



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

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Starting School Later: Is the Superintendent's Proposal a Recipe for Failure? What's Needed Instead...

January 13, 2016. While Start School Later Anne Arundel County (SSLAACo) is pleased that Anne Arundel County Public School's proposed bell schedule provides safe, healthy and academically appropriate school start times for high school students, we are concerned about significant schedule changes proposed for many elementary and middle school students and the manner in which they are being proposed.

Schools Superintendent George Arlotto's proposal, released on Jan. 12 for implementation in 2017-18, reflects the need for middle and high schools to begin class no earlier than 8:30 a.m. — per recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Maryland Department of Education. However, to achieve this goal and provide safe, healthy and practical school hours for children of all ages, SSLAACo believes AACPS needs to:

- 1) Educate the community about the science of teen sleep health and the reasons why the medical community is calling to change school start times accordingly.
- 2) Communicate authentically with parents, students and staff to address concerns about the impact of new schedules and how to manage the change process as the district continues to refine proposed schedules.
- 3) Refine the school and bus schedules based on the transportation routing software purchased by AACPS with targeted funding by the County Council but not yet implemented. Skilled use of the software can improve both transportation and cost efficiencies.

Start School Later is particularly troubled by the following aspects of the proposed schedule:

- **The Magnitude of the Elementary School Shifts:** The AACPS Start School Later Task Force's first option limited elementary school start and end time changes to 5-10 minutes, with perhaps a few outliers. In Dr. Arlotto's proposal, only 14 schools (18%) shift by just a few minutes. The remaining (82%) shift by 20-90 minutes. Within certain feeder systems, early starting schools were shifted later while later starting schools shifted earlier without apparent reason.
- **The Take-It-Or-Leave Message:** Other school districts have experienced serious backlash when a single option is presented before public outreach begins in earnest. Since the ultimate goal of SSLAACo, the Anne Arundel County Board of Education, County Executive Steven Schuh and the Anne Arundel County Council is to bring about successful start time change with broad public support, it's important for the planned community forums to use an iterative approach that allows for community feedback on various alternatives.

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>.

- **The One-Size-Fits-All Approach to Upper Schools:** Just as the current elementary school schedules vary by location and other variables, the same may need to be true for the middle schools (for which AACPS is proposing a uniform 9:30 a.m. start time) and schools with magnet programs for which students travel long distances.
- **Not Using the Transportation Software:** The already-purchased transportation software will likely improve the proposed schedule, but no such assurance has yet been provided. SSLAACo is also concerned that both the design and presentation of the schedule is a recipe for dividing the community, much of which may have no idea why this change is happening.

Despite these reservations, SSLAACo remains optimistic that the Anne Arundel County Board of Education as well as Dr. Arlotto and his staff will demonstrate the necessary leadership to accept both negative and positive feedback from concerned families, make beneficial schedule adjustments from the transportation software, seek additional feedback and ultimately develop a school bell schedule that provides safe and healthy school hours for all of the district's 80,000 students.

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