementary boundaries, for instance, do not result in a change to middle school boundaries.

For more information about BCPS, our schools, and updates on what is happening in our school system, please visit [the BCPS homepage](#).

