



February 21, 2020

Atlanta Public Schools Leadership,

On behalf of the Morningside Elementary PTA and the Morningside Lenox Park Association, I write to inform you of our communities priorities and concerns regarding the future of both Inman and the Grady Cluster.

The MES PTA and MLPA hosted a joint meeting last week to discuss our priorities and goals, with nearly 100 attendees. Special thanks to those of you on the School Board who were able to join us. We reviewed the enrollment projections and building capacity information initially presented by the Sizemore Group during the third round of FMP meetings. We left our meeting with a clear sense of what is important to MES parents and neighbors. I am sharing those priorities with you and am excited to advocate for our community at the cluster-wide meeting on Tuesday, February 25.

Our top five priorities center around the following issues, in order of priority:

1. elementary school capacity in the Grady Cluster
2. walkability to and from school
3. future capacity and growth
4. minimizing school transitions
5. middle and high school capacity

Our community intentionally decided to focus on clarifying our priorities and concerns. We are not proposing a specific recommendation for a future use of the Inman property. We recognize that there may be more than one way to achieve our priorities, and we are not currently attached to one particular solution.

Attached is a detailed record of our community's responses to the information presented. I hope you will take time to review the report. It provides a good glimpse into what people in our community are saying. Importantly, I hope you can appreciate that our community is open to many different solutions as long as they address our priorities.

Thank you for soliciting feedback and for providing opportunities for us to learn about the FMP process. We are grateful for the chance to engage with APS, and we're excited to see how things unfold. If you have questions, please contact me at [ptapresident@morningsideschool.org](mailto:ptapresident@morningsideschool.org).

Many thanks,

Emily Fink  
Morningside Elementary PTA President

On February 18, 2020 the Morningside Elementary School (MES) PTA and Morningside Lenox Park Association invited the Morningside Elementary community to a conversation about the community's priorities and key concerns. All feedback collected during the meeting has been included in this document and will be shared with Atlanta Public Schools (APS) as part of their Facilities Master Plan process. There were 85 attendees who signed in at the meeting, including current and future MES parents, three members of the APS School Board, and former City of Atlanta Council Member Alex Wan.

The meeting organizers compiled all comments received during the meeting in this document. Comments have been recorded verbatim - with very light editing only when necessary for clarity. The document has also been shared with Atlanta Public Schools on behalf of the Morningside Elementary community in attendance at the meeting.

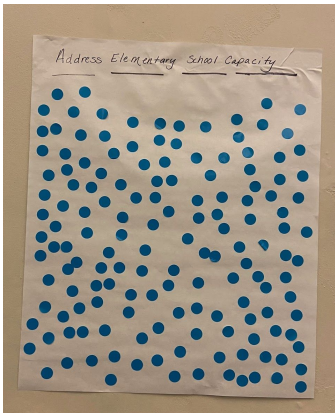
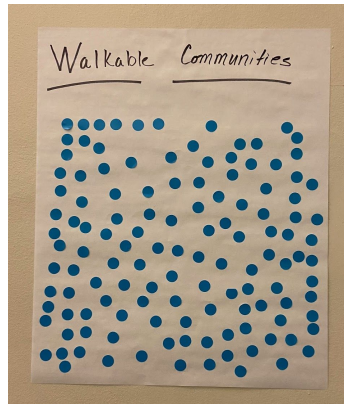
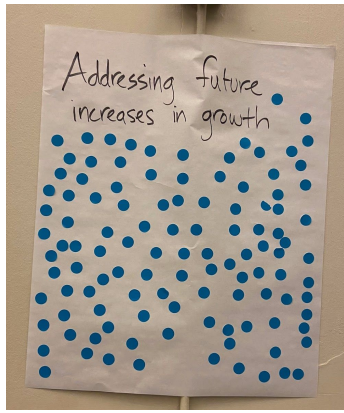
For more information about the APS Facilities Master Plan process - including regularly updated materials from the APS Board of Education retreats and presentations shared with the public as part of Facilities Master Plan Regional Community Conversations held in October 2019, January 2020 and February 2020 - visit:

