



Howard County | Maryland

health, safety and equity in education

BOE Election Candidate School Hours Questionnaire

Please return to: sslhoco@gmail.com

Candidate Name: Antonia Watts District: 2

ANTONIA
WATTS
DISTRICT 2
BOARD OF EDUCATION

By Authority: Friends of Antonia Watts, Korin Sharp, Treasurer



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 signed the petition.

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?

As an educator, I experienced first-hand the decreased productivity and engagement from my first period middle and high school students when compared to classes that were later in the day. Our students' mental and physical health and academic performance are negatively impacted by not adhering to the later school start time recommendations supported by research. While our county leads the nation in education, it could utilize tools like later start times to bolster student outcomes.

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: 8:00-9:30 a.m.

Middle School: 8:30-9:30 a.m.

High School: 8:30-9:30 a.m.

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?

Models 1 and 2 run counter the research that suggests high schools should start after 8:30 am. Because of this, I do not believe that these are viable options to explore. Models 3 and 4 support the research-based findings of the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, and the CDC. These organizations recommend middle and high schools start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. While both times are acceptable, I think the 8:45 a.m. start time is the best option of the four. It allows high school students to get the most amount of sleep.

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?

Depending on when the financial outcomes are evaluated, I expect the implementation of healthy school hours to start the following school year after the routing software results are published.

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 firmly believe in using public tax to support public schools. In this tough financial time, the school system must dedicate its limited resources to the public school students it serves.

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?

I am a member of the Community Advisory Council which is a group that reports directly to the Board of Education. Recently, Colonel Brian Robertson, Chief of the Sleep Disorder Center at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, spoke about the positive benefits of a later school start time. He provided a PowerPoint that I shared with community members to inform them of these benefits as well. This presentation sparked productive conversations that highlighted the importance of later school start times.

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.

The research clearly outlines the benefits of later school start times, and I support these findings. Still, several concerns must be addressed.

Funding. The increased transportation cost associated with the change is the major hurdle to ensuring that all students have appropriate school start times. By staggering the school start

times, school systems decrease the number of drivers and buses required to transport students. However, a study from a Minnesota school district showed that after two years of altering school start times, the school system broke even on their investment.

Additionally, the County could increase countywide public transportation routes and allow school children to ride for free. This investment would benefit both the community and the school system. Older school-age children could take public transportation to school. Public transportation runs at more frequent intervals, so children who miss one bus can still get to school that day. This change reduces absenteeism rates.

Legislation. Some families depend on the income generated from their teenagers. Currently, students 14-15 years old can only work until 8pm during most of the school year. I propose that the Maryland department of Labor increase the working hours for this group until 9pm year round. Later start times should not impact the ability of older teens to work after school and get the necessary sleep.

Community services. The public library is integral in public education. Students use the library resources to help complete their classwork. Therefore, I advocate for extended hours at the library to accommodate the change in school start time.

Public outreach: Change is hard. Because of this, it is important to educate the community, parents, and teenagers about the numerous benefits of changing school start times. Community members will want to know how this change directly impacts their life. The conversation should discuss changes in traffic patterns, community services, and public safety. Parents are rightly concerned about how to adapt new school start times into their lives. Therefore, it is important to provide parents with ample time to adjust to the new start time. Also, some parents might find it helpful to receive sample schedules based on the new start times. Teens may need some convincing that a later start time is beneficial too. This is a shift that impacts them the most. It is also important to honestly address the challenges that this change presents with thoughtful and inclusive solutions.

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 fully support safe, healthy, and age-appropriate school hours. I believe that this change is long overdue. In this economic environment, I think that our community and school system are going to have to explore non-traditional, alternative solutions that work in other areas like Uber-style or shuttle-like transportation for children, transportation fees for non-FARMS students, or combining students from neighboring schools on one bus.