

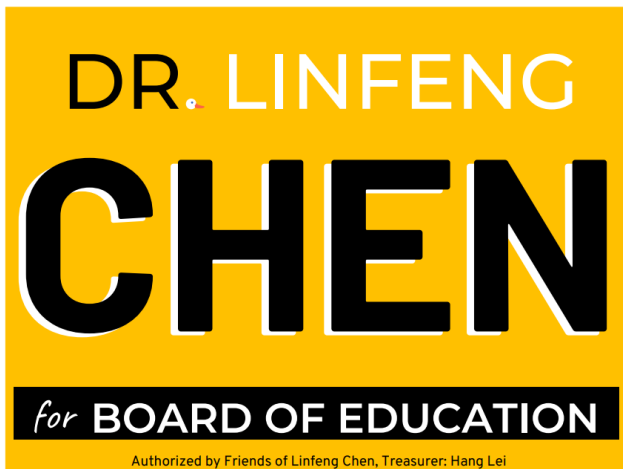


Howard County | Maryland

health, safety and equity in education

BOE General Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

Please return to: sslhoco@gmail.com



Candidate Name: Dr. Linfeng Chen

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?

I have three children, one each in Elementary, Middle, and High School; therefore, I can speak from my own family's experience. It usually takes at least 1 hour from waking up to arrival at school if the bus route is not too long. I think the current elementary school start time of 8:15-9:25 a.m. is for the most part reasonable based upon feedback from my child, her classmates, and other community members. For example, Hammond Elementary School students are generally okay with their current start time, as they can wake up at 7:30 a.m. in order to make it to school by the 9 a.m start time. However, different elementary schools have a wide range of start times. We should be careful about early school start time near 8:15 a.m. because it means elementary school students need to wake up around 7:00 a.m. or earlier, which I believe should be avoided for this age group.

The current middle school start time of 7:40-8:25 a.m. is not ideal, but manageable. Hammond Middle School students can wake up at 7:00 a.m. in order to make it to school by the school start time of 8:10 a.m. Some students have complained they do not have enough sleep and that there are times when they are not in a good mood due to lack of sleep.

A high school start time of 7:25 a.m. is too early for teenagers and needs to change. Reservoir High School students have to wake up around 5:45 a.m in order to make it to school on time. I asked my daughter's friends how they felt about the 7:25 a.m. start and every friend complained that the start time was too early. On a winter morning, it is even worse because it is dark and very cold waiting at the bus stop. For high schoolers with a lot of homework, social stress, and extracurricular activities, it is difficult for them to fall asleep before 11 pm (most times even later), but it is crucial that they receive at least the minimum 8 hours of sleep to be productive at school both academically and socially. That means they should not be waking up before 7:00 a.m., which puts an ideal school start time for high schoolers at 8 a.m. or slightly after 8 a.m.

Research shows several health risks, including being overweight, drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, suffering from symptoms of depression, using drugs, and poor academic performance can be associated with early school start times. The adolescents, unlike young kids, go to sleep later at night because they participate in after-school activities, have a lot of homework, and are just more socially active. Some poor sleep habits, including irregular bedtimes and use of electronics in the bedroom cause poor quality sleep and add to the problem. The early school start forces them to wake up very early. This results in most adolescents not getting enough sleep. For many this may translate to oversleeping, missing the bus, and not being able to get to school, leading to absenteeism and reduced academic performance. For others, it may appear that a student is not affected by the early start time because his/her academic performance looks okay on paper, but it is wreaking havoc on their physical and mental well-being. I believe we should change the high school start at a minimum and adjust the middle school start as

much as possible. HCPSS should change high school start time to a later time, i.e., no earlier than 8 a.m.

At the same time, I think the high school bell time at 8:30 a.m. or later would significantly impact after school activities (extracurricular programs, sports, clubs, baby sitting, work etc). So I support high school start time no earlier than 8 a.m. and no later than 8:30 a.m.

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?

We need to understand that many parents rely on older siblings to help with younger siblings (i.e. getting them off the bus after school). I believe high school students should go first because they have many after-school activities including athletics, clubs, scouting, volunteering, and jobs. I propose that HCPSS school start times should begin between 8 a.m. and 9:25 a.m. All high schools should start at 8 a.m. or later. Middle school should start after high school starts and after 8 a.m. The current elementary school start times (8:15-9:25 a.m.) are reasonable and could be adjusted to 8:30-9:25 a.m. if it is possible. I do not support any recommendation with elementary school starting school as the first tier at 8 am.

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 am not open to this scenario. Elementary students need more and longer sleeping time than high school students. As I said in Q2, I repeat here. We need to understand that many parents rely on older siblings to help with younger siblings (i.e. getting them off the bus after school). I believe high school students should go first because they have many after-school activities including athletics, clubs, scouting, volunteering, and jobs. I propose that HCPSS school start times should begin between 8 a.m. and 9:25 a.m. All high schools should start at 8 a.m. or later. Middle school should start after high school starts and after 8 a.m. The current elementary school start times (8:15-9:25 a.m.) are reasonable and could be adjusted to 8:30-9:25 a.m. if it is possible. I do not support any recommendation with elementary school starting school as the first tier at 8 am.

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 am fully in support of HCPSS beginning between 8 a.m. and 9:25 a.m. All high schools should start at 8 a.m. or later. Middle school should start after high school starts and after 8 a.m. The current elementary school start times (8:15-9:25 a.m.) are reasonable and could be adjusted to 8:30-9:25 a.m. if it is possible.

A successful school start time change requires a change in the whole system. We should improve traffic infrastructure around schools to reduce traffic jams, add more sidewalks for better walkers' accessibility and safety, provide alternative drop off sites for car riders, and adopt new technologies. I strongly suggest that HCPSS consider the following technical items during the change. We shall evaluate the impact from making Daylight saving permanent on the school start time initiative if the legislation passes. The school start times essentially will move one hour earlier during the winter in 2023. We shall upgrade and modernize buses in both hardware and software and adopt new technologies such as AI and APPs to improve our bus ridership, increase transportation efficiency, reduce waiting time, and facilitate more timely and accurate communication with students and parents. Compared with combustion engines and expensive fuel, we start to consider electric buses, which use greener and more reliable electricity with less maintenance labor and cost. I will support smaller and customized transportation as needed for special education or disabled students. This can save more energy and provide better solutions for these students.