



**Howard County | Maryland**

health, safety and equity in education

## BOE Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

Please return to: [sslhoco@gmail.com](mailto:sslhoco@gmail.com)

**Candidate Name: James Cecil**

**District: 2**

**1. Will you sign Start School Later's 2013 petition at <https://sign.moveon.org/petitions/changing-howard-county>? If you won't sign it, please explain why.**

Yes, I have.

**2. Based on the research that later middle and high school start times increase graduation rates and decrease absenteeism, with disadvantaged students benefiting the most from age-appropriate school hours, do you feel the current school hours affects the County's ability to be a leader in K-12 education for all students?**

Yes, I do believe that the school start times in Howard County are out of alignment when it comes to what data tells us about the benefits of increased sleep for students.

**3. What hours would you define as healthy, safe, and age appropriate? The current school hours are: Elementary 8:15-9:25 a.m. start times, Middle School 7:40-8:25 a.m. start times, and High School 7:25 a.m. start time.**

Elementary School: 8:00am or later

Middle School: 8:30am or later

High School: 8:30am or later

**4. On December 19, 2017, Staff proposed four models for bell times that could be implemented. All four models had Elementary starting between at 8:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. and Middle between 8:00 a.m. and 8:45 a.m. Model 1: High school at 8 a.m. Model 2: High School at 8:15 a.m. Model 3: High School at 8:30 a.m. Model 4: High School at 8:45 a.m. What do you think about these four proposed models?**

There are a lot of moving pieces within these four models in terms of collateral consequences. Solely based on what is best for supporting a student's sleep, models 3 and 4 are most ideal. Delineating between the two would depend on community feedback, staff input and implementation costs. There have also been discussions of flipping the proposed ES & MS start times to address the needs of Middle school students. Personally, I would not want to be locked into these four models as the only options.

**5. With the Board of Education purchasing a new bus routing system for the Department of Transportation, what would be your timeline of implementation healthy school hours?**

As mentioned earlier, our school start times are not optimized for student success. As a pragmatist, making such a seismic shift to our school start times would need to be done with intentionality, community education and community input. We see good ideas rebuked because they feel forced and good causes are set back because they evoke fear. Further, our fiscal situation and current contracts will inhibit our flexibility in the short term. We can better investigate implementation impacts and begin better community engagement while beginning the process of securing funding. The routing system is an important step in moving forward, especially in terms of being able to better model what routes would look like and a better estimate on financial impacts, but we would be a couple of years away from getting to a point of community supported and responsibly funded implementation.

**6. Currently, HCPSS services 5 parochial schools with 21 bus routes dedicated to those schools at a price tag of \$800,000 annually to HCPSS. The HCPSS Transportation department uses their manpower to design and maintain those routes. The BOE's Legal Counsel stated that the school system is not legally required to supply bus service if a student does not reside on a public school bus route. What are your thoughts about HCPSS providing this extra service to these parochial schools?**

Parochial school busing is quite a complex issue. To the letter of the law, the county is only legally required to provide service to those on existing routes. In practice, it is coming to light that HCPSS has been going above the minimum in this regard. However, HCPSS is reimbursed for this service and reductions in this service would result in reductions in reimbursement. While HCPSS may not directly see a net gain financially, I do firmly believe public funds should be going to public education before they are allocated to private education by any governing body.

**7. In your prior experience and positions, what have you done to ensure all Howard County Public School students (K-12) have healthy, safe, and age appropriate school hours?**

I have taken up a great deal of interest in school start times as a parent and as a member of the CAC, where this has been a topic of discussion. Being informed allows me to be a better advocate and combining this with practical knowledge on what it would take to implement healthy start times would help to get us closer aligned to what is best for our students.

**8. In your elected position, what will you do to ensure healthy and safe school hours for all of Howard County Public School Students? Please be specific: Resolutions, recommendations, funding requests, educational outreach, implementation efforts, etc.**

I've touched on this in some of my other answers, but going from concept to implementation will be a process. Early adoption steps would include forming a dedicated committee to

evaluate all aspects of implementation that is comprised of multiple stakeholder groups. Proposals should include relevant research and HCPSS should hold community information sessions with representatives from districts that have successfully implemented later start times. Graphs and PowerPoints are not enough to lead an effective information campaign. We would also need to add dedicated public forums outside of those built into existing board meetings. We have to be more engaged on issues like this. Further, we need to know true costs via models, communicating with our current transportation vendors and bringing them into the process as well. Driver recruitment is already a challenge and several options would require additional drivers where start times overlap. We should not be waiting until after voting to have a plan to address that. We also need to make sure we are establishing the student performance metrics that will be used to gauge success and that there is a perpetual process in place that requires annual reviews of this data and action if outcomes are not met.

**9. Is there anything else you would like your constituents and future voters to know about your position on safe, healthy, and age-appropriate school hours?**

Healthy school start times will reshape the school experience for everyone in our county. It will impact childcare, parental work plans, after school activity participation, after school employment, traffic and more. However, difficult does not mean impossible and I am determined to seek out the solutions necessary to make this work. I believe it will take unprecedented collaboration with other county agencies, such as the Office of Transportation to align transit options beyond the traditional yellow school bus. I'm ready to put in the work.