



Health, Safety and Equity in Education

Press Statement by Cynthia Jatul May 7, 2015

Start School Later Seattle Questions the Validity of SPS's Community Engagement Process on Bell Times

As members of Start School Later Seattle we joined the bell time task force on good faith that the process would include meaningful input. We are rapidly losing faith in the district's process in terms of analysis and communication. SPS is currently gathering community input on the question of changing bell times. However there are multiple ways in which the process is flawed. District staff rejected the inclusion of a two tier option with 8:00 and 8:50 start times despite recommendations by the task force to consider this option. There is no place on the online survey for people to write in comment, effectively preventing the public from suggesting a two tier system. SPS claims two tiers will cost an additional \$20 million dollars but has not substantiated this analysis. SPS is using two methods to collect data and has no control over how many times individuals respond. The accompanying FAQs are heavily weighted towards potential negative outcomes of later starts. In summary, we call into question the validity of the data collected given the inconsistency between the two methods used, the lack of comment space, and the overall negative bias of the survey and informational documents. A full enumeration of our concerns, which have been sent to Pegi McEvoy, Assistant Superintendent of Operations and Sam Markert, Bell Time Analysis Project Manager is provided on page 2.

The Seattle community deserves to know that the task force recommended consideration of a two tier system and that the tools being used to elicit community input were constructed without review by the task force. The community also deserves to know how the district arrived at an estimated \$20 million additional cost for the two tier start.

The following members of Start School Later Seattle are available to discuss these issues in more detail.

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1. The process by which the three options were decided upon was done with limited input by the task force. Although we discussed and voted on a number of options that were generated by the district and the task force, the current options; 1) no change, 2) modified flip, 3) extended day were basically pre-determined by the district. The extended day option received the least number of votes by the task force because it fails to meet American Academy of Pediatric recommendations for all middle school students and approximately half of high school students. The task force's most favored option, a two tier system with elementary schools starting at 8:00 and 8:50 and all middle and high schools at 8:50 was categorically removed from consideration by the district. The district claims a two tier system will cost an additional \$20 million. By independent analysis we believe the additional cost to be closer to \$1.6 million. SPS changed to a three tier system in 2012 and only saved \$2 million (<http://www.seattleschools.org/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=268319>), thus a return to a two tier system shouldn't exceed \$2 million.
2. We were promised at a meeting last spring at Roosevelt High School that presentations to the community on the issue would be unbiased. The 3 options flyer and the option 2 and option 3 FAQs have a greater emphasis on potential negative impacts than they do on the positive. In none of these documents is there a forthright statement on the major impetus for consideration of adjusting bell times, namely to adjust our schedules to align with the biology of our students in order to improve learning, health, and safety of middle and high school age students.
3. Community engagement communications, except for the N2N video, have been made without taskforce oversight or review. The task force has had no input into the wording of the N2N questionnaire, the online survey, or the FAQ documents.
4. Not only are the FAQ's skewed toward potential negative impacts but they also contain glaring distortions of reality. Both option 2 and 3 FAQs claim that the district is collaborating with the medical community to "impart health education". There is no evidence that the sleep medicine community nor the school nurses have been called upon to help educate the community on the issues of adolescent sleep and the importance of sleep for brain function (hence learning), health, and safety.
5. The FAQ's state, "Currently, there is a Task Force working on a recommendation to address the 24 credit graduation requirement problem, which would be a decision made independent of a bell time change. This issue, along with the 1080 instruction hour requirement, is also a challenge to be addressed. *The application of solutions for these state requirements within a new bell time structure would be required for any option under consideration.*" (italics added) The task force has not been informed that meeting 24 credit or 1080 hours must be met by a bell time change. Therefore we haven't had meeting these state requirements as one of our goals.
6. While the task force was told that the community would have a chance to suggest alternative bell schedules, neither the N2N questionnaire nor the online survey solicits such input. The online survey has in fact, no place for comments. How will the task force know what other options the community might favor?
7. Data gathering through the N2N process is not following the original intent. The questionnaires are available in so many venues that many respondents will not have viewed the video prior to responding. These responses will not be based on the educational components of the video and therefore will constitute a very different data set. Therefore the N2N data shouldn't be evaluated in the same manner. What is the purpose of such widespread distribution when SPS is also using an online survey?

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