

Summary of High School Bell Times Work Group
April 25, 2013, 3:00–5:00 p.m.
Carver Educational Services Center, Room 162

Next meetings:

- Thursday, May 9, 2013, 3:00–5:00 p.m., Carver Educational Services Center, Room 120
- Thursday, May 23, 2013, 3:00–5:00 p.m., Carver Educational Services Center, Room 127

Opening remarks

John invited participants to contribute feedback gathered from stakeholders to date.

Congratulations were offered to two group members recognized for contributions to the community:

- Susan Burkinshaw, recipient of the Montgomery County Business Roundtable for Education Champions for Children Volunteer of the Year Award
- Carol Goddard, recipient of the Washington Post Distinguished Educational Leadership Award

Review of options generated during previous meeting

While reviewing options discussed in the last meeting, clarification was offered over the term “flipped classroom” as compared to what participants referred to as “rotating class periods.”

“Rotating class periods” were defined, for purposes of this discussion, as classes that meet during different class periods, depending on the day of the week. It was suggested that a first-period class, for example, might meet in a later class period during some days of the week. This option was offered as a possible way to address students who may not do well in their first-period classes because they are sleepy but may be more awake during a later period of the day.

“Flipped classroom” was defined for the purposes of this discussion as a teaching technique whereby students first study a topic outside of class, possibly with a teacher-created videotape. Classroom time then is used for application of the content through a variety of practices that might include problem-solving, project-based learning, or other applied learning. This option was offered as a possible way to make first-period classes more active for the potentially sleepy student or to offer the student who has mastered the content outside of class the opportunity to sleep late.

Discussion about the flipped classroom technique followed:

- A flipped class currently is offered in the high school of one of the group participants, and a parent has raised concerns.

- Preparation time for teachers can be more extensive than a normal class preparation, as there needs to be presentation prepared for students to view outside of class, as well as application activities for a full class period.

Evaluating options

The following criteria were offered for evaluating possible options:

- Serves the primary and desired purpose for key stakeholders
- Minimizes impact to others
- Reasonably acceptable
- Justifiable cost
- Practical and could be accomplished

Discussion about the evaluation criteria followed:

- Stakeholders: Who are the “key” stakeholders and what if parents/students/staff do not all want the same thing? It was suggested that our stated strategy is first to determine the level of interest among parents and students. It was also suggested that our charge is not to decide which stakeholders’ interests prevail, if those interests diverge, but rather our charge is to present options and identify any apparent differences in their concerns.
- Evaluating options: Participants discussed the difficulty of determining whether options were “reasonable” or acceptable to stakeholders.

Student survey

Student members presented data they collected at the April 15, 2013, meeting of the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association (MCR) general assembly. Of 116 high school students present at the general assembly, 60 responded to a student-generated survey. The percentage of students responding “yes” to the following questions was as follows:

- Do you think beginning high school at 7:25 a.m. is too early? (51 percent)
- Do you think high school bell times should be changed? (43 percent)
- Do you believe that by starting and ending the high school day later, you will get more sleep? (43 percent)
- If bell times were to remain the same, do you think including information on good sleeping habits in health classes would cause students to get more sleep? (32 percent)
- If you were given an option to arrive at school later and take one or two classes online, would you be interested in doing this if MCPS transportation to school was not provided? (60 percent)
- If high school bell times were to change, would this negatively impact your after school job? (27 percent; 58 percent reported not having a job)
- If the high school day was to end later, would this negatively impact your after school activities? (65 percent)
- Do you think high school students on average get enough sleep? (8 percent)

- Would starting/ending school later negatively affect your parent/guardian's schedule? (27 percent)
- How much do you sleep on an average school night? (Average response: 6 hours, 15 minutes)
- If school were to start/end later would you go to sleep earlier? Yes, (2 percent), later (31 percent), same (67 percent)
- How often do you doze off or lose focus due to sleepiness in 1st or 2nd period: everyday (28 percent), 2–4 days of the week (38 percent), 1 day a week (11 percent), rarely (15 percent), never (8 percent)

Discussion of the student-generated survey was as follows:

- A survey of student leaders is not representative of all high school students.
- Students were aware of the start time issue, and Dr. Joshua P. Starr, superintendent of schools, who was present at the MCR general assembly, discussed the topic in response to student questions.
- MCR students responded similarly to parent focus group participants who felt more sleep is needed but were reluctant to make changes in high school start times.
- Student members of the work group were encouraged to replicate this survey with middle school students participating in the upcoming Montgomery County Junior Councils (MCJC) meeting on May 7, 2013.

Survey development update

Kecia provided an update on the ongoing development of a survey to be administered to parents and students. The timeline for administration of the survey is between May 10 and May 31 to a sample of parents of students in Grades 9–11. Topics raised by participants included the following:

- Including parents of Grade 8 (rising Grade 9) students
- Administering the survey via paper or a Web-based application
- Including certain questions from the survey developed by the students, particularly questions about tele-learning and falling asleep in class
- Developing a survey for staff

Stakeholder group update

Traci and John provided an update on stakeholder groups. Discussion focused on the difficulty of conducting focus groups as the school year draws to a close, the possibility of sharing the survey with the focus group participants, and the desirability of waiting to conduct focus groups until the survey results are available. Other topics included the following:

- Options for reaching parents who do not participate in Parent Teacher Associations or boosters (and would it be possible to access parents through the George B. Thomas Saturday School)?

- Concern that businesses represented on the Montgomery County Business Roundtable for Education (MCBRE) may not be the same businesses that hire high school students and possible limitations of assessing the impact of start times on businesses that hire students if feedback is only sought from MCBRE.
- Advisability of meeting with interest groups before seeing parent/student survey results.
- Concern about the effect that the survey results will have on the development of later start time options (e.g., if 65 percent of parents do not want a change in start time, will the process of developing later start time options stop?).

Meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.