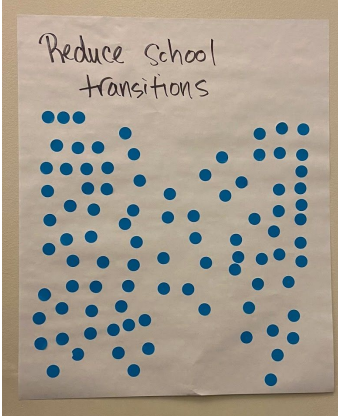
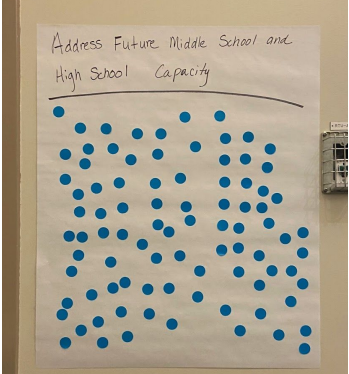
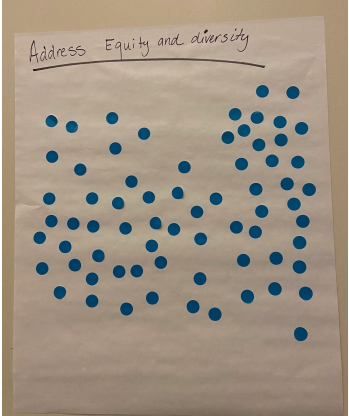
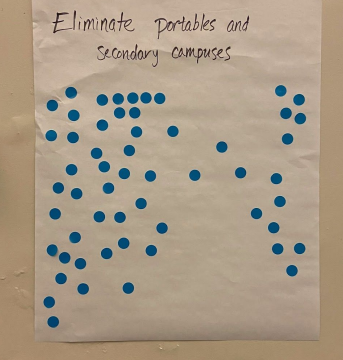
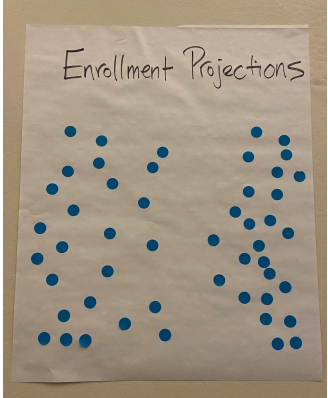
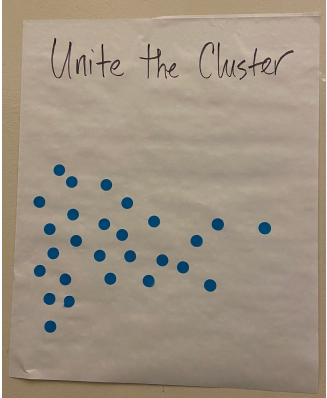
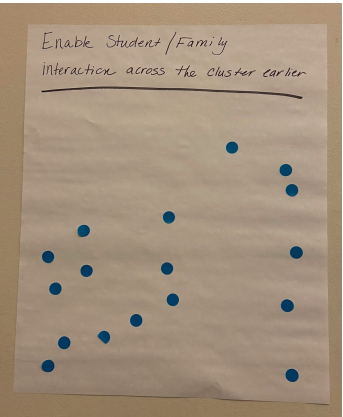
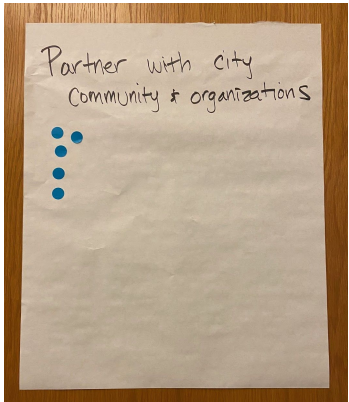
<https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/FMP>

## PRIORITIZATION EXERCISE

Meeting participants were asked to prioritize their concerns through a walking exercise. Eleven statements were posted on the wall and participants placed blue dots beside those statements that they felt were most important for APS to consider during the planning for the future of the Grady Cluster facilities. The statements were pulled verbatim from an APS survey circulated by the Cluster Advisory Team in February 2020

(<http://apsstrongschools.com/cluster-planning-home/find-your-schoolcluster/grady>)

		
<b>Address Elementary School Capacity - 151</b>	<b>Walkable Communities - 126</b>	<b>Addressing future increases in growth - 112</b>

 <p><b>Reduce School Transitions - 91</b></p>	 <p><b>Addressing future Middle School and High School capacity - 89</b></p>	 <p><b>Address Equity &amp; Diversity - 69</b></p>
 <p><b>Eliminate portables and secondary campuses - 57</b></p>	 <p><b>Enrollment Projections - 50</b></p>	 <p><b>Unite the Cluster - 27</b></p>
 <p><b>Enable student/family interaction across the Cluster earlier - 17</b></p>	 <p><b>Partner with City, community and organizations - 5</b></p>	

The community was then invited to submit written comments and participate in small table discussions around four broad topics - Safety & Transportation, Capacity, Diversity & Equity, and

Community. Comments below were recorded by scribes at each table and written comments have been provided verbatim.

