



Howard County | Maryland

health, safety and equity in education

BOE Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

Please return to: sslhoco@gmail.com

Candidate Name: Julie Hotopp **District:** 4

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.

I am a strong, long-time believer in starting school later. I signed the petitions by Ms. Van Buskirk on February 7, 2020 and the one linked above by Ms. Rottier on April 23, 2020. However, the petitions do not go far enough. Research shows that teenagers struggle to sleep before 11 pm and they need 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep; many will still be sleep-deprived with an 8 am start time, as they also need time to get ready for school and get to school. I know this from personal experience too. My school had an 8 am start time and I saw students fall asleep in 1st period; the same was true of my parents a generation before that.

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?

Absolutely. The data is clear: schools need to start later. Implementing a later start time must be a priority. I included this in my written testimony during redistricting -- transportation funds that were being used for socioeconomic-based redistricting should instead be used to change school start times, given the extensive evidence of how changing start times would help students, improving outcomes. Changing school start times has long been known to improve student outcomes, improving them most for the most disadvantaged. The HCPSS community has discussed this for many years, with plenty of avenues for public input. The school board should have already acted.

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.

Middle School and High School: no earlier than 9 am. A 9 am start time would allow students to go to bed at 11 am, sleep 8.5 to 9.5 hours, and have half an hour to get ready for school. This is consistent with the 2014 guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/134/3/642>).

Elementary School: no earlier than 9 am. Although less well studied than middle and high school students, several small studies suggest that elementary school students also suffer from an early start time, particularly since they require more sleep. For my oldest son, a 9 am start time was perfect. Any earlier would have meant that for a substantial portion of the school year, he would go to bed while still light out; this would have likely been a struggle for him and could have led to behavioral problems.

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?

None of these models are correct. When I completed the parent survey at the time, I stated as much. We need new, better models that fully address the issue of start times at all grade levels.

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?

We need to do this as soon as possible because of its wide impact. I would like to see it happen the first year I get elected. But the BOE will need to balance this with other issues beyond obtaining the bus routing system, such as the implementation cost (which will be more difficult with the COVID-19-related financial issues).

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?

I do not support taxpayer's paying for transportation to private schools. I advocated to a current board member that it should not happen, passing on a lawyer's interpretation that they are not required to provide busing to these schools.

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 personally advocated this position to my neighbors, colleagues, and friends for many years. In the past year, it was part of my written redistricting testimony. More recently, I wrote the BOE an impassioned letter asking why COVID-related continuity of learning is not happening at the optimal hours for students. With online learning, there was an opportunity to address this issue, since the bus schedules are moot. I was very disappointed when the school system failed to take action on this issue when it would have cost them nothing.

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 will continue to advocate for healthy and safe school hours for all kids, at all grade levels. However, we need to ensure we only do it once. Thus, the solution should not merely be an incremental change with an 8 am start time. That start time is not in-line with expert recommendations based on sound research and data. Many of the arguments I have seen against such a change revolve around difficulties with parents' schedules, extracurricular activity and athletics schedules, and after-school use of school facilities. I would advocate for more outreach and communication with respect to those issues in order to ensure popular support for the measure.

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?

If we cannot achieve a later start time, I want to develop a test program for middle and high schools where the schedule rotates daily, as is done at some private schools. For example, English might be a first-period class one day, a second-period class the following day, and a third-period the day after. In this way, one subject would not be unduly affected by early start

times. Clearly such a proposal would need input from students, families, teachers, and staff to work out all the details. For example, a full rotation through the entire day may not be possible with half-day programs. But in that case, half day rotations should be explored to ensure a better learning schedule.

In addition, we need to analyze the financial benefits that might be realized from an earlier start time. For example, increased attendance could lead to additional federal dollars, which partially depends on student attendance data. Having age-appropriate school hours reduces tardiness and absenteeism levels, which could result in increased funding that could offset an increase in transportation costs.