



Howard County | Maryland

health, safety and equity in education

BOE General Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

Please return to: sslhoco@gmail.com

Candidate Name: Dan Newberger

1. 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 agree that HCPSS high schools should start at 8:30 am or later?

Yes, I agree. I strongly believe that HCPSS must make decisions that are data-driven, supported by science and research, and recommended by trusted experts in the relevant field. The research overwhelmingly indicates that later start times for adolescents (8:30am or later for high school students) lead to better outcomes on a wide variety of metrics including not just increased graduation rates and decreased absenteeism, but also a decline in behavioral issues and improvements in physical and mental health—including reduced suicide rates. The research tells us that adolescent circadian rhythms are different from those of younger children or adults, so they are biologically “programmed” for a later sleep/wake cycle, meaning that our current school start times are forcing our middle school and high school students to fight against their own biology. Research also shows that students of color and lower socioeconomic status students are disproportionately harmed by our current unhealthy school start times, so changing to healthier start times is consistent with my deep commitment to eliminating

opportunity gaps and ensuring that every child in Howard County receives the resources, support, and opportunities they need to be successful.

2. Based on the proposed start times presented by DSG at the July 14, 2022 BOE meeting, if high schools are kept as the first tier, elementary schools would have to start at 9:45am in order for high schools to start at the desired 8:30am. As determined during the shift in start times during the pandemic, 9:45 am is too late for elementary school kids to begin their day. Do you agree with the BOE that DSG should revisit their analysis with elementary school starting school as the first tier at 8am?

Yes, I think the BOE needs more information, analysis, and alternatives from DSG including having elementary schools start first. Looking critically at the entire process to date, I feel like the BOE has made a fundamental error in how it has approached and framed the start time decision-making process, and as a result it is not getting the right analysis from DSG. By starting from the premise that the start time changes must be cost neutral—by refusing to even consider investing additional resources in changes that will increase graduation rates and decrease absenteeism, which are core goals of the district—the BOE immediately took countless options and scenarios off the table. Rather than asking DSG to come up with plans that fit into the existing transportation footprint (similar number of buses, same three tier structure, etc.), the BOE should instead have instructed the DSG consultants to start with a clean slate and come up with a series of plans that optimized start times, and then worked backwards from this desired end-state to determine the level of resources required. If the BOE decided that the “best possible” plan was too expensive to implement, DSG could then have been tasked to provide alterations and tweaks that reduced the amount of additional resources required. This start time decision—a decision that will improve the health and well-being of our students while also causing fundamental changes to the daily routines of every family in the district—is too important to be shaped by falsely-imposed constraints and an unwillingness to consider what’s truly possible.

3. When DSG comes back to the BOE in November/December with the additional analysis switching tier 1 and tier 3, elementary starting in tier 1 and high school starting in tier 3, would you be open to this scenario? Why or why not?

I would be open to considering this scenario, but, again, I would much rather consider the “best possible scenarios” rather than “the best possible budget-neutral scenarios that fit into our existing transportation footprint of three tiers and keep the existing number of buses.”

4. 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?

I would like families and voters across the county to know that I understand and appreciate the complexity and impact of these school hour changes. There are so many considerations at play in these decisions, and the BOE must always keep in mind how their decisions will impact students' and families' lives. The BOE must consider the fact that elementary school families build their home and work routines around school start times. The BOE must also remember that many high school students in our county work after-school jobs to help support their families, and many other families depend on their high schoolers to babysit younger siblings after school. It is also critical for the BOE to consider how the entire county's network of extracurricular activities, after-care programs, and even countywide traffic patterns will be impacted by changes to school start and end times. It's no exaggeration to say that there are very few decisions made by any level of government (local, state, or federal) that have as great an impact on the daily lives of Americans than school districts making major changes to school hours.

I believe that the good (the positive outcomes in student health, well-being, and academic performance) that will result from making these start time changes outweighs the bad (disruption, uncertainty, etc.) but this doesn't alleviate the BOE's responsibility to minimize the community's concern and confusion that come with any major change. Best practices from other school systems that have made this change show the importance of providing enough lead time for comprehensive communication with the community regarding the upcoming change, so that everyone understands the reasons behind it and has time to make the necessary changes in terms of childcare, after-school activities, etc. Our educators will also be impacted by this change, and so it is important that the BOE work with our partners in the Howard County Education Association, both to ensure their members are informed and prepared, and to ensure that the voice and perspective of our educators are included as decisions around implementation are made. It is incumbent upon the BOE to ensure the start time change is successful by insisting on, and providing oversight of, a comprehensive change management plan, to include public outreach and education. All too often in Howard County, we see HCPSS attempt to make positive changes, only to have them unravel and fail due to poor execution. The last thing we want is to make this critical start time change and have it back-fire or even fail outright because of poor implementation. Our students and their families are counting on the BOE to get this right.