

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

MEMORANDUM #237 (2001-2002)

April 15, 2002

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATION FOR SCHOOL STARTING TIMES

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the School Board approve the Superintendent's recommendation to retain the current school starting times for the 2002-2003 school year. It is further recommended that the Administration continue to annually evaluate the pros and cons of changing school starting times through researching the experiences at all levels (K-12) in other school districts; continuing discussions on this topic with the various community agencies and school staff, students, parents, and community most directly affected by this potential change; and to carefully evaluate the increased costs of making this major change. It is also recommended that the Superintendent give an update, and any further recommendations, to the School Board by April 1, 2003.

PERTINENT FACTS:

Introduction

There is genuine interest within some parts of the Anchorage community for revising the current school start times for a variety of reasons; however, there is not enough support for any one of the tested start time change proposals – certainly not the kind of community support one would want to see before making a change of this magnitude. There is consistency within the data from all sources that more respondents are satisfied with the current school start times than any single change proposal; but if all the start time *change* options are added together, a statement can be made that many people are willing to consider an alteration in school start times.

Family, school, and community systems are, however, complex and overlapping. Further study is needed related to issues such as cost, family time, childcare, and public safety impacts, as well as recent legislative discussions (HB 409) about the State of Alaska rejecting daylight savings time. Any decision to change school start times will impact numerous other systems and could produce new obstacles for some families. Throughout this discussion, the issue of inadequate time between busing tiers (55 minutes is requested by Student Transportation) was

not resolved; this is particularly a problem at the middle school level. While student achievement is paramount to the Anchorage School District and public awareness of issues surrounding school start times has been heightened, a decision to alter school start times needs further administrative study, this is the basis for the Superintendent's recommendation.

Research Basis

There is longitudinal research which shows conclusively that adolescents not only need more sleep than they did earlier in their childhood but also that their sleep and wake time patterns change again as they approach adulthood. High schools across the country tend to start too early in the morning for teenagers to do their best learning. Much of the research on this subject has come from the University of Minnesota.

What Other School Districts Have Done

A number of school districts across the country have studied the research on adolescent sleep needs and made a local decision whether or not to change their school start times depending on many interrelated factors. Every school district we contacted had unique conditions that contributed to their start time decision. Minneapolis School District changed school start times over five years ago in response to the research and also to prompt a change from magnet schools back to neighborhood schools. Minneapolis School District has generated the most comprehensive study of their change in school start times. Of interest however, is the fact that Minneapolis School District has studied the impact of their change on secondary students only – they have not collected data related to the impact on elementary students. Other districts that were contacted include North Clackamas School District, Milwaukie, OR; Fairfax County, VA; Fayette County Public Schools, Lexington, KY; and Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, MD. A summary of their current start times and issues related to changing start times is included. (Attachment A)

Impact on Grades

While you would expect grades to improve if students were more rested while learning, we did not find any study that supported this conclusively. There are many factors that contribute to student achievement, including rest and physical well being. Minneapolis did collect self-reported surveys from students and teachers that indicate a perception that grades improved with a later school start time. It has been suggested that we do a comparison of student grades throughout the school day here. However there are so many inter-related factors which impact student achievement that comparing the grades of students in a first period Algebra class with students from the same teacher's third period Algebra class would not produce valid data for the purpose of this decision.

Impact on Attendance

Improvement in student attendance was the largest measurable gain in the Minneapolis study and seems to be one of the more compelling reasons to consider a change in school start times. Attendance improved dramatically and student mobility decreased. There were also fewer tardies reported, and records showed fewer staff and student health-related absences.

Impact on Sports and Student Activities

The biggest negative impacts of later high school start times reported by districts that have changed school start times seem to center on activities. Problems arise when student have to leave school even earlier in the afternoon for competitions, cutting out a larger amount of class time, when the demand for buses for activities conflicts with regular student transportation, and when sports practices and competitions end later in the day or evening. Competition for community sports facilities also increases when student practices are later in the day.

