

## School Start Time Ad Hoc Committee Minutes

December 19, 2014

Present: Deirdre d'Albertis, Diane Lyons, Laura Schulkind, Joe Phelan; Steve Boucher, Tom Burnell, Ed Davenport.

### **Transportation Challenges**

Tom Burnell joined the group to report on transportation options if the district's school start time occurred later in the morning (8 AM or 8:30 AM). We could: 1) "flip" the elementary and middle/high school bus runs or 2) consolidate bus runs for a single trip. This latter option would require more buses but involve less time overall (billable hours), so there is a possibility of savings with option two. The committee expressed its interest in learning more about option two, recognizing that a major adjustment would be needed if mixed-age ridership became the norm. A staggered drop-off and pick-up would need to be designed for the two sites (CLS and BMS/RHS) in any case. It would be important also to keep individual bus runs within an agreed upon time limit (i.e. no longer than 40 or 50 minutes). Ed suggested that we analyze ridership this spring to get an accurate head count and consider how to optimize bus transportation. How many empty seats are there? How does usage fluctuate over the seasons? Tom noted that such changes would not measurably impact parochial and private school transportation within the district.

Transportation to BOCES might also be impacted by a change to the school start time. Currently, BOCES starts at 8:33 am. To arrive there on time, the bus leaves RHS between 7:45-8:00 am. The afternoon BOCES schedule runs from 12:06 to 2:43 pm.

Sports buses would be another concern. At present, sports buses are "add ons." If we moved to a single tier system of busing, we would need to engage more drivers. Fewer drivers would be available to drive the sports buses. Perhaps Rhinebeck could join with another district facing similar challenges to contract for sports trips. Diane also asked if it would be possible to restore the late bus (no longer operating).

### **Attendance Issues and School Start Time**

Ed Davenport spoke with the group about patterns in attendance in the district, most notably tardy arrivals. His overall sense is that a later start time would not necessarily impact chronic tardiness issues. There are roughly 4 or 5 students in each cohort who struggle with this. But he does recognize how the larger question of health and wellness intersects with the school schedule. He is not aware of any correlation between lack of sleep and driving accidents in our community.

### **Athletics and After-School Activities**

Steve Boucher pointed out that there could be a significant impact on after-school sports with a change in start time, depending on how late the school day begins. He walked us through the changes entailed by an 8 AM and an 8:30 AM plan. The major challenge facing the sports program would be lack of light

as the days grow shorter from mid-October on (with a 6:20 PM sunset). If students were released from school at 2:45, he observed, it would be far more manageable than a 3:16 dismissal time. Our teams travel as far away as Ellenville and Dover, a one hour trip. For closer matches (Red Hook, Pine Plains) the travel time is minimal. Golf and tennis may represent the most lengthy time of play—but tennis is a spring sport, so daylight improves as the season progresses. Practice times could be negatively impacted. Modified sports tend to start and run later into the fall; lack of light would be a problem for those teams in the fall.

Steve mentioned that other districts are currently discussing the same issue. Changes may be coming across the county (Poughkeepsie shifted to a later schedule this year, for instance, at very short notice). There are possible solutions to some of the problems outlined: arranging for some matches on fields with lights (FDR, Millbrook, Marlboro, New Paltz, Ellenville), changing dates once the schedule is set to play against distant teams early in the season, and so on. The athletic schedule is set by February, so such adjustments could take place after that—but the league is not particularly encouraging of making wholesale changes. At this point, he sees it as much more feasible to consider a 2:45 dismissal as opposed to a 3:15 end to the school day. In other words, he says it is not impossible to imagine some change along these lines but a great deal of planning will be involved.

After our conversation, **a few guiding questions and concerns seem to be emerging:**

--**8:00 versus 8:30 AM?** Is a change to 8 AM meaningful in terms of benefits to students? We want to investigate two possible scenarios, the 8 and the 8:30 start time. Moving the time to 8 seems much more manageable, but we want to ascertain if it is actually worth doing in terms of health and wellness.

--Could the change be **cost-neutral or even cost-saving** (in terms of busing)?

--How would the change impact **after-school activities** in general? Ed Davenport will speak to Guidance and others about this.

At our next meeting, the group will hope to speak with principals Brett King and John Kemnitzer.