



Health, Safety and Equity in Education

PRESS STATEMENT

by

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Changing Bell Times: Let's Do it Right

On Tuesday, February 10, the MCPS Board of Education will have to decide, once for all, whether and how to delay high school start times, in response to the overwhelming demand from parents in Montgomery County. While there are many alternatives on the table, the choice appears to be between a "no-cost" option that pushes back High School bell times by 35 minutes or an option to switch the order, with Elementary Schools starting the day first.

If the board chooses the "no-cost" option, high schools would commence learning at 8:00 am, thirty minutes *before* the start time [recommended by American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP). The AAP guideline of an 8:30 opening bell for teens is not some lofty goal to aspire to. It is the bottom-line threshold below which we should not go.

On the other hand, if the board chooses to start Elementary Schools at 7:45, followed by High School and Middle School, each age group arrives in the classroom at a time when they are ready to learn. And no child goes to school in the dark.

The issue is not whether later start times are a good idea -- the board has seen the voluminous research confirming that they improve teenagers' health, safety and academic achievement. The issue is not whether parents want it -- that has been made abundantly clear by surveys conducted by MCPS and [nearly 14,000 signatures on a petition](#).

The issue, plain and simple, is cost. With major budget cuts looming, some board members are reluctant to spend *any money at all* on changing bell times. But the costs are small, and when budgets are tight, it is imperative to prioritize your spending on what delivers the most benefit for the most children.

Board members, you say you want healthy start times? This is your chance to do it right. Please don't use a minimal expense as an excuse.

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Start School Later is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working to ensure school start times compatible with health, safety, education, and equity. Please visit our website at: <http://www.startschoollater.net>.