

Testimony before the Board of Education of Howard County

February 7, 2017 Public Hearing on School Start and Dismissal Time

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My name is Debi Lattimer. I am a long time resident of Howard County and have two children in the Public School System. I am testifying today on behalf of the Howard County School Health Council, which generally supports later start times for all students. Here's why.

- **Our high school students get much less sleep than younger students.** Only 1 in 4 Howard County high schoolers report sleeping 8 hours or more on school nights, compared to 2/3 of middle school students. Scientists have found that the natural biological rhythms of teens and adolescents are different from those of younger children and adults due to changes associated with puberty. As a result, teens and adolescents' sleep patterns shift, with a tendency to feel sleepy and to actually fall asleep later at night while waking up later the following morning.
- **Our high school students are sleep deprived, even though adequate sleep is vital to physical and mental health, executive functioning, quality of life, and public safety.** Researchers have found that insufficient sleep contributes to decreased academic performance, increased tardiness and absenteeism, lower motivation to learn, as well as depression & anxiety disorders. An estimated 1 in 9 Howard County children have been diagnosed with depression/anxiety.
- **Pushing back school start times is critical to improving the quality of sleep among Howard County students. This would align wake-up times for adolescents with their biological sleep patterns.** Research shows that alertness increases by 22% on average when schools start later. The evidence for this can be found in the excellent Mayo Clinic report attached to the written testimony we have submitted.

- **We believe the 4 new models the Board is considering need further refinement, as follows:**
 - First, align with the preferences shown in the March 2015 HCPSS survey, in which the majority of elementary school parents and staff favored a start time after 8:00 a.m.
 - Second, meet the minimum criteria spelled out in HB 39-Orange Ribbon for Healthy School Hours- adopted last year by the state legislature, which is based on the available evidence and numerous professional and expert recommendations.

- For all of these reasons, the Howard County School Health Council recommends strongly that the Board of Education should examine only models with start times no earlier than 8:00 a.m, The Board should also work to better inform the public about the importance of adequate sleep, particularly during adolescence, and how later start times can improve individual student and school system performance.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the School Health Council's expertise and consensus views on this important matter. We look forward to continued collaboration with the Board on these and other issues.

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