

## West Hartford Public School District

**Agenda Item:** Rethinking School Start Times Committee Update  
**Date:** May 1, 2018  
**From:** Anne McKernan, Director of Secondary Education  
**Through:** Tom Moore, Superintendent

### Background

The Rethinking School Start Times Committee (RSST) is charged with identifying the benefits and challenges that changing school start times will have on our community. This report is the final in a series of three updates during the 2017-2018 school year. The areas of focus in this update include transportation, stakeholder engagement efforts, impacts on the town of West Hartford's programs and services, and social/emotional impacts on students. The update builds on the committee's previous presentations.

### The Transportation System

West Hartford's transportation department delivers students to and from school in a safe, efficient, predictable, timely and orderly manner. The district's primary concern in any transportation activity is the safety of West Hartford's students. The chart below includes details regarding the current transportation system

Current Transportation System

Tier	Schools	Routes Start	School Start	Number of Buses	School Ends	Routes End
1	HS -WHPS Private Schools	6:45-7:00 6:50-7:25	7:30 7:50-7:55	37 Large/19Mini 2 Large/4 Mini	2:15 2:07/4:35	2:45-2:55 30 min - 1 hr
2	MS-WHPS Private Schools	7:05-7:30 6:55-7:25	8:00 8:00	42 Large /25 Mini 3 Large/1 Mini	2:50 2:30	3:20-3:30 45 min - 1hr
3	ES-WHPS Private Schools	7:45-8:00 7:20-8:05	8:35 7:50-8:30	44 Large/42Mini 5 Large/3 Mini	3:20 2:20-3:30	3:50-4:00 30-45 min

A key feature of the current system is that transportation is provided in using three tiers. Both public and private/parochial high school routes begin at approximately 6:45 a.m. and drop students off in the 7:10-7:40 a.m. time frame. The high school buses are then joined by approximately nine additional vehicles to commence the middle school run. Once those are complete, another 23 vehicles are added

to the middle school run to complete the elementary school runs. The same number of buses are used in the afternoon to deliver children home.

Transportation: Costs

If a three tiered transportation system is maintained, transportations costs are likely to be similar to the current costs including the contracted yearly increases. As buses are contracted for three runs in a designated window of time regardless of what time schools start, the current contract does not have to be negotiated as long as the 30 minute window between bus runs and the overall window per day are maintained.

Additional costs may be incurred if the 9 private schools with which West Hartford shares transportation costs do not change their start times or adapt to West Hartford’s changes. Currently West Hartford splits the cost of 17 transportation vehicles (8 large and 9 mini) with the private schools. It is possible that West Hartford would have to assume the full cost of these shared buses. The anticipated costs for an additional 8 to 9 vehicles is \$452,000-\$510,000 per year. For the 2017-2018 school year, buses cost \$309.95 per day or \$56,410.90 per 182 day school year.

Transportation: A Two-Tiered System

To achieve the goal of sending adolescents to school at 8:30 or later, some school districts have implemented a two-tiered bus system. Preliminary research shows that a two-tiered system is possible with increased costs.

Hypothetical Two-Tiered Transportation System  
WH Public Schools Only

Tier	Schools	Routes Start	School Start	Number of Buses	School Ends	Routes End
1	Elementary Schools	7:30 or 8:30	8:00 or 9:00	44 Large/42Mini	2:50 or 3:50	3:20-3:30 4:20-4:50
2	Middle and High School	7:45-8:00	8:30	77 Large/44 Mini	3:20	3:50-4:00

Benefits and Challenges of a Two-Tiered System: This approach would allow all secondary students to start school at 8:30 in line with the research from major health organizations. The costs of a two-tiered transportation system are expected to be approximately \$2.6 million. This increase results from the need to contract a minimum of 46 additional vehicles and drivers in the same timeframe. Another challenge will be to ensure that high school and middle school pick-up/drop-off locations are distinct as buses will be arriving at the same time in the same neighborhoods. To address this possible challenge routes and pick-up/drop off locations will be redesigned. The district might have to assume the costs of the 17 shared private school vehicles if private/parochial schools cannot adjust to the new transportation system. That cost is estimated between \$452,000 and \$510,000; the total cost of a two-tiered system may reach approximately \$3.1 million per year.

