

School Start Time Ad Hoc Committee Minutes

February 20, 2015

Present: Deirdre d'Albertis, Diane Lyons, Laura Schulkind, Joe Phelan; John Kemnitzer, Brett King.

Chancellor Impact

Brett King has spoken with teachers as well as the BLPT at CLS about their views of a possible change in school start time. Most are not in favor of “flipping” the schedule between elementary and BMS/RHS. The sense is that shifting the time table may lead to less sleep for the younger students—not a healthy alternative. In terms of the idea of both schools starting at the same time or a bit later, responses have been mixed. CLS does actually start pretty late already in comparison to other elementary schools. Most think that the 8 AM start time seems imaginable, at least.

There are some **benefits to having a uniform length and start time to the school day** at all three schools. Faculty meetings could take place at the same time, for instance.

What about having **all ages ride on a single bus run?** BK reports that people are split on the idea. From his perspective, he sees relatively few problems on our buses at present in terms of behavior. Would a bus monitor help? Yes, of course, if it could be figured into the budget. While some may be fearful about K-5 children being exposed to middle and high school students on the bus, others argue that it could have a strong positive effect in terms of community. Older students could be encouraged to model responsible conduct and also see it as an important role to look after the younger ones. BK believes there could be many advantages to such a shift.

Much time was spent considering the timing of loading and unloading for a single bus run. There is room now at CLS for two more buses to park. How many additional buses would be needed if we moved to this new system? We would need more bus runs, with each bus covering less territory, to ensure that students spend no more than 40-50 minutes on the bus for each trip. Undoubtedly, it would be necessary to tighten the schedule to coordinate all these factors.

BMS Impact

John Kemnitzer has spoken twice with the BMS BLPT and also with teachers. His sense is that people are all over the map in terms of response to any change. Some parents have expressed concern about the mixed age bus plan. JK says that he likes the idea, however, of having the older and younger kids together. Siblings could ride together, for instance, increasing parental comfort level. JK agrees that there are very few bus issues in our district. He understands apprehension on the part of parents, however. Most bus management issues are due to immaturity, in his experience.

Teachers at BMS have raised **questions about how to accommodate sports and after-school clubs**, both of which are popular in the middle school. Many students take advantage of these opportunities now.

In all of this discussion the same question emerges where is the optimal point of shifting without too much difficulty/disruption to the greatest number of students? What time represents the maximum benefit? **Is 8 AM sufficiently late to represent a benefit in terms of sleep?**

Both BK and JK spoke about current arrangements for before-school enrichment and after-school homework help that would have to be rethought with such a change.

DL asked if we could save money on the bus runs, could we add a “late bus” for those who stay after school?

When asked about his experience with students making the transition in 6th grade to an earlier start time, JK acknowledged that it is hard for many. At parent orientation, he and his staff urge parents to ease their children into the early start by shifting their schedules a few weeks in advance. The reality is, however, that middle school kids are very busy—they have a lot of commitments, they are coping with more homework and more rigorous academic expectations. Many do not get enough sleep.

The group spent much of the rest of this session talking about the data collected by Marc Berg and the principals on tardiness in the schools (see attached). **Tardiness is a significant issue in Rhinebeck.** Why is that? Would a change in start time positively reverse that trend? The sheer volume of late arrivals (most of them “excused” by a parent’s note) has made it very difficult for the schools to enforce policy. If we see 2000 tardy arrivals per year, we are confronting a cultural issue.

Parental “enabling” of late arrivals, not to mention attendance issues (taking a week off in the middle of term for vacation, etc), are a concern for the district. Students who miss too much school fall behind in their understanding of the material they are studying. We may be reaching a tipping point: how are kids supposed to make up the missed days? Teachers do their best to review the material later with students, but it is inevitable that the children’s learning suffers. We are in a climate in which schools are being asked to work harder and harder to support student success—families need to partner in this focus. Although each individual may have his or her reasons for excusing a child’s late arrival, the overall system begins to suffer if it becomes wide-spread. Late arrivals are disruptive. All students are distracted in first period classes as late-comers straggle in. School start time is just the “tip of the iceberg” when it comes to these health and wellness concerns. We anticipate that concern for the schedule of students will always be addressed alongside adult concerns for their own routines and convenience. It is hard to strike a balance between the two.

Driving issues are sure to become exacerbated if we move to a single start time. **Traffic congestion** is already a problem. If parents decide to drive children to both buildings, there may be even more pressure to arrive on time to school.

Lunch schedules would have to be reorganized with a later start time.

The group realizes that moving forward with a proposal at this point depends on a few key factors:

--**Cost-benefit analysis.** How much would this change cost? Could it be cost neutral or even cost saving to move to a single, later start time and a single bus run?

--**Would tardiness be positively impacted?** What is the real cause for students arriving late to school in such large numbers? We are not confident that start time is really the problem.

--Would our most **at-risk students** be better off with a later start time? How would we know?

Agenda for next meeting:

Meet with Tom Burnell to conclude our pro/con analysis and determine projected financial picture for a later school start time.