

February 5, 2009

The attached statement reflects the concerns of individuals who have responded to the WAKE Fairfax web site and the Save Our Sport web site. In addition, it reflects concerns raised by the Minority Report of the 2007 Transportation Task Force. The WAKE web site was established in January 2009 as a way to "provide information and opinions about proposed changes to the Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) bell schedule." The Save Our Sport web site was started in response to concerns that the proposed bell-schedule change would threaten the FCPS Swim and dive program.

Signed,

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TTF Minority Report

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School Board: Please Consider All the Costs

FCPS School Board members are considering a proposal from the 2007 Transportation Task Force (TTF) to change the start and stop times of all FCPS schools. We ask that School Board members proceed with caution and carefully weigh the potential benefits against the potential costs.

Supporters of the change, including SLEEP, believe that teen sleep problems must be solved by changing school start times. They also believe that the costs associated with these changes are relatively minor and outweighed by the benefits. While SLEEP has communicated their view broadly and effectively, we are concerned that broad segments of the Fairfax County community were not sufficiently involved in the development of this proposal, are unaware of the magnitude of the changes under consideration, and have objections that have yet to reach the attention of the School Board.

We ask that the School Board recognize that the TTF Proposal may impose serious costs and hardships on several groups of parents, students, student athletes, teachers, staff, business owners, and commuters:

- The TTF Proposal imposes costs on these parents:
 - parents who do not have flexible work schedules and will need to leave home hoping that their adolescents get themselves up and off to school on time
 - parents who cannot afford the additional daycare before and/or after school for elementary and middle school children whose schedules are altered (SACC, which is based on a sliding fee scale, may not be able to accommodate the additional need for after-school childcare services).
 - parents of lower socio-economic status who may have fewer resources or flexibility to accommodate the bell schedule change, as occurred in Minnesota
 - parents who balance work, coaching, and family responsibilities during after-school hours, hours that will be reduced with a change in bell schedule
 - parents whose teens will no longer be home in the afternoon to care for younger siblings, if high schools are dismissed after elementary schools
- The TTF Proposal imposes costs on these students:
 - students who need time after school to meet with teachers for extra help, review sessions, and other enrichment activities
 - students who may not be able to participate in various extracurricular activities because of their late dismissal time (this will affect the 70% of high school students who participate in these activities)
 - students whose extracurricular activities could be moved to before school starts, cancelling the sleep benefit and forcing those without independent transportation to stop participating
 - students in elementary schools who may have reduced opportunities for before-school enrichment activities with an earlier start time
 - students in middle school who will lose the after-school academic support and enrichment program (70% of middle school students currently participate in this popular and effective program)
 - students who will have fewer after-school hours for homework, instrument practice, meeting with tutors, and the like
 - students who will have a reduced time window for employment
 - students whose morning and afternoon commute times will increase because school start and stop times will coincide with rush hour

- student drivers who will encounter increased traffic before and after school
- The TTF Proposal imposes costs on many student athletes, even though participation in sports and other extracurricular activities has been proven to positively affect GPA, test scores, school attendance, college aspirations, college enrollment, success after college, civic participation, mental health, and physical health and weight:
 - student athletes who may need to leave school early for competition, reducing instructional time
 - student athletes who use county recreational facilities (cross country, golf, swim and dive, tennis) and may have reduced access if their activities start later and conflict with peak public use time
 - student athletes whose practice and competition schedules will change or be reduced due to the unavailability of lit fields and courts
 - student athletes – and the families and friends who cheer them on – who will end practices and games at a later hour than at present
 - student athletes whose travel time to competitions will increase because the later dismissal time puts them in rush hour traffic
- The TTF Proposal imposes costs on many FCPS teachers and staff:
 - teachers, administrative, cafeteria, and custodial staff whose work schedules will be shifted with the bell schedule change
 - teachers who may be reluctant to sponsor clubs and activities after school so that they can get home to their own families
 - teachers whose opportunities for professional development through evening courses may be reduced
 - employees whose length of work day will be lengthened by rush hour commutes
 - employees who provide federally-mandated breakfasts for 20% of enrolled students (33,000 children), since meals and students must arrive early enough for breakfast to be served
 - teachers and other employees who are parents, too – parents who do not want their own young children waiting at bus stops at 6:35 a.m., or their own middle school children losing enrichment programs, or their own teenagers driving to and from school in rush hour traffic
- The TTF Proposal imposes costs on private-sector service providers:
 - providers who will have reduced after-school time to serve students and earn a living (this includes tutors as well as teachers of art and religion classes, voice and musical instruments, gymnastics, aquatics, dance, martial arts, and more)
- The TTF Proposal imposes costs on Fairfax County commuters:
 - commuters who will be delayed further as buses pick-up and drop-off students through morning and evening rush hour
 - commuters who will encounter major delays as well as inexperienced drivers around high schools during morning rush hour

Fairfax residents now know what an external consultant told the School Board in December of 2006: changing school start times will “fundamentally change the entire transportation system.” We now know what researchers learned: that a later opening bell does not significantly improve student grades or test scores, even if it generally improves alertness, reaction time, and focused attention. We also know that this experiment was tried – and failed – in Orange County, Florida just last year, where the School Board was forced by outraged parents to reverse a similar bell schedule change only seven months after adoption.

As Fairfax residents, we ask our School Board representatives to respect the needs of all Fairfax County stakeholders. We – parents, students, athletes, teachers, staff, commuters, and others who teach the county’s children – have many interests and needs. We also believe there are other solutions for sleep-deprived teens. School Board, please do the right thing for us all. Please consider all the costs of this proposal.