



ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

36 Bartlet Street
Andover, MA 01810
(978) 247-7010

Sheldon H. Berman, Ed.D
Superintendent of Schools

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Joel Blumstein, Esq. - Chair
Tracey Spruce, Esq. - Vice Chair
Susan K. McCready
Paul Murphy
Shannon Scully

February 11, 2020

- *A version of this email will be posted on our website under District News to allow our families the option of utilizing Google Translate*

Greetings:

The purpose of this message is to update the community on the status of our study of potential changes in school start times at the Andover Public Schools. As most people know, a change in school start times has been under active discussion in Andover for a considerable period of time. This examination is driven by the significant body of scientific study on the impact of sleep deprivation on adolescents and the recommendations of many professional medical and public health organizations that middle schools and high schools should delay start times in order to allow more sleep for adolescents. It also furthers the district's longstanding commitment to students' social, emotional and mental health and, while there is no single initiative that could fully solve all the challenges faced by our students, start times that allow better sleep is a potentially important element to promote student well-being. Many communities in Massachusetts and around the country have made, or are in the process of making, changes to their start times to address these challenges.

In August of 2018, the School Committee established a set of principles to guide the evaluation of potential changes to start times and shortly thereafter the Superintendent established a School Start Time Working Group, under the direction of Assistant Superintendent Sandra Trach, to conduct that evaluation. The overall goal is to make a positive impact on student wellbeing, including physical health, mental health, and academic performance, and to consider the impact of potential start time options on a number of factors including family and staff schedules, extra-curricular activities, and costs to families and the district.

The Working Group has met regularly for the last 18 months. It has held numerous public forums on start times and conducted surveys of parents, students and staff. The School Committee has discussed the issue at many of its public meetings. We also engaged Edulog, a transportation consulting firm, during the fall of 2019 to conduct an optimization study on our transportation data and to objectively evaluate existing bus routes and various tasks for timely, efficient, and cost-effective transport of students to and from their residences. As a result, we now have a significant amount of information on potential bell time options. We also have received input from many parents, staff, students and members of the public expressing a wide

About APS: The mission of the Andover Public Schools, in partnership with the entire Andover community, is to educate by engaging and inspiring students to develop as self-reliant, responsible citizens who are thinkers, problem solvers, and contributors prepared to participate in an evolving global society.

range of views on whether and how start times should be changed. Among these comments, many parents of elementary school children have expressed concern about the limited amount of scientific study on the impact of changing start times on elementary students. Much of the information related to our analysis of start times can be found on the APS [start times webpage](#).

In order to narrow the potential options for further consideration and to address the concerns we heard from many parents, on December 5, 2019, the School Committee requested that the School Start Time Working Group study in more depth, specific bell time options that meet five criteria:

- 1) Do not require bus-transported students to be picked up before 7:00 AM;
- 2) Do not require changes to private school bell times;
- 3) Set middle & high school bell times at least 20 minutes later than they are now with a target of the medically recommended time of 8:30 AM;
- 4) Set elementary bell time no earlier than the current high school bell time with a target of 8:00 AM or later; and
- 5) Do not change the current length of the school day.

Since the beginning of January, the School Start Time Working Group has been analyzing a number of factors affecting potential options, including double bus runs, private school bell times, time between public school busing tiers, and the need for additional buses. This process narrowed the group's focus from approximately twelve start time sample scenarios to five. These five scenarios include the status quo which, although it does not meet all the School Committee's criteria, remains under consideration. A summary of the five options can be found [here](#).

In addition, a School Start Time Parent Advisory Group (PAC) has been established. There are 13 members that serve as delegates from our APS community, with one serving on behalf of our APS special education families. The PAC is advisory to the School Start Time Working Group and will help analyze school start options under the major considerations defined by the School Committee. The group has met twice to date with additional meetings scheduled.

Among the remaining tasks for the working group are the following:

- Consideration of whether an independent study of private school transportation is needed in order to understand the implications of potentially decoupling public school and private school transportation;
- Analysis of any potential increase in special transportation vehicles and cost, if the time between the existing tiers is compressed;
- Further analysis of the implications of the start time scenarios on athletics and fine arts, including potential costs;
- Updating principals on the options and encouraging faculty and staff to provide feedback to the working group;
- Ongoing collaboration with the School Start Time PAC; and
- Continued communication with the community.

Because of budgetary constraints, as well as the significant work still to be done, no changes in school start times will be implemented during the 2020/2021 school year. However, work on this effort will move forward without delay so that the School Committee can decide as soon as is realistically possible whether to change school start times and, if so, how and when to implement those changes.

Comments regarding start times are always welcome and should be sent to the Start Time email address: schoolstarttimes@andoverma.us.

We thank the community for their continued interest in this important issue.

Joel Blumstein
School Committee Chair

Sheldon Berman
Superintendent of Schools