

Office of Superintendent of Schools
Board Meeting of November 20, 2019

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November 18, 2019

Valtena G. Brown, Deputy Superintendent/Chief Operating Officer
School Operations

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR THE SUPERINTENDENT TO EXPLORE AND PURSUE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LATER SCHOOL START TIMES

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT: SAFE, HEALTHY AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) provides a safe, secure learning environment as a means of promoting academic achievement for all students. As the District continues to lead the nation in expanding school choice options to our community, it is important to enhance tertiary functions to ensure equitable access to our innovative instructional programs. Furthermore, students' mental and physical well-being and its connection to academic achievement has long been a priority of the District. Thus, M-DCPS is exploring options for creating a bell schedule that will both consider the health needs of all students while increasing transportation access to high-demand programs across the District. A new bell schedule provides the unique opportunity to redefine a day to support the future of learning.

As a result of previous board discussions and as a follow-up to Agenda Item H-16, which was proffered by School Board Vice Chair Dr. Martin Karp and approved by the Board at its meeting of October 16, 2013, this initiative was launched. The District has afforded schools the opportunity to participate in pilots of later start times, and explore, on a limited basis, the academic and financial feasibility of offering later start times for high school students. Initial findings yielded reports of higher energy and alertness from participating students.

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Public health officials and the medical community at large have declared that a public health crisis of epidemic proportions is affecting adolescents. Most adolescents do not get enough sleep, leading to a host of mental, behavioral, and physical effects, as well as public safety concerns. Adolescent sleep needs are driven by a temporary biological shift in sleep onset and wake times that occurs concurrently with the onset of puberty and ends in early adulthood. Early school start times run counter to this biological condition and can contribute substantially to adolescent sleep deprivation. Shifting bell times for adolescents to start school at 8:30am or later has been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, the National Association of School Nurses/Society of Pediatric Nurses, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, the Society of Behavioral Medicine, the American Sleep Association, the National Parent Teacher Association, and the National Education Association.

M-DCPS staff has conducted a review of the research and studied the outcomes observed for student health and learning outcomes. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that middle and high schools start no earlier than 8:30 a.m.

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As part of the evaluation process, the District engaged 1,800 senior high school students during the 2018-2019 academic calendar year to obtain feedback regarding the current bell schedule and how a change would impact their educational experience.

The results from the self-reported student survey led the District to assemble an internal work group to identify cost-neutral bell schedule alternatives that support the start time recommendation for adolescents. Potential bell schedule alternatives will include options for starting all grade levels no earlier than 8:00 a.m. and allow for expanded transportation operations.

As M-DCPS continues to evaluate alternative bell schedules, stakeholder feedback is key to determine the overall impact of each proposed alternative. District staff solicited feedback through small focus groups on viable alternatives from parents, school leaders, and teachers who represent all three geographic regions throughout the District. District staff will continue to solicit input regarding potential adjustments to school start times from various stakeholder groups through a multitude of means, including surveys, additional focus groups and town hall meetings. The results will be analyzed and a final comprehensive recommendation, inclusive of logistical and associated financial impact on system-wide operations such as transportation and food service, will be brought forth by Spring 2020 for potential implementation for the 2020-2021 academic year.

RECOMMENDED: That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, authorize the Superintendent of Schools to explore the feasibility of implementing later school start times and provide a comprehensive recommendation to the Board no later than the School Board meeting of April 2020.