ASD SCHOOL START TIMES TASK FORCE

Clearly, the school district is a system that is inter-related to many other systems within the community. To that end, a wide spectrum of constituents was invited to contribute comments and suggestions and to participate in a process for developing some start time recommendations. In September 2001, members of the Instructional Team met with other key district employees to develop a list of constituent groups with opinions vital to the start time question. Invitations were issued to individuals who had previously expressed an interest in the topic and the following groups were asked to send representation to an informational meeting:

Anchorage Education Association	Childcare Connection
Anchorage Principals' Association	Camp Fire
Totem Association	Boys' & Girls' Club
Anchorage Council of Education	YMCA
Local 71	Anchorage Chamber of Commerce
Teamsters (Food Svc., Maint. & Bus)	Eagle River Chamber of Commerce
Special Ed. Advisory Committee	Community Councils
Multicultural Ed. Concerns Comm.	Music Teachers' Association
Military Representative	21 st Century Community Learning Ctrs.
Student Advisory Committee	Community Schools Advisory Council
Middle School Advisory Committee	Anchorage Police Department
High School Advisory Committee	Preschool
Bilingual Advisory Committee	Gifted Education
High School Advisory Committee	Sleep Disorders Ctr/Providence Hosp.
Native Advisory Committee	Retail & Restaurant Owners/Managers.
Anchorage Council of PTA's	People Mover

At the informational meeting on November 13, 2001, attendees heard a presentation of the Minneapolis School District process and experience with changing start times as well as a summary of the sleep research that indicates adolescent sleep patterns are out of phase with school times. Attendees were invited to join a School Start Times Task Force.

Several subcommittees were generated within the Task Force, and participants signed up to consider start time implications within the framework of the subcommittee topics. Administrative personnel were appointed to act as liaisons between subcommittee chairs and the school district. Subcommittee chairs received a notebook of comprehensive research data gathered through an ERIC search by the ASD Assessment and Evaluation Department. Over the next 11 weeks, the two tasks for each subcommittee included finding any other groups or individuals who could provide pertinent data and researching the implications of changing school start times on their specific topic. Some subcommittees met biweekly. A link was maintained with each subcommittee through the administrative liaisons. A list of committee members, community affiliation, and subcommittee assignments is included. (Attachment B) The Task Force timeline is also included. (Attachment C)

At the second Task Force Committee meeting on January 31, 2002, subcommittees reported on issues and considerations that would arise within their area if school start times were to change. Ten start time options were initially proposed by the subcommittees although, after discussion, some were discarded by the group, and others were so similar that combinations were made in order to reduce confusion. Through consensus, the list of options was shortened to six and a plan developed to share the pros and cons of each option in a series of six community meetings. Later, additional meetings were added to increase the opportunity to gather community input.

The six options presented to the public are listed below. These were included as part of the PowerPoint presentation used at the public meetings. (Attachment D) In response to an internal Task Force request, a change to Option F was made following the first community meeting at West High. (Originally Option F showed an 8:15 start for middle school and 9:00 for both elementary and high schools.) Option F was modified to 8:15 for middle school, 9:00 for elementary and 8:30 for high school; this was the only two-tiered option and would require additional buses.

School Start Time Options

	Summary	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
A	Keep current Schedule	Start 9:00 Finish 3:30	Start 8:15 Finish 2:45	Start 7:30 Finish 2:00
B	Move all schools 1/2 hour	Start 9:30 Finish 4:00	Start 8:45 Finish 3:15	Start 8:00 Finish 2:30
C	Middle/Elementary/ High School	Start 8:45 Finish 3:15	Start 8:00 Finish 2:30	Start 9:30 Finish 4:00
D	Middle/High School/ Elementary	Start 9:30 Finish 4:00	Start 8:00 Finish 2:30	Start 8:45 Finish 3:15
E	Elementary, Middle/ High School	Start 8:00 Finish 2:30	Start 8:45 Finish 3:15	Start 9:30 Finish 4:00
F	One set of buses pick up Middle, then Elementary; another set picks up HS	Start 9:00 Finish 3:30	Start 8:15 Finish 2:45	Start 8:30 Finish 3:00

Community meetings were held on the following dates:

- Wednesday, February 20, 4:15 – 5:45 p.m., West HS Library
- Monday, February 25, 4:15 – 5:45 p.m., East HS Library
- Monday, February 25, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m., Wendler MS Cafeteria
- Tuesday, February 26, 4:15 – 5:45 p.m., Bartlett HS Library
- Tuesday, March 5, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m., Gruening MS Cafeteria
- Thursday, March 14, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m., Hanshew MS Multipurpose Room

An additional meeting was added in response to requests from Eagle River community members because of the delay in receiving the mailed out information. That meeting was held on Thursday, March 21 from 7:00 –8:30 p.m. at Birchwood ABC School. The same night, an informational meeting was held for the Title I Parent Advisory Committee. Presentations were also made to the Anchorage Council of PTA’s on March 4 and to the School Business Partnership Board on March 12.

