



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

Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

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

Candidate Name: **Melissa Ellis for Board of Education, Councilmanic District 4**

The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, American Academy of Sleep Medicine, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other public health groups recommend that middle and high school start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. These experts base their recommendation on numerous studies that connect changing adolescent sleep patterns and early school start times to lower academic achievement, negative physical and mental health conditions, and risky behaviors among teens.

A 2014 Start Time Task Force by Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) recommended several potential options to improve school hours, and in February 2015, the County Council unanimously passed Resolution 6-15 urging AACPS to follow the recommendations of its 2014 Task Force and “expeditiously take measures to establish safe and healthy high school hours for all students.”

Despite shifting start times by 13-15 minutes this year, AACPS and the Board of Education have thus far been unable to fully implement safe, healthy, and age-appropriate school hours. Therefore, Start School Later Anne Arundel County asks:

1. Will you sign Start School Later’s 2017 petition at <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/establish-safe-and-healthy-school-hours-in-anne-arundel-county> ?

If No, will you sign it? If you won’t sign it, please explain why.

**Signed it the day it came out.**

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?

**I do feel our county cannot be viewed as a leader when known physical needs of our students are being ignored by unhealthy school hours. Meeting students’ physical and emotional needs has to be the priority for students to be able to make optimal academic gains. This is basic psychology (Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs). We wouldn’t be considered a leader in education if we took out the lunch hour in order to have more time for learning. I see sleep deprivation being just as detrimental. The importance of sleep has been long known in science, but the**

**scope of the research has expanded to the point that it is being recognized more and more in mainstream media. There is no longer any excuse for ignoring the science on this issue.**

3. What hours would you define as healthy, safe, and age appropriate for:

**Elementary School: I believe more study needs to be done as to the ideal start time for elementary students, but I know many students who attend our latest starting elementary schools have been awake for as many as three hours before beginning school. Research indicates that elementary age students generally wake earlier than adolescents, and therefore, elementary start times should be earlier than middle and high school.**

**Middle School: Starting no earlier than 8:30, the time the medical organizations indicate is the earliest middle schools should start.**

**High School: Starting no earlier than 8:30, the time the medical organizations indicate is the earliest high schools should start.**

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

**As a parent of teens, I have attended multiple Anne Arundel County Board of Education meetings and testified on this matter, asking our board to make healthy hours a priority for all students.**

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

**One of my first priorities will be to look for waste and inefficiencies in our schools' current spending, especially in our transportation system. It is imperative that our school system uses the best available technology to ensure the most efficient bus routing. Two years after spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on routing software, this software has still not been fully implemented. I believe our school system also had the support of our county council to fund start time changes for the health of our students, but that was not made a priority by our board, so the funding was not received. I will work with other board members to make this a priority and engage with our county council to reaffirm their support. Then the board and administration will need to work together to address concerns from the public, namely parents and students; and to educate the public on the benefits of healthy hours and, therefore, the harm that we are bringing to our students by not moving forward with changing to healthy hours for all students. This community education piece is critical to a smooth rollout, and something that we can seek guidance on from other school systems that have already successfully implemented these changes. I think many students' and parents' fears can be alleviated by hearing from others that had the same fears and now realize the tremendous benefits since their schools changed to healthy hours.**

6. What is your timeframe for your actions in Question 5 Please be specific, Fiscal Year, School Year, etc.

**Immediately. There will still be time after the election to adjust the superintendent's proposed budget for the 2019-2020 school year, and these changes would be implemented for the fall of 2020, assuming we are able to obtain any needed additional buses in that timeframe.**

7. 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 hours is a small but important piece of my mission to bring a whole-child approach to education. When students are adequately supported with appropriate class sizes, sufficient access to school counselors, healthy sleep and nutrition, a meaningful and inspiring curriculum that is not based to the constant drive to perform, and greater engagement between our schools and the community, we will begin to see significant gains in academic achievement, and more importantly, student overall well-being.**