

# School Start Times Task Force

Meeting 9 - August 12, 2014  
Minutes

**Members Attending:** M. McMahon, K. Lane, W. McIntire, C. Truffer, D. Batten, F. Chaney, K. Chandler, W. Meyers, C. Streeter, J. Horstkamp; T. Tudor, K. Snyder

**Absent Members:** H. MacIntosh (pre-arranged), P. Bukowski (pre-arranged)

**Also in Attendance:** L. Grey-Hawkins (recorder),

Kathy opened the meeting with a welcome and overview of the agenda: look closely at the four previously identified school start time options and begin thinking about the recommendations to present to the Board. Rather than create a large report, Kathy recommended instead presenting a short executive summary with recommendations and an accompanying website to hold additional details, considerations, and research/reference materials. Maureen then gave an overview of the first draft website already created as a model to show the general format and a brief look at the content. The Task Force agreed that the website will offer a flexible repository for both the Board of Education and public that can live and grow as new information and resources become available. Staff will begin populating the website with information from Task Force meetings – readings, research, minutes, etc. At the next meeting, the Task Force will have the opportunity to begin closely reviewing the content of the site.

The Task Force then closely reviewed the four previously identified AACPS bell time options and each option's associated costs (detailed explanations of each option, including bell schedules and comparative Current AACPS School Start Times was provided to each Task Force Member at the meeting). Working in groups of 2-3, the Task Force spent 15 minutes reviewing each option and considering what the public needs to know about the option. Once each group had an opportunity to review, the Task Force shared their thoughts:

**Option A: Middle School Late.** *With this option, High School begins 70 minutes later than current start times, Middle School begins the latest, starting 35 to 110 minutes later, and Elementary School begins 5-10 minutes earlier.*

The Task Force noted that this option would benefit adolescent students at both middle and high schools. This option also offers an elementary school start time that makes it safe for young students walking to school or the bus stop. However, this option will also increase bus travel during peak commuting hours and would force buses to arrive at each high school as students are being dismissed, increasing the safety risk to students, teachers, and staff. The schedule for middle school students will be significantly modified, even though this group of students/families does not have a problem with the current start time. With this option, middle school students will have less time for after school activities. It will be extremely difficult to find and train enough bus drivers to accommodate this option. In addition, some middle schoolers will be home in the morning unsupervised for an extended period of time.

**Option B: High School Late.** *With this option, High School begins approximately 120 minutes (2 hours) later than current start times, Middle School begins 25 to 40 minutes later (\*one middle school will start 9:00 AM), and Elementary School begins 5-20 minutes earlier.*

While this option successfully offers High School students more sleep, its adverse impact on all school levels make it less attractive, bordering on unacceptable. In addition to requiring the most additional buses (131), this option would force some elementary school students to walk to school/bus stop in the dark, significantly restrict opportunities for athletics and co-curricular activities, and could prohibit high school students (who would now get out of school at 4:05pm) from taking care of younger siblings or working a job. As with Option 1, this option will also increase bus travel during peak commuting hours and would force buses to arrive at each high school as students are being dismissed. The Task Force noted that while it is important to share this option with the public as it provides a "late start" for high school students, it would not be one that is recommended.

**Option C: 30 Minute Shift for All.** *With this option, High School begins 30 minutes later than current start times, Middle School begins 30 minutes later, and Elementary School begins 30 minutes later.*

This option is the least expensive and results in minimal impact to middle and high school co-curricular and athletic activities, extended day Magnet Programs, and alternative education programs. With this option, the elementary schools are impacted the most. Of note, this option could pose day care issues for parents who normally drop their students off before going to work, delay the time that students have to eat

breakfast at school, and could potentially miss the optimal learning time for elementary school students. However, it does allow for all students (preK-12) to potentially gain an extra 30 minutes of sleep daily.

**Option D: 30 Minute Shift for All with Extra Late High School Start Hybrid Learning Option (choice).** *With this option, all high school, middle school, and elementary schools would begin 30 minutes later than the current start times. In addition, high school students could choose to participate in a "Hybrid Schedule" in which they attend 4 face-to-face courses/semester in school(traditional), take 2 courses/semester in a hybrid environment (with a portion of learning occurring online and a portion occurring face-to-face with a teacher and peers in the classroom) and 1-2 courses/semester completely online (virtual learning). High School students choosing to select this schedule would arrive at school (via AACPS transportation for bus riders) during the second half of 2<sup>nd</sup> period, or 135 minutes after the start of the regular school day.*

As a benefit, this option would give families and students the choice to select the schedule that works best for them without adverse side effects on school activities. This option also offers a technology-enhanced learning component and opportunities for differentiated instruction in conjunction with later start time adjustments. This option's costs include those of Option C plus the cost of tablets (computers) and virtual learning courses for those engaged in the hybrid learning schedule. One Task Force member also noted that there may be an increased safety risk to students carrying tablets. This option could be piloted in fewer than the 12 high schools to work out any challenges posed by the hybrid learning option. More details are needed regarding the Hybrid Learning Option for the public to fully understand the value.

As the Task Force discussed pros and cons for each option, several reoccurring questions emerged:

- Could transportation software impact the cost of each option? To what extent?
- Why do some options need significantly more buses than others? How was this number determined?
- What are the current costs of transportation?
- How will alternative education, Centers of Applied Technology, and the Performing and Visual Arts Extended Day Magnet Programs be affected by each option?

The Task Force suggested compiling a Frequently Asked Questions sheet for each option to help answer some of the questions that both Board of Education members and the public may have about these possible bell schedules. In addition, because the impact on Transportation is crucial to selecting an option, the Task Force requested creating a pod cast and additional information materials to better explain the challenges faced by this office when planning routes and hiring bus drivers.

One of the most significant concerns raised by the task force was the multi-million dollar costs associated with most of the options. Repeatedly, members of the task force expressed serious concern with recommending an option that required spending millions of dollars on transportation during a time when teachers/administrators are still unable to receive raises. In addition, this task force feels that because Anne Arundel County offers relatively low taxes, the taxpayer community (many of whom do not have children in this school system) could push back if the Board of Education were to recommend spending millions of dollars on a change that does not improve the community. While starting high school later offers a significant health benefit for adolescent students and a better atmosphere at homes with high school students, there is little research to support significantly increased academic achievement or community improvement because of later school start times. We will continue to look for this research.

The Task Force left the meeting with copies of the draft options for further reflection and consideration. Kathy and Maureen agreed to send a survey to the group to gather additional comments and questions that the Task Force had about each option upon further reflection.

**Next meeting:**  
**August 20, 2014**  
**4:00-6:00 pm**  
**Anne Arundel County Public Schools**  
**Conference Room 2A (formerly Center III)**  
**2644 Riva Rd**  
**Annapolis, MD 21401**