## FEEDBACK

### Safety & Transportation concerns:

(Written comments collected on notecards)

- I think this depends on the school level. I think walkable is important for elementary but not Middle School - others may disagree

(Notes from table discussions)

- Better bus route management needed (example of current overlapping bus routes resulting in SPARK kids accidentally getting on a Morningside bus on Lanier Blvd on the AM route recently)
- Safety concerns around Howard security based on neighborhood location close to highways and Beltline.
- Howard's accessibility to the Beltline requires additional security
- Insufficient parking around Inman
- Traffic concerns around Inman during rush hour traffic
- 4/5 Academy = is Inman too far for the Hope Hill community? What will transportation needs be for those students? What will be the effect of a missed morning bus on attendance when kids are further from school facility.
- 8 am start time leads to more traffic (Inman)
- Parental engagement requires parking - tough at Inman
- Security at Inman entrance
- Safety: Neighborhood business outreach
- "Walkable" not a reality for all as it is currently set
- Transportation confusion with bus routes
- Academy model will increase bus confusion
- Beltline not viewed as a safe option to get to school
- Majority cannot walk
- Limiting how long kids will be on the bus - concern over long bus rides.
- Shorter bus routes
- "Safety" separate from transportation (behavioral, fights, etc.)
- Encouraging more bus riders
- Crossing guards needed to encourage walking
- 4/5 Academy - transportation needs for kids further from Inman
- 4/5 Academy timing and staggered start time
- More buses required for academy models
- Technology for bus safety?
- 4/5 Academy - neighborhood safety & temptations (Starbucks, Trader Joes, etc.)
- Overall: increased safety & patrol + Beltline access points

- Walkability and diversity/equity goals are in direct opposition. Make sure the recommendations incorporate nodes and other pathways for kids to get to Howard [or other schools] from across the Cluster. Don't exclude people.
- Neighborhood and community walkability are a big reason that [the Grady Cluster] is a desirable place to live. It's not spread out. There is something to be said for not having students all over the City of Atlanta - but Morningside Elementary's footprint is already big.
- [If redistricting or redrawing lines within a Cluster] would encourage APS to pay attention and not divide neighborhoods. Don't lop off streets, but pay attention to smaller neighborhoods when drawing lines.

### **Capacity concerns:**

(Written comments collected on notecards)

- I don't think there is an inherent value in a K-5 school (6 years in 1 school). I think developmentally appropriate groupings for 2-3 years make sense (K-3, 4-5, etc.)
- Fifth grade academy could help ease transition to Middle School [and also] ease overcrowding, avoid redistricting, access parent volunteers who may not be available at all schools (esp. when volunteerism drops in later elementary years)
- I wish the goal of eliminating portables and secondary campuses were separated. I think they are two different things. I want to eliminate portables but am fine with secondary campuses.
- Recommend to separate portables and secondary campuses in survey (NO on portables OK on secondary campuses)

(Notes from table discussions)

- Inman as a 4/5 Academy
  - Pro: no rezoning, fewer people angry about rezoning
  - Con: young age + social development to be putting such huge number of grades together with so many new students (like 6th grade but premature)
- Inman as a new Elementary School
  - Pro: consistent K-5 experience for schools
  - Con: rezoning issues
- If teachers are only certified to teach 9th and up, being in an 8th/9th grade academy is limiting
- 8/9th grade [Academy] could pose curriculum & faculty issues
- Capacity issue with Grady = even after the new construction, Grady will be overcrowded within 3 years
- Idea of increasing diversity by rezoning Cluster
- Would prefer to look at rezoning if it's within the elementary schools vs. rezoning for high school. I don't want my child leaving the Grady cluster [to go to North Atlanta].
- Idea that 4/5 Academy is too many students/too large of a school
- Benefit of 4/5 cluster school at Inman is [to] join kids together earlier
- How do you expand Grady with no land? What is the model in NYC/Boston?
- Inman and Grady are the closest to each other. Makes sense for a 9th Grade Academy.
- K-3 redistrict. Hope Hill [as a] 4/5 Academy, 8th and 9th together.

- What happens to the [current MES] Annex after MES renovation? Can't that stay as an APS K Center?
- Is Inman underutilized if only one or two grades?
- What is the new MES capacity?
- Problem in Elementary and High School but no addressing Grady capacity?
- Can Grady build up?
- What are suggestions for Inman? No defined list.
- Current capacity at Grady?
- Buckhead clusters split and transitions fine.
- Really want an Elementary School experience.

