

School Start/End Time Task Force Meeting

Tuesday, February 11, 2020 11:00 AM

WHS Main Office Conference Room, 24 School Road, Weston, CT 06883-1623

I. **Welcome and Review**

II. **Focus Group Update**

III. **Review of Draft School Start and End Time
Recommendation Report**

IV. **Additional Survey Discussion**

V. **Other Business**

A. Set Meeting After BOE Meeting

VI. **Next Steps**

Parent Focus Groups: School Start/End Time

Jenny Walsh (PTO representative for Upper Schools) and Kristen Ancker (PTO representative for Lower Schools) reached out to parents via the PTO meetings and PTO newsletters and the Moms of Weston Facebook Page to gather parents interested into two scheduled focus groups and one follow-up combined focus group.

The first focus group for the upper school parents was held on November 6, 2019 from 7 to 8:30 PM at the Weston Public Library
Attending the focus group were the following;

WMS

Jenny Reilly
Christa Gross
Ilana Escandon
Jill Jorschick
Erica Scoscia
Nicci Wiese

WHS

Beth Lubline
Billy Sherlock
Amea Borys
Debbie Morvillo
Cathy Greene

BOTH WMS/WHS

Mike Nevitt
Nancy Hayden

The focus group began with everyone introducing themselves and their children's ages. Jenny Walsh then explained the process the task force has taken so far and introduced the names of all the members on the task force. We talked about the research about adolescent brains and importance of sleep for mental health and wellness.

We discussed how some of the schools in Fairfield county have made the shift and what schools in our district are "thinking about making a shift" to start school later for High School students. We talked about the importance of talking to schools that have made the shift and what can we learn from their mistakes and successes.

We stated all the impacting factors to think about, explained the 4 options and discussed pros and cons of each scenario. The parents broke into smaller groups to better discuss the 4 options and the pros and cons of each.

We then met back together as a whole group and discussed our brainstorming and ideas "outside the box". Some questions and concerns that came up in our discussions were:

- It's very important we talk to other schools that have made the shift and the impact it has had on families and students' learning
- Will there be any extra-curricular classes before 8:30 AM (if we do all this work to shift and then teams start practicing early it will defeat the purpose)
- Will kids have to leave classes too early? Why can't Weston just dictate to other

- schools. "We don't get out until _____ so we will start the games at _____."
- Will there be substitute teachers for important academic subjects if the teacher needs to leave for a coaching game.
 - How many kids are affected by leaving early? How many student/athletes?
 - Why don't the younger kids go earlier since they are up earlier?
 - Many parents liked the option to just flip the two. HES and WIS start earlier and WMS and WHS start later.
 - Can we shave 10-20 minutes off our day?
 - One group liked HES/WIS 8AM start WMS/WHs 8:50 start
 - Can the bus company look at ways to make the rides more efficient due to lack of kids taking the bus?
 - Another group liked the flip but saw the concern of kindergarten students on a bus at 6:50 and waiting outside in the dark.
 - If the trend is going this way, Weston should lead the way. Push athletics back as needed. Really take a hard look at the schedule and figure out what is best for the kids?
 - Many parents said that Weston should look at their homework load and cut back on homework.
 - We need to teach the kids better time management skills and study skills.
 - If we shave 20 minutes off the school day can there be an "on-line" component for the time missed?
 - If the intent is to do what's in the best interest of the kids, we can figure out all the small nuances. Change is hard but doable.
 - We need to be aware that the kids need downtime and really take a look at the schedule to allow this.
 - There may need to be some education on what is right for these kids and how do we challenge them without stressing them out?

The second focus group for the Lower School Parents was re-scheduled due to a snow storm but was held on December 6th (some parents couldn't attend due to the change in date so there seemed to be a low turnout) parents attending were:

Dana Repka
 Sam Harrington
 Mark DeMul
 Kataska Davis
 Alissa Stoltz
 Sarah Blair

We held the same format as the upper schools' focus group and introduced ourselves and our children's ages, We first discussed as a whole group what the committee was tasked and the history and research of the adolescent brain and all the impacts to think about within the 4 options. We then broke up into 2 groups of three to discuss in-depth the pros and cons of each scenario. When with the whole group, a question came up about Dr. McKersie's part in Greenwich's school start time and how is the district doing now?