At all ten meetings, attendees were given a brochure (Attachment E) containing information about the six start time options, along with a postage-paid card for indicating their preferred school start time option. Brochures were also mailed to all families in Anchorage with children enrolled in the district. The time period for returning mailer cards originally was to end on March 15, but was

extended to March 22. For this report, all cards received by March 29 were tabulated and the comments included in summary reports.

Simultaneously, information about the start time options was posted on the District website (Attachment F) and readers were invited to submit their opinions and select the start time option they favored. Once Option F was modified, opinions already registered via the district website were reviewed to determine if respondents needed to be provided an additional opportunity to make their choice. The only web votes cast prior to the change came from students in a kindergarten class; because the number of the actual votes was fewer than 30, it was determined that the change was made early enough in the process to avoid confusing the community.

The Task Force reconvened on March 18 to consider the summary of opinions expressed via the district website and results of phone interviews with other school districts that had changed school start times or considered doing so. The Task Force concluded that six options made it difficult to see one clearly favored choice among community members. They also concluded that even though no one change option emerged as a favorite, the community was ready to begin to consider a school start time change.

The committee felt a need for careful consideration of medical and scientific research data on sleep and student performance when making decisions about school start times. They also pointed out that Option E best fit the scientific research and received the largest number of community website votes, if only the options for change were considered (Options B through F). Committee members concluded that when community members selected a start time change that involved elementary schools, the preferred elementary start time was either 8:15 or 8:30.

The Task Force reviewed the research, the Minneapolis study, and local information gathered by the subcommittees related to childcare, implications for elementary students, student behavior and juvenile crime, and student activities and employment. The data collected by the Task Force specific to Anchorage was similar to conclusions drawn in the other districts we contacted. That information is summarized below.

Impact on Elementary Childcare

Many of the changes to school start times considered by the Task force would have an impact on elementary childcare. An early elementary start time could make it difficult for major providers such as Camp Fire to attract employees to work a shorter morning shift. Earlier start times also create a longer after school period where children need supervision. This time period would likely have more options available to parents but could impact the amount of family income

allocated for childcare. A concern also surfaced that the number of transitions between home, childcare and school could increase, creating difficulties for young students. Comments received from various community agencies providing after school programs show a major change would definitely impact their staffing, budgets and delivery of programs.

Impact on Student Behavior and Juvenile Crime

The Anchorage Police Department prefers earlier school release times. Deputy Chief Mark Mew has said that a later school release time for adolescents would merely move the “spike” of juvenile traffic accidents and criminal activity to later in the day during rush traffic hour. (See Attachment I.) As for in class behavior, Minneapolis teachers reported that there were fewer students sleeping in classes and students themselves reported they were more alert. There were fewer cases of student depression reported to the school counseling and nursing staff. As for juvenile crime, the FBI reports 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekdays as the peak activity period. Proponents of later school start times claim that keeping adolescents in school later in the day would reduce juvenile crime. While this makes sense, none of the communities that had changed start times had statistical evidence to provide to us on their juvenile crime rates.

Effect on Student Employment

The School Start Times subcommittee on Student Activities polled local employers regarding the impact on student employment possibilities and employer needs if high school start times were to shift to later in the day. Employers did not feel a later start time would have a negative impact on their businesses or student employment. They would still have a need for students as employees and could accommodate a change in the school schedule. Regardless of the school day schedule, the Minneapolis study did reinforce the declining benefit of student work: the more hours a week a student worked, the greater the negative impact on school performance.

