



Press Release

Anne Arundel County Maryland Chapter health, safety and equity in education

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AACPS: Fund and Implement Healthy School Start Times for the 2016 School Year — Don't Delay to 2017

Start School Later Anne Arundel County is encouraged that Dr. George Arlotto, the Superintendent of Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS), has heard the call from his County Council, health and education experts, and the parent community to change high school start times from the current 7:17 a.m. In Dr. Arlotto's recommended fiscal year 2017 AACPS Budget proposal to the Board of Education, he has proposed an option to do so.

Those of us who have long advocated for change are disappointed, however, that Dr. Arlotto's budget fails to support the Board of Education's promised timetable for correcting the too early bell times for more than 22,000 high school students in the 2016-17 school year.

Because Dr. Arlotto's proposed funding for safe and healthy school start times did not occur in December 2014, following the presentation by the Start Time Task Force two months prior, his budget request delays school start changes until the 2017-2018 school year. **Start School Later hopes that the Anne Arundel County Board of Education rejects this delay and insists that school start times are corrected for the 2016-17 school year, as it voted for last February and reiterated in June.**

The option selected by Dr. Arlotto —8:30 a.m. for high schools, elementary starts between 7:50 and 9:15 (as they are now) and middle schools at 9:30 — would meet the recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that no middle or high school start before 8:30 a.m. We are concerned that middle schools would not begin until 9:30 a.m., which would result in a dismissal time of around 4:15.

We are disappointed that Dr. Arlotto's decision was made without the assistance of the transportation software AACPS purchased earlier this year using funds specifically allocated for it by the County Council. That software, which could be analyzing and optimizing our bus routes right now, is not yet being utilized. With the aid of the software, it's possible that the loosely based cost estimates for changing school start times will be less, and that the window between school runs can be narrowed to start middle schools before 9:30 a.m.

Families from all three school levels will have concerns about changes to school hours. Their concerns may focus on the impacts to after-school sports and activities, jobs, child-care arrangements for younger siblings, etc. The experience of other school districts that have successfully changed bell times has shown that these concerns must be addressed through Leadership in the community outreach AACPS will conduct beginning in January. Experience has also shown that communities and families do adjust to new schedules. **Not every family in Anne Arundel County will benefit equally and immediately from these changes, but all will benefit from safer and healthier school hours** that allow our students to graduate better prepared for college or careers.

Start School Later Anne Arundel County understands there are many important priorities in the proposed education budget, including smaller class sizes and adequate pay for our teachers. As is true of healthy learning and school start times, those priorities and many others are critical to student success and closing achievement gaps.

We look forward to working with the Board of Education, with County Executive Schuh and with the County Council to ensure that their past support of healthy and safe school hours will both continue and result in the leadership and funding required for Anne Arundel County to start school later.

Lisa VanBuskirk is the Chapter Leader of Start School Later Anne Arundel County, MD. Start School Later is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working to ensure school start times compatible with health, safety, education and equity-with currently 50 chapters in 18 states.