



School Start Time Background:

Visit the Project Website for more details:

https://www.wpsk12.com/our_district/district_initiatives/school_start_time_change

**WILMINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS ~ SCHOOL START TIME PROPOSAL
JANUARY 2023**

PART A: BACKGROUND

In May of 2022 the School Committee asked my administration to review further possible scenarios that could be considered in order to make a change in our school start times to follow through on our goal to adjust our school start times to better align with the research regarding adolescents. I shared an update most recently at the December 7 School Committee meeting and am pleased to be able to provide members of our community with additional information attached in the form of *Frequently Asked Questions* (FAQs).

The final decision around any change to our school start times is scheduled to be made by the School Committee at their regularly scheduled meeting on January 25. The committee is very interested in hearing from members of our school community to help inform their final decision and we have a variety of ways to provide this feedback:

Virtual Community Forum - January 18, 2023 from 5:30pm - 6:30pm

<https://wpsk12.zoom.us/j/88166000582?pwd=Ums5MkFoaFN5aHNlSEExZVGFDUlZCdz09>
Meeting ID: 881 6600 0582, Passcode: SST2023

Written Feedback Form Link - <https://forms.gle/XS3krMNLJV6N7Ee19>

I believe this latest proposal meets our overall goals of the community and I am confident that this reflects the *best* option we have at this time and largely achieves the goals we set out to while responding also to the community's feedback we have gathered along the way.

The following represents the new schedule being proposed:

School	Length of School Day Fall of 2023	Start Time/End Time Fall 2023
<i>Wildwood</i>	5 hours 30 mins.	7:40 am-1:10 pm
<i>Boutwell</i>	5 hours 30 mins.	8:25 am-1:55 pm
<i>Shawsheen</i>	6 hours 20 mins.	8:25 am – 2:45 pm
<i>Woburn</i>	6 hours 20 mins.	9:00 am – 3:20 pm
<i>North</i>	6 hours 20 mins.	9:00 am – 3:20 pm
<i>West</i>	6 hours 20 mins.	8:25 am – 2:45 pm
<i>WMS</i>	6 hours 25 mins.	8:00 am – 2:25 pm
<i>WHS</i>	6 hours 30 mins.	8:00 am-2:30 pm



School Start Time FAQS:

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PART B: WPS PROPOSAL TO CHANGE SCHOOL START TIMES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Question: Why is a change to our current start times even being considered?

Answer: : Our school community has made commitments on multiple occasions starting approximately seven years ago to make changes to our current school start times given the current early starts at the middle and high school level. See the commitment with the Middlesex League ([2018-19 LaterStartTimesMiddlesexLeagueSuperintendentsLetter.pdf](#)) and, more recently, as part of our strategic plan (https://www.wpsk12.com/our_district/strategic_plan).

2. Question: How did we get here - in terms of the last several years and the various efforts on this topic?

Answer: As mentioned above, discussions about this started approximately seven years ago. More directly a working group was established during the 2019-20 school year to address this topic. Their work was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Last school year the process was restarted, several options were reviewed and narrowed down to 3 for comment from the school community. Out of this, very good feedback was received, but it was clear that none of the options had clear community support. The School Committee requested that additional review be performed this fall and the current proposal came from that work.

3. Question: How did we get here - in terms of this specific proposal?

Answer: Starting from the work done last year, a much deeper dive into the details of our student population and bus utilization was performed (The accuracy last year of that data was very limited considering the disruptions of the pandemic.) Based on that review, this proposal was formed. It worked to align, as best as possible, the educational needs of the students and the top line goals from the community. These were offset by the challenges of the total number of schools, the geographical size of the town, and financial limitations. This proposal is aligned with all of the top goals including the following:

- *Start times for both middle and high school students that align with the research on what is best for adolescents to improve their academic success and overall well-being*
- *School end times at the high school that provide enough time for athletics or other extra-curricular activities.*
- *Start times that avoid young students waiting for the bus at early morning hours.*

4. Question: If we adopt the proposed schedule, when would the first morning pick up happen and when would the last afternoon drop off happen?

Answer:

- We anticipate the absolute earliest a student will board is 7:00 a.m. but our goal will be closer to 7:10 a.m. The buses will arrive at the Wildwood (West/ Middle) to drop off students at 7:30 a.m. if we finalize a 7:40 a.m. start.
- For high school/ middle school students, there may be a couple of buses that will begin picking up students at 7:10 a.m. (for those students being picked up on the Andover/ North Reading lines).
- If the School Committee adopts the currently proposed schedule, we anticipate all students to be home by 4:00 p.m. pending any unusual circumstances.

5. **Question: Why are there limitations on the total number of buses the district can use to transport students?**

Answer: The school district's operating budget currently supports the entire financial operation of our transportation services exceeding \$1 million dollars a year in total costs. With each additional bus at approximately \$75,000 a year (more than the average cost of a classroom teacher) the District has optimized the current total number of buses at 16 to timely transport the total number of students necessary over the geographical size of the town.