ASD Task Force Conclusions

Not all community input had been returned by the time the Task Force met for its final session on March 18, but trends were certainly evident. Based on the theory that community respondents to the website survey were interested in change, the Task Force then looked more closely at Options B through F. Weighing the pros and cons of each of those options, Task Force members voted to forward two options to the Superintendent as their most preferred:

Option	Elementary Day	Middle School Day	High School Day
C	8:45-3:15	8:00-2:30	9:30-4:00
E	8:00-2:30	8:45-3:15	9:30-4:00

RESULTS OF COMMUNITY INPUT

The district contracted with Ivan Moore Research in the fall to conduct a survey for multiple purposes, among which was public opinion regarding school start times. The results of this survey showed that while some members of the community would like to see school start times changed, there was no consensus about what change should be made and how it should be accomplished. The Executive Summary of that survey is attached. (Attachment G) This survey was done prior to the community meetings. Another survey should be considered now that more people in the community are aware of the potential impact of a possible change. This would also ensure a scientific sample, rather than a self-selected sample.

Community input was gathered via the website and also through a mass mailing to all families with children enrolled in ASD schools. Total opinions expressed through those two methods are shown in the table below. Website respondents were required to submit their e-mail address in hopes of discouraging multiple "votes." Mailer cards were distributed freely throughout the district, and it was possible for individuals to return multiple cards. In addition, respondents could register an opinion via the website and by mailer card. Therefore, the counts below could contain duplicate information. Narrative comments from the website and mailer cards are included. (Attachment H)

Website and Mailer Responses

Start Time Option	Website Responses		Mailer Responses		Total Number
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
A	180	38	1344	33	1524
B	56	12	685	17	741
C	40	8	326	8	366
D	37	8	511	13	548
E	91	19	451	11	542
F	72	15	726	18	798
TOTALS	476	100	4043	100	4519

Input from other Community Groups

An earnest effort was made throughout the decision making process to elicit community opinions from various special interest groups regarding school start times. Included (Attachment I) are letters from Dr. and Mrs. Clinton Lillebridge, a petition signed by local physicians and health care providers endorsing a later school start time, and letters from the Anchorage Police Department, Camp Fire, Boys and Girls Club, and the YMCA. The comments represent very important but diverse points of view and no single statement can be generated from them.

SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENTS

I very much appreciate the diligence and effort put into this School Starting Times Task Force Study by the administration and the students, staff, and community members. The parents and community representatives who requested this study have brought many compelling issues forward for our consideration as a district, and as a community. I believe that these issues must receive further study.

I believe that we need to make some site visits and observe the actual implementation of later high school starting times in various school districts, and to also talk with school staff, students, parents, and community representatives as to the impact on all levels. High school issues must be looked at in the context of K-12 education in this community. We need to see if there is documentation and data to show that changing starting times in high schools has improved student achievement, attendance, and attitudes; we also need to look at the impact of such a change on elementary and middle school students.

We see this Task Force Study as the beginning of a continuing discussion on how to build in more flexibility to school scheduling during the day. This discussion can assist us in dealing with overcrowding issues at our high schools, especially during construction. Many high schools in the country have started innovative pilot programs to accommodate overcrowding and the starting time issue; we can review what they are doing and what the impacts are on student achievement and activities.

The Administration has discussed the need for further study about the pros and cons of adding seventh, eighth, and ninth periods to the day and allowing some students to come later as one strategy to pilot in the future. We must assess the impact on co-curricular and extracurricular activities if we moved the starting times in high school back---will activities happen before school, thus negating the benefit of later starting times? What is the impact on our community facility rentals? Many non-profit organizations provide recreational opportunities to the youth in this community using our gyms and other spaces in the late afternoons and evenings. How would a change impact them? We must not lose sight of the issues surrounding young children coming home from school earlier in the day with no older siblings, as well as having elementary students walking to schools and bus stops in the dark for much of the year.

The pending legislation regarding daylight savings time should also be taken into consideration. If the change occurs, this would impact our discussions. We also have some ideas on how we could experiment with some alternative scheduling and the creative use of transportation. All of these issues need further review and assessment, both in financial considerations, but with regard

to the impact on students, staff, families, and community agencies and businesses.

Finally, I believe that it is premature to change the starting times of the schools for the next school year. Much work must be done over the next school year to more fully assess all issues. A scientifically based parent and community survey is essential to ascertain support or no support on this important issue. Further discussion with the School Board, Administration, students, staff, and the community is also essential. A change of this magnitude will profoundly impact everyone in the Anchorage community if it is done; I do not believe we are ready to make that radical a change at this time. I do believe that further study will solidify people's opinions and further their understanding of the ramifications of such a change.

CC/PM/DC

Attachments

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Approved by: Carol Comeau, Superintendent