



Howard County | Maryland

health, safety and equity in education

BOE Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

Submitted by Dan Newberger



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.

Yes, I have signed the Start School Later petition. Even though the Board has now voted to implement later start times starting in the 2023-24 school year, this issue is not resolved. Community support will be vital to ensuring a successful implementation, and efforts such as the petition and the other important work being done by Start School Later will help to generate such support.

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?

To be a leader in K-12 education for all students, I strongly believe that HCPSS must make decisions that are data-driven, supported by science and research, and recommended by trusted experts in the relevant field. The research overwhelmingly indicates that later start times for adolescents lead to better outcomes on a wide variety of metrics including not just increased graduation rates and decreased absenteeism, but also a decline in behavioral issues and improvements in physical and mental health—including reduced suicide rates. The research tells us that adolescent circadian rhythms are different from those of younger children or adults, so they are biologically “programmed” for a later sleep/wake cycle, meaning that our current school start times are forcing our middle school and high school students to fight against their own biology. Research also shows that students of color and lower socioeconomic status students are disproportionately harmed by our current unhealthy school start times, so changing to healthier start times is consistent with my deep commitment to eliminating opportunity gaps and ensuring that every child in Howard County receives the resources, support, and opportunities they need to be successful.

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.

I believe we need to listen to scientists and researchers to help us define healthy, safe, and age-appropriate school start times. The consensus among most experts favors start times no earlier than 8:30am for both middle and high schools, so that is what I prefer, although any improvement from the too-early times we have now would be worthwhile. For elementary school, the sleep-health research tells us that younger students are biologically “programmed” to wake earlier. However, when we factor in considerations such as parent work schedules, childcare needs, and bus stop/walking safety, I believe the preferred start time for elementary schools should be between 8:00-9:30am.

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?

Yes, I agree with this decision. The research has been clear, for decades, that later start times are better for our middle school and high school students. In an ideal world, I would have

preferred not to delay this change until 2023-2024. However, it is absolutely critical that HCPSS get this done RIGHT as it will impact the daily routines of every family in the district. Best practices from other school systems that have made this change show the importance of providing enough lead time for comprehensive communication with the community regarding the upcoming change, so that everyone understands the reasons behind it and has time to make the necessary changes in terms of childcare, after-school activities, etc. Our educators will also be impacted by this change, and so it is important that the Board of Education work with our partners in the Howard County Education Association, both to ensure their members are informed and prepared, and to ensure that the voice and perspective of our educators are included as decisions around implementation are made. It is incumbent upon the Board of Education to ensure the start time change is successful by insisting on, and providing oversight of, a comprehensive change management plan, to include public outreach and education. The last thing we want is to make this change and have it backfire because of rushed and/or poor implementation.

5. 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 I have been active in supporting HCPSS for many years in a variety of ways, the school start time issue has honestly not been on my radar as much as other issues. My work as a PTA volunteer and officer to date has been at the elementary school level, so I haven't seen first-hand the negative impacts of our current unhealthy start times in our middle and high schools. However, as I have learned more about the issue in recent years, as a member of both the HCPSS Community Advisory Council and the Operating Budget Review Committee, I have become absolutely convinced that this important reform will positively impact our students for years to come. Ensuring a successful implementation of the new start times will be a priority for me as a board member, and I will leverage my personal experience as a parent of younger children who is relatively new to the issue to ensure that HCPSS develops and implements a communication strategy that will help the entire community not only to become aware of the upcoming changes, but to understand the many ways that the later start times will benefit our students and our community.

6. 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.

Given that the decision has already been made to change start times beginning in the 2023-24 school year, the Board's primary task now regarding start times is to ensure that this change is implemented successfully and without additional delay. My professional experience helping complex public organizations implement major change initiatives tells me that HCPSS must develop and execute a comprehensive implementation and change management plan to inform the community of the coming changes, educate parents and others on the significant health and safety benefits we will gain from the change, and work to earn buy-in from all the stakeholders in our community. Examples of community outreach and education can include a series of community engagement sessions on this issue, enlisting the help of local experts such as Dr. Brian Robertson, former Chief of Sleep Medicine at Walter Reed and Amy Wolfson, psychology professor at Loyola University. We also must study and learn from the best practices identified by other districts which have already made these changes, and, in particular, we should closely follow the process in our neighboring Anne Arundel County, which will be implementing later start times a year ahead of us, and to date, seems to have an impressive roll-out and communications strategy that we can learn from. The Board also needs to ensure that the 2023-24 budget fully funds all the resources necessary to implement the change in start times, particularly in the Division of Operations and the Office of Transportation.

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?

I would just like to reiterate my commitment to listening to the experts and making data-driven decisions rooted in science. Given the unanimity and clarity of the research on this subject, this should be a priority for all Board of Education members, and is certainly a priority for me. I would also like to emphasize that we must not underestimate the complexity and widespread ramifications of this change, both for our students and their families, and for our educators and school staff. A smooth and successful change in school start times will require excellent communication and transparency, as well as careful and comprehensive planning. The Board of Education needs to take an active role in ensuring that HCPSS gets this done right.