Jenny Walsh explained her experiences speaking with some Greenwich parents and how the process is happening differently in Weston. Greenwich's change did not happen in the most organized manner and the athletes and teachers missed important academic time. We need to think of all the implications and the academics need to be a priority.

There are so many implications and so many moving parts and if the research is sound and kids need more sleep; Weston can figure it out. Below are some talking points addressed from the breakout sessions:

- We need to talk to Norwalk, Wilton and Greenwich to discuss ideas. What worked/what didn't work?
- We should talk to other schools in our district who are thinking about making the change (if some schools are getting out at 2 and some not until 3:30 how can we find the time to compete?)
- Parks and Rec needs to develop some before care and longer after-care options for working parents
- Before care is very important if the start time is delayed. We need an after-school option until 5:30/6
- What if we do Option 2 but flip the schools?? HS/MS is 8:50 and HES/WIS is 8 AM
- 9:20-4:05 would be detrimental to the younger kids.
- Younger children really do not learn past 1PM so we need to be cognizant of keeping them too late.
- If we do the flip, we are concerned about the wildlife so early in the morning with young children (raccoon attack in Weston had just happened the day before)
- In a perfect world, why don't we increase the transportation budget and get more buses so we can close the gap. Little kids start at 8 AM and Older Kids start at 8:30. Get more efficient bus loops and add some electric buses
- Have we asked the High School kids if this is really going to help them sleep more? Are we going to do all this effort for nothing?
- We need to be very thoughtful about how to help the kids get the rest they need. Can someone explain the research in a succinct manner to inform the whole population?
- If we do the flip we just need to beef up before care and after care.
- We don't want the academic sacrificed. We need to create a schedule that is best for the kids and the extra-curricular can work around that (but NOT before school) this defeats the purpose
- What about a 30-minute delay? WHS/WMS 8:15-3 HES/WIS 9-3:45?
- Can the bus routes be looked at to create more efficiencies? The parents have noticed many empty buses and inconsistencies with the routes
- We heard from the Weston Tennis team that the girls would like to keep the schedule as it because they already get home way too late as it is. Is this going to create even later nights?
- Can we take 15 minutes and shed 2-3 minutes off each class?
- If the kids get more sleep and are better focused then they will be able to do the work in less time
- If we shave 15 minutes off the school day and shave 15 minutes off the buses we can gain the extra time in the AM
- What actually are the research results? How much more sleep are kids getting where schools have made the shift?
- One parent brought up the one research study on a school that shifted times successfully (Private school in Rhode Island) actually started the day with a hot meal and kids learned better due to the intentionally peaceful start of the day with a hot breakfast
- Can we teach our kids to be more mindful through meditation to help with stress levels and mental health

- We can't be planning our schools days around extra-curricular activities, it's okay to take time away from athletics (kids and parents need to "calm-down" with TOO MUCH and TOO BUSY schedules
- A lot of tennis courts don't have lights. Do we need a budget line for extra lights?
- We need to be talking to 2 working parent families to see how it will work for them.
- Can we require more of a commitment of those families taking the bus to ensure the most efficient bus routes?
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The third focus group was held on January 29 from 7:30 to 9 PM at the Weston Public Library's community room.

In the third meeting we did a few things differently. We invited both the lower school and upper school parents together. We did not get a big turnout so both groups worked well. Some parents who could not attend the first focus group were there and there were some parents at both meetings. Some parents who could not attend wrote us their opinions in email.

The following parents attended:

Kim Grogan
 Ilana Escandon
 Nancy Hayden
 Alissa Stoltz
 Inge Hoefkens
 Marc De Mul
 Dana Repka
 Alissa Stoltz
 Debbie Corrothers
 Sarah Blair

We met as a whole group and discussed some concerns and questions and then we asked the group to break up into groups of 3-4 and discuss the pros and cons of each of the three options. There were some concerns about the amount of survey results and the low percentage of parents who completed. The parents of the upper school kids were upset that the "flip" was not still an option and really wanted us to reconsider that.