Transportation for Open Choice Students/Magnet Programs: To serve the town's nearly 200 students in the Open Choice program, WHPS will have to work closely with the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) which provides these services. As CREC currently services over 2000 Open Choice students in 25 school districts with various start times, it is anticipated that CREC will be able to make the necessary adjustments. There are 21 students enrolled at Conard and Hall who attend the half-day CREC Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts. The effect of a time change on children attending these programs is another area for further study if new start times are established for WHPS.

Transportation: Middle School Students in Advanced Coursework: For over 20 years, 8th grade students who perform at advanced levels in mathematics and world language take courses at the high schools during period one starting at 7:30 a.m. These students secure their own transportation to Conard or Hall or ride the high school buses to this period one class. The district transports these students back to their middle schools by 8:30 a.m. daily. If the district chooses to change school start times this program will be affected. During a planning year, decisions would be made to determine the best way to serve these students. Options may include offering the courses at the middle school or transporting students to the high schools for the last period of the day. One challenge to transporting students to the high school for the final class period is that these students would not be able to participate in afterschool activities at the middle schools. Other costs and benefits of any new approach would be identified during a planning year.

Transportation: Field Trips and Late Buses: If school start time shifts, the window for field trip times will shift accordingly. Currently, no field trips can commence before the end of the third transportation tier without incurring additional costs. If new school start times are implemented, the same requirement would be in place. This change would not increase field trip costs.

The late bus at the high school picks up students at 4:00 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; the late bus on Wednesday is scheduled for 3:00. Middle School late buses are scheduled for 4:00 on M, T, F and 4:15 on Thursdays. No late buses are available on Wednesday at the middle school level. If school dismissal times change, late bus pick-ups times would need to adjust.

## **Stakeholder Engagement Efforts**

To gather stakeholder input for this important decision, the Rethinking School Start Times Committee (RSST) worked with the Hanover Research Group to create a customized survey for the West Hartford Public Schools. The survey is available in both English and Spanish. During the week of April 16, the survey was shared with elementary and high school families, secondary school students, and faculty/staff members. Because the school climate survey was open for the middle schools in mid-April, the RSST survey will be sent to middle school families by May 1 and will close on May 15. Survey results will be shared with the Board of Education at the June 1, 2018 meeting.

The RSST Committee is hosting a Family Information Night on Thursday, May 3 at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall Auditorium. The meeting format includes an informational presentation and time for comments from stakeholders. Using school newsletter announcements, the WHCTV scrolling announcements, the dedicated website, and press coverage, the meeting details have been communicated to the community.

Throughout this process, building principals shared information with family and staff members at PTO meetings, staff meetings, and through written communication. In January, RSST committee members presented to the Parent Teacher Council (PTC) who were asked to share with their school communities.

## **Social and Emotional Impacts for Students**

Committee members read approximately 20 articles regarding the impact that later school start times for adolescents may have on a variety of outcomes. It is important to keep in mind there are thousands of articles on sleep research and the committee read a very small portion of the total. A subset of these articles focused on adolescent emotional well-being and mood. In a study entitled [Impact of Delaying School Start Time on Adolescent Sleep, Mood, and Behavior](#), (Owens et al., 2010) researchers sought to determine the impact of a 30-minute delay in school start times (from 8:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.) on mood, behavior and sleep patterns. The study subjects were 201 private school students in grades 9-12. Researchers found that students reported more satisfaction with sleep and experienced improved mood, decreased daytime fatigue, and depressed mood. The students visited the health center less frequently for fatigue related complaints and attendance improved.

The study entitled [Sleep duration, positive attitude toward life, and academic achievement: the role of daytime tiredness, behavioral persistence, and school start times](#), (Perkinson-Gloor et al., 2013) examined the connection between sleep duration, positive attitude toward life and academic achievement. Researchers found that students sleeping less than 8 hours per night experienced more tiredness, lowered ability to persist behaviorally, less positive attitude toward life, and lower school grades. The researchers found that when school started even a modest 20 minutes later, students benefited from more sleep and reported less tiredness.

