

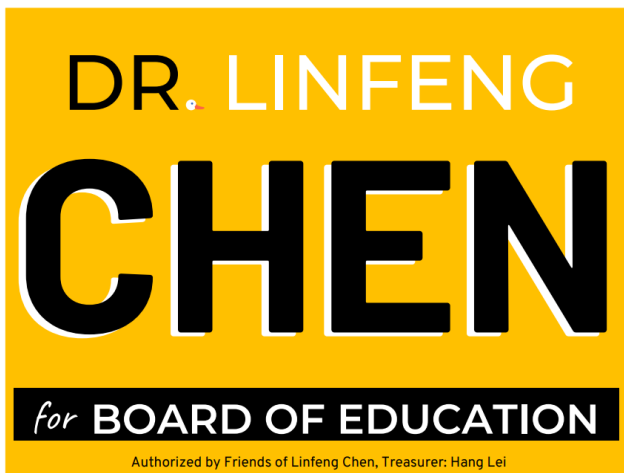


Howard County | Maryland

health, safety and equity in education

BOE Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

Please return to: sslhoco@gmail.com



Candidate Name: Linfeng Chen 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 completed the Start School Later’s 2013 petition and shared it on my Facebook page. I am fully in support of this cause. The petition is an effective way to promote the awareness of the school start time problem and is helpful in gaining support to start schools later in our community.

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 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 6:15 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.

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.

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.

4. On February 10, 2022, the HCPSS Board of Education unanimously voted for healthy school hours to be implemented for the 2023-2024 school year. Do you agree with this decision? Why or why not?

I am totally in support of this decision. This decision is heading in the right direction to support the physical and mental health of high school students. Its goal is to achieve later high school start time by compressing the earliest and latest school start time into a narrower range, with a minimal impact on transportation costs. However the details, such as transportation eligibility by distance, use of combination routing shared by different schools and mixed grade levels, and bus stop consolidation, are still to be worked out and some compromise will be necessary. Student health and safety cannot be part of that compromise.

6. 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?

While serving on the HCPSS Operating Budget Review Committee I expressed my support for later school start times. I have advocated on my Facebook page for later high school start time

before I received your survey. I also contacted the Anne Arundel County Public School System and learned from their experience planning to implement their new start times. However, their decision to move elementary school start time ahead of middle school and put the high school start time at last is totally wrong. It caused many problems. First, many families need older siblings in high school to come home early to care for younger siblings while parents are working. Second, if high school students start too late, it really limits their extracurricular activities and ability to study / work outside of school. With very late high school start times, the precious morning time is most likely wasted waiting for the school buses. I am in support of later school start times in order of high school, followed by middle school, and then elementary school. I also support reducing downtime and increasing the overlay of three elementary, middle, and high school transportation bands.

7. 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.

School start time study in support of advancing student achievement in the HCPSS began as early as 1997 and continued through 2017. Numerous school start and end time scenarios were analyzed based on the community's interests and priorities. The single most impactful barrier to proceeding was consistently identified as the additional transportation system costs. I am in support of later school start times for high school and middle school, while minimizing transportation cost increases.

Resolutions: HCPSS should have school start times between 8 a.m. and 9:25 a.m. High school starts early at 8 a.m. or slightly after 8 a.m, middle school starts after high school and after 8 a.m. The current elementary school start times (8:15-9:25 a.m.) are reasonable.

Recommendations: HCPSS should not have schools start before 8 a.m. or later than 9:25 a.m. The change should not introduce a big transportation cost increase. HCPSS should use technology to simulate and optimize the routes with some redundancy in the transportation system and encourage innovation and technology adoptions in transportation daily operation. School start times are in order of high school, middle school, elementary school.

Funding requests: For one-time, non-recurring expenditures for elements such as technology upgrades and transition planning, I am in support of state or federal level funding or grant to cover this cost.

Education outreach: I will suggest the HCPSS forms a school start time advisory committee, which shall include school administration, teachers, parents, students, a school start time

consulting company, and bus drivers. The committee can share the news with the communities as part of education outreach. HCPSS can share the project development with PTACHC and encourage PTAs to share the news with families.

Implementation effort: I believe we should have a pilot project and implement new school start times in a few schools first in order to address any issues before county-wide full implementation. Survey tools can be used to collect community feedback before and after implementation.

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?

I am fully in support of HCPSS beginning between 8 a.m. and 9:25 a.m. 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.