



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

Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

Please return to: sslaaco@gmail.com

Candidate Name: **James Kitchin**

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.

Yes, I’ve signed this petition.

The only qualifier I would add is that the last two sentences about not releasing school specific start times until the board of education has dealt with the issues of transportation, childcare, after school activities, etc. to their satisfaction might come off as lacking in transparency. I don’t think the purpose of this language is to be nontransparent. Indeed, putting out specifics while solutions are still being worked on is not an appropriate timeline and could create unnecessary opposition to the overall goal. While I understand the rationale for not releasing specifics until anticipated logistical issues are dealt with, I would add that I believe these issues should be dealt with and the school specific times should be released before a final funding request is made of the County Council. It is very possible that parents will have better insight into how the school specific times will affect their families. They should have a chance to review them, put them up against the Board’s proposed solutions, voice any concerns, and be a part of the problem solving before this is a done deal. This will increase community buy-in to this policy goal.

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?

There are a whole host of issues that I think prevent our county from being a real leader in k-12 education. And Yes, I do think that this topic is one of those issues. There is a clear movement towards adopting later start times for adolescent students, I've come across it in my work as an education policy researcher.

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

Elementary School:

Starting not earlier than 8:30 am; no afternoon busses dropping off after dark. I understand the logic of having elementary school start before 8:30 am. However, most of the studies I have reviewed don't look at elementary school start times at all. There are actually two studies that do look at them that find earlier start time for elementary school kids have negative associations (not causality) with test scores and behavior. Until more research is done on the elementary level, I am not comfortable saying it is healthy to move their start times up.

Middle School:

Starting not earlier than 8:30 am; no afternoon busses dropping off after dark

High School:

Starting not earlier than 8:30 am; no afternoon busses dropping off after dark

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?

Honestly, this has not been one of the issues that I have organized around. We all have to choose which issues to use our spare time to advocate for – and there are simply other issues that I've chosen to spend my time focusing on. That doesn't mean that this issue isn't important, but just that we're not all going to channel our activism into the same issue. However, I do believe that I am the only candidate it my race to have graduated from AACPS. I remember what it was like catching a bus and getting to Arundel by the 7:17 start time. I can empathize with this issue in a way that other candidates can't.

And in full disclosure, I actually worked against the proposal that Dr. Arlotto put forth last time around. I think that he put forth a plan that was intentionally so bad that it would engender a lot of public opposition – which I

was a part of. I believe that we can all get on board with the value of safe school start and ending times. However, the devil is in the details of implementation.

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.

I would be willing, within my first year in office, to pass a resolution reaffirming the county council's commitment to this policy goal. I would also be willing to attend working sessions with Board of Education members to talk about the kind of public input I would want to see in this process before a formal funding request were made of the County Council. This way, when the request is made I would be able to speak on its behalf with confidence.

I would work to help find funding for this issue if (a) the implementation plan is good, (b) adequate public input had been solicited, received, and used to inform the implementation plan, (c) the Board of Education doesn't just request 100% of the required funds from the County (by this I mean that I would want a good portion of the funding to be found by making cuts/improving efficiencies in other parts of their budget), and (d) the Board does not request these funds in lieu of requesting appropriate funds for teacher compensation (including makeup steps). If the plan is right, this is something that I'd be willing to invest in and would be a vocal support of. I've been trained in doing public cost-benefit analysis and so I understand the potential gains that this kind of investment can bring to the public over an extended time.

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

I would work to pass the county council resolution in support of this policy goal within the first year of my term. Obviously, working with the Board on the funding would be dependent on when the Board gets their act together.

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?

Again, not only do I have kids in the school system – but graduated from it myself and vividly remember what it was like to be up past midnight doing homework and then wake by 6:00 am in order to catch the school bus. Both my own experience and my desire for my children to be healthy inform how I will advocate for this issue. Furthermore, my training and experience as public policy scholar will ensure that I pay attention to the details as this issue moves forward. Policy can be

designed in a way to mitigate the concerns, such as childcare and traffic, that many have with this topic.