In the article [Examining the Impact of Later High School Start Times on the Health and Academic Performance of High School Students: A Multi-Site Study. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement](#), (Walstrom et al., 2014) found that teens getting under the required eight hours of sleep

reported higher depression systems, greater use of stimulants such as caffeine, and were at increased risk of substance abuse and making poor choices.

### **Town of West Hartford Impacts**

This subcommittee researched the effects of a school start/end time change on daycare facilities, recreation services, and other services. Daycare facilities indicated they would need to adjust times and staffing to meet new school start/end times, but cannot provide more details until actual times are established. They expect to adjust staff schedules, morning start/end times and evening start/end times.

Recreation programs such as the West Hartford Baseball, Girls Softball, Soccer Leagues and the YMCA noted they currently do not use fields before 5:00 p.m. Their programs would be affected if the school-based athletic teams practices or games extend beyond 5:00. If high school end times are delayed, practices and games will be delayed. This change is likely to impact recreational team practices which normally occur between 5:00 and 6:30/7:00 p.m. These groups must shift later into the evening. Until specific schedules are established, these groups cannot accurately report the impact. The Leisure Services Department reported most of their programs are already in the evening and do not expect to be affected by a change.

Early communication with these groups indicate there will be an impact and that they will need advanced notice of any changes. The groups want to be involved in the planning phase if a decision is made to change start/end times.

A study on the implications for the elementary school homework center at the Hillcrest Area Neighborhood Outreach Center (HANOC) could be affected by a change in dismissal times. HANOC, a collaborative effort of the Town of West Hartford, the West Hartford Housing Authority, West Hartford Public Schools and other community agencies, helps families with limited economic means to become more financially independent and integrated into the schools and community. The center runs a homework program for students starting at 3:40. A concern noted by the HANOC staff is in reference to childcare needs. Many younger students who attend the center rely on older siblings to care for them. If secondary students are dismissed after elementary school students, childcare needs could be affected. The study will have to determine potential impacts based on start times across the three levels.

### **Professional Learning**

The subcommittee members studied the question: does a potential change in school start time affect teacher professional learning? Members felt it was imperative to identify the components that make the West Hartford professional learning approach highly successful and the envy of many public school districts around the state. The components for success that must be preserved include the time dedicated to the program, the element of choice in professional learning for teachers (the Collaborative Inquiry Teams), structures that allow for a focus on district initiatives and flexibility. Currently, the professional learning calendar, called the Curriculum and Staff Improvement (CSI) schedule, includes time for building, academic department, and collaborative inquiry sessions on a rotating basis

throughout the school year. The CSI calendar also incorporates preparation for and delivery of parent conferences at all schools in the fall and the spring. This rotating approach provides teachers consistent and ongoing support as they gain the necessary knowledge and skills to act as contributing members of an academic department, a school and as a partner to the families and students they serve.

Subcommittee members felt it is important to understand that education is not a static field. For the past several years, new curriculum standards have been released in virtually every academic discipline. The impact these changes have had on teaching and learning cannot be understated. The professional learning time West Hartford has available for studying changes and understanding the instructional impact is invaluable. Beyond the academic disciplines, teachers must become knowledgeable and skilled in areas that support students physical, emotional and civic growth. Over the past two years the emphasis on enhancing culturally competent practices and adapting to the new federal guidance on 504 have been major areas of focus of their work. The committee feels strongly that this dedicated time and structure must be preserved in any change.

Challenges to changing school start times include exacerbating the conflict athletic coaches face. In many instances coaches delay their practice start times to attend professional learning sessions or secure appropriate supervision for students and shorten their practices. With later school dismissal times, the frequency of these conflicts will increase. Committee members identified a potential benefit of changing school start times/end times by perhaps moving the professional development sessions to the morning for some levels and suggested exploring how South Windsor, Newtown, Wilton and Greenwich have approached morning professional learning sessions. The committee noted a challenge in this area would be that morning times may not be sufficient to all three levels (elementary, middle and high school) and would disallow K-12 teams to meet together.

### **Next Steps**

The Committee's work will conclude on June 1 with a report to the Board of Education on the results of the RSST family, staff and student survey.

Ms. Anne McKernan and Mr. Paul Vicinus will be available for questions.