### **Diversity & Equity concerns:**

(Written comments collected on notecards)

- The personal things one gives up to promote/implement equity are far outweighed by the benefits to society through increases in diversity.
- How do you [APS] define equity goal? What is the outcome you [APS] want to receive?
- Does APS have diversity goals? What are they? (asked 2 times)
- Create homogeneity at earlier ages (before Middle School) - Is this an achievable outcome?
- Diversity is more than by race/ethnicity - religion, special needs, ESL, income
- I would like for the District/Cluster [to] explore ways to make the Elementary Schools more diverse without bussing to a new Cluster.
- Earlier interaction may make Middle School transition easier

(Notes from table discussions)

- Who owns the equity lens to measure it?
- What is it worth to you?
- Not a zero-sum. One group doesn't lose for another to win.
- What does equity mean compared to diversity?
- How to reallocate resources from the rest of APS
- The outcome is equitable, not the input
- Everyone has gifts
- 4/5 Academy - bring them together earlier - perceive each other differently when they arrive at 6th [grade]
- A K-1 Academy might bring kids together earlier, but any benefit they gain by getting to know each other would be lost by being split up again until Middle School.
- 9th grade Academy has received push-back in the past due to lack of sports access and access to upper level classes.
- Special needs students should be considered when discussing equity. Currently the special needs classrooms are spread out, and given the number of children that are diagnosed with autism, there should be rooms for these students in their neighborhood schools as well.
- Choose the goal / priority and find ways to achieve those and diversify the school.

- If APS is serious about diversity it needs to make decisions without allowing one small group of people to have outsized influence.
- Need a much more robust conversation about what the lens is and what definitions are. How do you measure whether significant changes have been made?
- Equity image: equality - everyone is given the same vs. equity - you have different inputs going in.
- Who owns the equity lens?
- Inman as 4/5 Academy would address the issue of diversity.
- There are lots of different ways to support people.
- APS needs to do a better job communicating what this means.
- Getting kids together earlier would help students see more commonality earlier.
- Special needs to not be an afterthought - came here for autism classroom.
- Housing available reflects a diversity of housing options if redistricting happens
- Figure out what the measuring stick is for equity and then build the programs around it.
- Housing matters - it's difficult to balance a desire for a diverse student population (socio-economic + other measures) when housing isn't available at different price points in an area
- Is APS looking at how other cities have studied this and increased diversity and equity across other large school systems?
- Integrating across the Cluster earlier helps break down barriers with \*families\* and students before the challenging years in Middle School. The same thing could also be accomplished through grade-level academies.
- Is there a way to zone/redistrict in a way that would integrate?

### **Community concerns:**

(Written comments collected on notecards)

- None

(Notes from table discussions)

- Neighborhood schools - should Elementary stay neighborhood schools? We like the feel of neighborhood, community schools in the younger grades in particular.
- Would 4/5 Academy ruin 'community'?
  - Cons: That's okay for older [kids] but want to keep a small neighborhood school for elementary [students]. Pushes fourth and fifth graders to 'age' faster. Small window of walkability, local neighborhood feel - know your community.
  - Pros: you can do more [things] specific to the ages. Science labs. Already have this experience of a small age group together with K and it has worked well.
- 5/6 Academy [make Howard 7/8/9 grades]
  - Pros: let's sixth graders stay younger longer vs. pushing them to be with 8th graders. Keeping them here as long as possible keeps the community together. Love seeing the kids together, walking to and from neighborhood schools.

- What happens when you redistrict to a new Elementary School? Will it change the community? Will everyone be okay with changing schools?
- Does anyone want to bring kids together sooner? Will that bring the community together? Perhaps bringing kids together younger could strengthen community over time because they (and their parents) would be together longer (for more overall years in their 13 year journey), but the grades would be so large for 4th and 5th graders (500+ kids per grade), that you would risk losing a big sense of community that is so wonderful in elementary school because it would be harder to get to know people with that large of a grade size in elementary grades.
- Do we want to have four steps (Elementary, 5/6, Middle, High) How does that feel? Only makes sense if it alleviates [capacity] pressure at Grady - not worth it if it only relieves Elementary School [capacity] pressure (4/5 academy, or K-2 and 3-5 splits).
- Do we know how more transitions affect student achievement? Are we reinventing the wheel? What happens with the PTA/Foundation when you are only there for two years? It's hard to get parents engaged if you aren't there long.
- If Inman becomes 4/5 [Academy] do you pull from Hope Hill? What about their capacity? It isn't fair if you bring the rest of the Cluster together but don't include Hope Hill. Do you need to then redistrict the Elementary Schools because taking two grades out of Hope Hill would leave the school too empty (Mary Lin may face a similar problem if two grades were removed)?