



**Howard County | Maryland**

health, safety and equity in education

## BOE Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

Please return to: [sslhoco@gmail.com](mailto:sslhoco@gmail.com)

**Candidate Name: Cindy Vaillancourt**

**District: 5**

**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 believe I have signed it in previous years, and have signed it - and shared it - again.

**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?**

The school start times in Howard County, and many other jurisdictions across the country are at the very least counter productive. We invest community resources heavily in an effort to educate our young people, and then provide schedules that undermine the effectiveness of instruction, physical and emotional health, and in too many cases impede our children's ability to become the best versions of themselves. Many school districts have made the commitment, and investment, to provide healthier and more effective school schedules - and are seeing dramatic results. Any

district that truly wants to be a leader in educational opportunity and results MUST provide healthy and effective school schedules.

**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.**

Elementary School: no earlier than 8:15, ideally after 8:30

Middle School: No earlier than 8:15, ideally after 8:30

High School: No earlier than 8:15, ideally after 8:30.

**4. On December 19, 2017, Staff proposed four models for bell times that could be implemented. All four models had Elementary starting between at 8:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. and Middle between 8:00 a.m. and 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. What do you think about these four proposed models?**

I supported the efforts to change the school bell schedules, using these or any other similar models. As a member of that Board of Education, I voted to direct that start times be changed on several occasions. I also voted to proceed with those changes in 2018. I was outvoted.

**5. With the Board of Education purchasing a new bus routing system for the Department of Transportation, what would be your timeline of implementation healthy school hours?**

I believe the decision to make the changes to the bell schedules for the health, safety, and education of our students should not be determined by the ease of designing routes. This is a question of taking a specific action that has been demonstrated to have a critical impact on the health, well being, and educational outcomes for our children. If educational leaders in this county believe the overwhelming research, then it is their obligation to make the decision that is in the best interest of the health and education of the students - and then implement the actions necessary. If the routing software makes that easier for the staff, great. But even if it is difficult, it still needs to be done.

**6. Currently, HCPSS services 5 parochial schools with 21 bus routes dedicated to those schools at a price tag of \$800,000 annually to HCPSS. The HCPSS Transportation department uses their manpower to design and maintain those routes. The BOE's Legal Counsel stated that the school system is not legally required to supply bus service if a student does not reside on a public school bus route. What are your thoughts about HCPSS providing this extra service to these parochial schools?**

I am extremely frustrated to learn that, in spite of questioning on multiple occasions, the details of the parochial school transportation beyond what was legally required was not disclosed to the Board of Education when I was on it, or in the decade prior when these changes apparently were implemented. It doesn't really matter that the funding for these buses does not strictly come out of the k-12 funding for HCPSS, but is "passed through" to the HCPSS via the "community services" portion of the budget - and that if that expense is reduced by returning to only providing the minimum services required by existing law those "saved" funds would not automatically be available to HCPSS to use elsewhere. Ultimately the funds come from the HoCo taxpayers, and as such should not be expended without good and reasonable care.

I will assume that this question being included on the questionnaire about the need to change school start times means that on some level the real question is whether savings on non-public transportation could be applied to the additional transportation costs quoted in order to accomplish later start times. I have never felt that the costs quoted for changing the bell schedules were reasonable, or derived with an eye toward actually executing the plan. I have always felt that the costs were generated specifically to be an obstacle to making the changes. This is why, in spite of the quoted costs, I voted to proceed with the changes anyway. I believe if the decision is made, the real numbers and costs will be significantly less than previously quoted. I also believe the benefits are worth the costs.

We make many decisions for the education of our students that are very costly, but few that have the potential to provide the enormous benefits that changing start times to healthy and effective schedules will.

**7. 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?**

For all of my time on the Board of Education from 2010-2018, I aggressively advocated to change the high school start times. I finally gained some traction when the American Academy of Pediatrics issued guidance, and the pediatrician on the BOE at the time joined my fight. We were able to secure the votes to direct the change that was to be effective in 2018.

Unfortunately, the new Board that was in place by then overturned that decision based on the dire financial situation.

If returned to the Board of Education I will continue to press for this change. If I am not returned to the Board, I will continue to press the Board and administration to make these changes in my role as a citizen.

**8. 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.**

I will engage in an ongoing campaign of education and persuasion among the other Board Members and the administration, including motions to revisit the previous decision to change start times.

I will also make bell schedules a significant part of the comprehensive reevaluation of attendance areas, programming, and calendars that HCPSS must engage in for the 2023 opening of the 13th High School, and the hoped for opening of the new Talbott Springs Elementary School. The enormous disruption and changes necessitated by these events brings a terrific opportunity to work in an overhaul to the bell schedules as well.

**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 have been a vocal advocate for healthy school start times for at least 2 decades. We even sent one of our children to a private high school in order for her to have a healthy start time of 8:30am. Our other child is a “natural early bird” and was not negatively impacted by the high school start times. Some children are “ok” as far as they and their parents know. For them, the need for a later start time is not obvious or dramatic. Some people use this anecdotal “evidence” to argue against changing times. While some may not be as harmed as others - I have never heard anyone argue that the later start times harm anyone. I also think our recent quarantine experience may help to remind parents just how much getting adequate sleep has impacted their teens.