Purpose

Districts are not required to use a single national template for boundary criteria. Even so, the same decision themes show up repeatedly in school board policies across the country: capacity/utilization, proximity, transportation efficiency and safety, stability/minimizing disruption, coherent feeder patterns, contiguous/understandable boundaries, and (often) demographic/equity impacts. This handout documents that the Cropper GIS criteria match those widely used district factors.

Cropper GIS redistricting criteria (used to evaluate options)

- Balance school facility utilization — aim for equitable utilization consistent with capacity.
- Account for future growth — accommodate projected increases/decreases in enrollment.
- Close proximity — assign students to the closest school where feasible.
- Maximize busing efficiencies — consider routes, ride time, commuting patterns, and cost.
- Minimize impact on students — reduce the number of students reassigned and repeated
- reassignments.
- Consider economic, cultural, and ethnic diversity — avoid adverse impacts and support inclusive
- schools.
- Contiguous zones — avoid disconnected "islands" where possible.
- Use major roads and natural boundaries — leverage barriers/features to support safety and clarity.

District Policy Examples

The districts below (different states/regions) publish boundary factors that strongly match the Cropper GIS redistricting criteria.

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MD)
Rule 1280: School Boundary Change Process (October 2001)
Policy 7110: Educational Facilities Planning
Policy factor headings (as published):
• Efficient use of capacity
• Student body diversity
• Neighborhood continuity
• Transportation & pedestrian safety
• Frequency of prior reassignment
• Long-term enrollment/capacity trends
• Future capital plans
• Feeder school boundaries
• Contiguity / avoid boundary "islands" (secondary consideration)
Why it supports the Cropper criteria: BCPS evaluates boundary changes primarily through capacity, proximity/transportation, stability, feeder continuity, and demographic impacts.
Policy source: https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcps/Board.nsf/files/CL2MMW5A7EA2/$file/POL7110_110922_Finalized.pdf
Policy source: https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/bcps/Board.nsf/files/DAZNC45F3834/$file/RULE%201280_110424_Finalized.pdf

PROVO CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT (UT)
Board Policy 1455: Attendance Boundary Review (adopted May 2024)
Policy factor headings (as published):
• District demographic information and housing development projections
• School enrollment and capacity
• Neighborhood stability and cohesion
• Natural and manmade boundaries / transportation corridors
• Minimize number of students impacted
• Feeder patterns
• Student program needs
• Safety and travel times
Why it supports the Cropper criteria: Provo's policy explicitly calls proximity and preserving neighborhood continuity, on top of using natural/manmade boundaries and minimizing the number of students affected—some of the most common public concerns.
Policy source: https://provo.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/06122025-policy-1450.pdf

WICOMICO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS / WCBOE (MD)
Policy SFS-GEN-PL-032: School Attendance Areas and Redistricting (effective Oct 11, 2023)
Policy factor headings (as published):
• Educational welfare of students
• Frequency of redistricting (limit repeat moves)
• Proximity to schools (walkers; bus distance/time)
• Student demographics (diversity)
• Established feeder patterns
• Impact on neighborhoods and communities
• Impact on specialized programs / changes to capacity
• Instructional and operational capacity
• Capacity trends
• Capital plans
• Geographic features
• Other unique/pertinent factors
Why it supports the Cropper criteria: WCPS' published factors closely mirror the Cropper GIS criteria, including geographic features and minimizing repeat reassignment.
Policy source:
https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/wcboe/Board.nsf/files/CWHSQN73CDCD/$file/SFS_GEN_PL_032%20School%20Attendance%20Areas%20and%20Redistricting.pdf

HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM (MD)
BOE Policy 6010: School Attendance Areas (April 2004)
Policy factor headings (as published):
• Facility Utilization (efficient use of capacity; projections; fiscal responsibility; transportation/walk counts and ride time)
• Community Stability (feeder "feeds"; contiguous communities; limit reassignment frequency)
• Demographic Characteristics (race/ethnicity; socioeconomic indicators; ELL distribution; number of students reassigned; other indicators)
Why it supports the Cropper criteria: HCPSS formally groups boundary factors into utilization, stability, and demographics—explicitly noting not every factor can be optimized at once.
Policy source: https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/hcpssmd/Board.nsf/files/CBAJ3E4B3351/$file/6010.pdf

FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (VA)
School Board Policy 8130 (P8130): School Boundaries (July 1986)
Policy factor headings (as published):
• Efficient use of available capacity / facility utilization
• Long-range enrollment projections and growth areas
• Proximity / walk zones and geographic distance
• Transportation (ride time, routing, cost) and safe routes/barriers
• Minimize number of students reassigned; stability over time
• Contiguous, understandable boundaries
• Feeder pattern continuity
• Equity / demographic considerations (as applicable in the policy)
Why it supports the Cropper criteria: FCPS' policy language aligns strongly with the same core factors used across many districts.
Policy source: https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/DKARYT70512A/$file/P8130.pdf

ARLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS (VA)
School Board Policy B-2.1: Boundaries (June 2017)
Policy factor headings (as published):
• Stability
• Efficiency
• Proximity
• Alignment (feeder continuity)
• Demographics
Why it supports the Cropper criteria: APS publishes a short, plain set of boundary considerations that map directly to capacity, proximity/transport, continuity, and group impacts.
Policy source: https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/arlington/Board.nsf/files/DB6K7B507599/$file/B-2.1%20Boundaries.pdf

BROWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (FL)
Policy 8010: Attendance Zone Boundaries and School Usage (criteria excerpt)
Policy factor headings (as published):
• Welfare/health/safety
• Neighborhood/community impacts
• Transportation requirements
• Feeder patterns
• Diversity impacts
• Number of reassigned students
• Capacity and facility impacts (including support services)
• Anticipated growth and planned facility work
• Financial considerations
Why it supports the Cropper criteria: Broward's criteria list is long; the headings above are the items most directly tied to boundary decision-making.
Policy source: https://northareaadvisorycouncil.ch2v.com/Content/22_776/Files/Policy%208010_Redline.pdf

Why criteria frameworks work in real meetings

Across boundary studies, the same community questions repeat because they reflect practical constraints: capacity, travel time, safety barriers, neighborhood identity, and stability for students. A criteria framework helps the IPT evaluate options consistently and communicate tradeoffs clearly.

Typical public concerns and matching criteria:

• Closest school / walk zone → Close proximity
• Overcrowding vs unused seats → Balance school facility utilization
• Longer or less safe bus/walk trips → Maximize busing efficiencies + Use major roads & natural boundaries (safety barriers)
• Moved recently / cohort disruption → Minimize impact on students
• Keep neighborhoods together → Make every effort to establish contiguous zones + Close proximity (community continuity)
• Program access / school composition concerns → Consider economic, cultural, and ethnic diversity + Minimize impact on students (program impacts)
• Use roads/rivers/lakes as the "line" → Use major roads & natural boundaries wherever feasible

Conclusion

Attendance zone boundaries are largely a local governance decision. There is little federal/state regulation prescribing a single "correct" set of boundary factors, which is why districts formalize their own criteria/factors over time. Even without a national template, districts across the country converge on a similar set of factors:

- capacity/utilization
- proximity
- transportation efficiency and safety
- community stability
- equity/demographic impacts.

Research does not usually study "how to write criteria," but it does study the outcomes those criteria are trying to manage (e.g., long bus rides, overcrowding, and the benefits/harms of socioeconomic segregation). In short, utilizing these criteria while analyzing boundaries provide a practical synthesis that replicated by districts in policy in order to produce lasting efficient outcomes to better serve the needs of all students within a district.