Jenny and I tried to stay very neutral and rather facilitate the discussion and let the groups meet on their own. There were some conflicting opinions to say the least and the conversation got a little heated at times. We are not going to please everyone with any decision the Board of Education decides to make.

Bottom line, most of the parents want to see a change. They see and understand the research and want to do what's best for these teenagers. (We also commented that someone needs to explain the research to the whole community so that everyone understands why we are changing so many things.) However, the younger kids will not be learning much past 1:30 PM. If their day is extended, the parents of young children were concerned of kids falling asleep on the bus and not having time to play outside after school. The schools would need to change their academic program to reflect the later school day. This can be done with mostly academics in the morning and specials and movement in the afternoon.

There was also the discussion that Hurlbutt and WIS would need to have a "Before-Care" option that will be paid for like Wow programs. Weston should also look at having some programs go until 5:30 to help working parents (or at least arrange for a bus to the YMCA). There were many great ideas thrown around and many parents are very

passionate about the subject.

The following are notes from each of the groups.

First Group:

Option 1: no change

Pro's

- no change to currently already hectic life schedule for families
- Parents of little kids can still get to work on time without having to hire help for the morning drop off
- > mitigation: provide early drop of facility at a cost for the family
- Better connection to district activities, keeping the number of times kids need to leave school early to a minimum

Con's

- Mental health risk with teenagers due to chronic sleep shortage
- (too) early bus pick up stimulates car drop offs in the morning, resulting in center town traffic jams increasing pollution

Option 2: delay and stay with 6:45 hours

Pro's

- not too much later, so likely working parents can still get to work

Con's

- not much added sleep, and pick up is still 'early' for teenage body rhythm
- little kids come home very late, in winter it will be dark already, prohibiting outdoor play after school
- little kids won't be able to have play dates or after school activities / sports in other towns anymore

Option 3: delay and reduce time in school to 6:30 hours

Pro's

- This option gives high schoolers the most sleep in the morning, gets them closest to where they need to be for their mental health
- Reduction in school day hours, without affecting academic learning, reduces impact on after school activities

Con's

- little kids come home very late, in winter it will be dark already, prohibiting outdoor play after school
- little kids won't be able to have play dates or after school activities / sports in other towns anymore
- Working parents will need to hire someone for Bus pick up time
- > mitigation: provide early drop of facility at a cost for the family

Ideas

1. Double the number of buses, so time 'commuting' to school can be reduced.
2. Facilitate pre-school program, potentially at cost, so working parents have the option to drop kids off and still get to work in time.
3. Create option 1 but with a shortened school day --> this will allow a start the morning schedule for all schools 15 minutes later

Discussion notes

Concern that kids will still need to wake up early if clubs will be scheduled early in the morning

--> Clubs are not mandatory, School is - even if clubs schedule training in the morning, each family can choose if they want to participate.

--> Club training's are not every day, so on non-club days teenagers will profit from longer sleep

Second Group:

#1 -

PROs

- . no change to current schedule for parents and students
- . Continued access to out of town programs
- . Length of school day remains unchanged

CONs

- . Research shows teens need more sleep - current start time too early
- . safety, mental health and learning could suffer under current conditions

#2

PROs

- . Adds 15-20 more minutes of sleep for students
- . No drastic impact to parent schedules

CONs

- . A lot of hullabaloo for minimal effect
- . Potential effect on HS activities and sports
- . Drop off for parents pushes later and could impact traffic at drop off time

#3

PROs

- . Could offer significant impact on sleep for teenagers
- . Shorter day would allow for significant change to sleep but no drastic effect on learning

CONs

- . Day ends later - could impact after school schedules for activities and sports
- . Later day could impact teens looking for jobs in other towns
- . Assume more parents picking up at HES/WIS causing more traffic

There are such varying opinions on the subject, and I believe there needs to be a full Community Forum and more communications with the parents before we make any decisions.