6. **Question: Is there a reason why we can't just have two start times for the District such as one for middle school and high school and one for all 6 other schools that start at the same time?**

Answer: Given the total number of students riding the bus at the elementary level and the distance to cover in town, the only way to achieve this would be to add an estimated total of six (6) additional buses. This would result in an additional cost of approximately \$450,000 per year. Considering the current budget pressures that exist for both the Town and school department, it does not seem appropriate to request this significant large amount of additional funding.

7. **Question: Why do children need to wait in the dark and/or get home when it is nearly dark?**

Answer: At a minimum, the bus routes to cover all schools are currently between 1 hour and 20 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes. Our priority in developing a new proposed schedule has been to eliminate children waiting at a bus stop before 7:00 a.m. It is simply not physically possible to have scenarios where, for all students, there will be daylight at **both** the start and for 30 to 60 minutes after the end of the day through the entire school year.

8. **Question: Why are some of our buses not full?**

Answer: The biggest issue in Wilmington is distance and the total number of schools to serve and not the total number of riders we have to accommodate. As a District, we have to plan with the assumption that students who wish to use our transportation services can do so and will have a seat (even if they only seldom use it, such as is often the case at the secondary level).

9. **Question: In the newly proposed schedule middle and high school students will have to ride together on the same bus. Are there concerns around this arrangement given the age difference?**

Answer: There are no specific concerns regarding this proposed arrangement. We know that this is not uncommon; nearby towns also have their middle and high school students riding together. Additionally, our plan is to have the driver's seat middle school students towards the front of the bus and the high school students to the rear.

10. **Question: The newly proposed schedule has the Wildwood School and staff having to make the greatest adjustment to their current times. What about keeping the rest of the proposed schedule and just moving the Wildwood closer to an 8:00 start?**

Answer: It is possible to make this adjustment. However it has to be kept in mind that for every minute that the earliest scheduled school (in this new proposal the Wildwood) is moved later the school day for all schools that follow also has to become later. An 8:00 Wildwood start would necessarily result in some of our schools (Woburn Street and North) ending their days at 3:40 p.m.

11. **Question: Why is there 25 minutes between the Middle School / High School and the Shawsheen / West and there is 35 minutes between the Shawsheen / West and the Woburn / North?**

Answer: The challenge for us is both geography and enrollment. The ‘northside’ of town is significantly larger geographically than the ‘westside.’ In addition, grades 1 to 5, the northside has ~620 students to ~560 for the west side (PK to 5 is ~795 versus ~700).

12. Question: Why does the proposal include ‘flipping’ the sides of the town?

Answer: The new proposal includes having the buses already on the west side of town so logistically it makes far greater scheduling sense to keep the bus fleet on that side of town to continue with their routes.

13. Question: What about the availability of CARES?

Answer: This proposal does not impact CARES and/or its operation including the availability of high school students to work in the program.

14. Question: Despite the goal of having the alignment of grade levels to support professional development, this latest proposal does not achieve this. Is this no longer a priority?

Answer: It is clear that until we have building restructuring, PD grade alignment is not going to be possible. In many ways this currently exists as a practical challenge for our District and there is no question that if we had fewer schools in the consolidation of school buildings there would be benefits realized for such things as grade alignment, professional development etc.

15. Question: One of the challenges with the previous scenarios included an impact on after school busing to help support the transportation of student athletes. Will this be a challenge in this newest scenario?

Answer: No. This proposal allows for buses to continue to be available for high school athletics.

16. Question: Is charging a bus fee to help with additional costs for more buses an option? Apparently a number of surrounding towns do charge families for busing.

Answer: There are three concerns with adding a bus fee: 1) It is very difficult to introduce bus fees in a completely equitable way for students/families; 2) Considering the current economic climate, it is difficult to suggest to families that they need to budget for an additional cost such as this new cost and 3) It is part of the town's ‘culture’ and considered important to try and avoid user fees/costs as much as possible. The efforts at the Town level to try and avoid such fees serves as a point of trying to attract businesses and new residents to the town.

17. Question: Can we just wait 5-6 years until the Wildwood MSBA project is complete?

Answer: This review has been ongoing for many years already. Delaying for that much longer seems to be too long and delays the implementation of a practice that research shows is in the best interest of a large portion of our student population. In addition, full rescheduling may have to wait until both sides of town have gone through a grade reconfiguration process given that a building program may require both sides of town to be complete. This process could be closer to 10 to 14 years away if another school building project occurs with the MSBA.

18. Question: Will there be a need to revise the current bus schedule when a new school is built on the North side of town?

Answer: It is likely that if a new school is built that includes more than just the Wildwood grades (currently only PreK and K) then the District would have an opportunity to explore adjustments. When we have these opportunities to make beneficial changes, we should look into them.