



Howard County | Maryland

health, safety and equity in education

April 6, 2020

Dear Candidate for Board of Education:

For decades, Howard County's community members have sought later school hours for high school students based on the ever increasing evidence that early high school start times significantly contribute to chronic teen sleep deprivation. In 2018, only 19.5% of Howard County high school students got 8 hours of sleep on an average school night, down from 22.6% in 2014 (Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Surveys). An adolescent's still-growing body requires up to 9.5 hours of sleep and they typically can't fall asleep earlier than 11 p.m. With the earliest HCPSS high school bus picking up at 5:59 a.m., it is little wonder that our high school students are chronically sleep deprived.

This sleep deprivation negatively impact adolescent physical and mental health, safety, and academic achievement, including increasing achievement gaps. The National Parent Teacher Association, 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. As noted in Enclosure 1, the entire community can benefit from school hours that are healthy, safe, and age appropriate for all students.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, American Academy of Sleep Medicine, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and many other public health groups recommend that middle and high school start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. In 2014, a joint report from the Maryland State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health recommended that school systems conduct feasibility studies to determine the possibility of starting schools after 8 a.m. These experts base their recommendation on numerous studies that connect early middle and high school start times to lower academic achievement, negative physical and mental health conditions, and risky behaviors among teens.

- In September 2013, the Howard County Public School System Superintendent charged staff to convene an exploratory work group. The charge directed staff to examine background research on high school start times with specific attention to student engagement, student achievement, and student well-being.

- The initial work group became the School Start and Dismissal Time (SSDT) Charter Committee and the committee's work had evolved to include five phases.
- On October 22, 2015 the Charter Committee developed four scalable implementation models. At the April 28, 2016 BOE meeting, the Board passed a motion that directed staff to bring forward models in which no middle or high school would begin before 8:15 a.m. and provide a funding placeholder in the development of the 2017-2018.
- On November 17, 2016, the committee presented four more models to the board. Based on community feedback on the elementary school earlier start time proposals, on February 23, 2017, the Board of Education passed a motion that beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, no school begins before 8:00 a.m. or after 9:25 a.m.
- On December 19, 2017, staff proposed four models for bell times that could be implemented with the guidelines set by the BOE. All four models had Elementary starting between at 8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. and Middle between 8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m. Model 1: High school at 8 a.m. Model 2: High School at 8:15 a.m. Model 3: High School at 8:30 a.m. Model 4: High School at 8:45 a.m.
- At their February 5, 2020 meeting, several Board of Education members motioned to keep school start times in their conversation based on all the positive data of the benefits to adolescents with later start times.

The challenge is not a discussion of *whether* HCPSS should take the step towards healthy, safe, and age appropriate school hours for all of its students. It's a discussion of *how and when* to begin the next step to correct the school hours for all students so that they are safe, healthy, and age-appropriate.

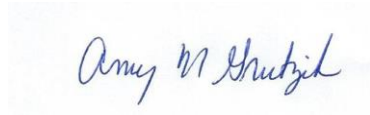
As a member of the Board of Education you may play a vital role in the implementation of healthy, safe, and age-appropriate school hours for all students. **Therefore, Start School Later Howard County respectfully requests your answers to the attached Candidate Questionnaire regarding your future efforts to ensure healthy and safe school hours.**

Please return the Questionnaire by May 1st to sslhoco@gmail.com

Your response will be shared on our website: <https://www.startschoollater.net/hoco-elections.html>, on our Facebook page, and with supporters who signed petitions in 2013 through 2020 to urge the Board of Education to act.

If you do not feel comfortable with answering the survey, Start School Later Howard County is available to meet with you via a video call to review the academic, health, safety, and economic benefits of healthy, safe school hours for all children, the challenges of implementation, and lessons learned from jurisdictions across the nation who have successfully navigated this issue. I can be reached at sslhoco@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amy M. Grutzik". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light blue rectangular background.

Amy Grutzik, Chapter Leader, Start School Later Howard County

Enclosure (1) 10 Community Benefits

Enclosure (2) 2020 Election Candidate Questionnaire