



NORTHERN REGION ATHLETIC ADMINISTRATORS ASSOCIATION

NRAAA

February 18, 2009

TO: Fairfax County School Board
CC: Dr. Jack Dale, Superintendent, Fairfax County Public Schools
Dr. Richard Moniuszko, Deputy Superintendent, Fairfax County Public Schools
Mr. William Curran, Director, Student Activities and Athletic Programs,
Fairfax County Public Schools

From: Northern Region Athletic and Activities Administrators Association (NRAAA)

Re: Proposed Bell Schedule

The members of the Northern Region Activities Administrators Association comprised of student activities administrators from Fairfax, Arlington, Loudoun and Alexandria, would like to express our concerns about the current proposal to adjust the school day schedule. We view this as an association issue since any change in the FCPS schedule will ultimately affect all region schools. While we understand a final decision will invariably take into account many factors outside the realm of athletics and activities, we want to weigh in on the negative impact such a change will have on the robust after-school activities program currently afforded to our high school students.

Our activities programs are structured to provide as many opportunities as possible for students to participate, recognizing the correlation between student involvement, increased academic performance and positive school attachment. We fear that with later end of day release times, programs will have to be significantly modified and/or eliminated.

Specifically, a later school ending time means less daylight for outside activities such as golf, cross-country, tennis and many other sports which rely on unlit facilities for practices. This will likely mean fewer events, smaller teams or missed instructional time due to the necessity for early release from school. Similarly, shared facilities such as pools and community use fields will have to be rescheduled with either high school teams or community teams losing valuable practice and game time.

While modifying the schedules for use of outdoor facilities may pose excessively challenging due to limited daylight, indoor facilities will not be any easier. With high school practices running later into the night, the opportunity for use by recreation teams will significantly decrease. Unfortunately, the amount of time available for high school use will also decrease as game schedules will have to be modified to account for the delayed availability of transportation. Early indications suggest buses for extracurricular activities would not be available until 5:40 pm in many parts of the county. With our current athletic schedule commencing as early as 4 pm and regularly by 5:30 pm, we will be forced to either eliminate programs/games or restructure the way we schedule competitions. This will likely mean playing basketball games two additional nights a week to accommodate freshmen and junior varsity games on one night and varsity games on another evening - which prompts the question of where and when the other levels or other sports will practice.

In our early analysis, it has become clear that we would be forced to regularly schedule contests on Saturdays if we desired to keep the same level of opportunity for our students in terms of number of games and number of teams per sport we currently offer. Adding Saturday games to the schedule will lengthen the work week for coaches, athletic trainers, athletic game staffs and athletic administrators (DSAs or ADSAs) while also adversely impacting community use of both fields and gymnasiums.

Several members of this organization work in school districts which have later release times than the current Fairfax County schedule, but not necessarily as late as the proposed schedule. While each of these other school districts has made adjustments to continue participating in regional athletic contests, these adjustments most likely could not successfully be implemented in Fairfax County for various logistical and structural reasons.

For example, in Arlington County, due to the small geographical layout of the county, several buses are available as early as 30 minutes after high school dismissal (3:01 pm), allowing teams from the three high schools to be at off-site practice locations or games by 4 or 4:30 pm. Under the FCPS proposal, buses would not be available until 5:30 pm, meaning off-site practices and games would likely not start until 6 pm at the earliest.

In Loudoun County, most schools have two gyms to accommodate for simultaneous freshmen and junior varsity volleyball and basketball games. This structure also allows for simultaneous practices on non-competition days, minimizing the negative impact on recreation use. Currently, over one-third of the high schools in FCPS only have one gym which would be a significant limitation on game and practice scheduling if the number of hours of available after-school time decreased due to the later release.

Non-athletic activities would face similar potentially negative consequences if school dismissal times were pushed later. Many bands practice on unlit parking lots or auxiliary fields putting them in a similar position as the golf and cross country teams mentioned above. Those bands which do practice on lit fields will be forced to practice either later at night after other teams use the lit fields or all teams using the field will have to resort to shorter practices. Shorter practices could have the negative consequence of leading coaches to decrease the number of participants on a team in order to reduce the number of repetitions needed during practices.

Overall, the impact on extra-curricular activities and those who devote their time to them as coaches and moderators will be significant. While change can be viewed as an opportunity to streamline schedules and implement improvements, we find it difficult to believe the current proposed bell schedule change will provide positive outcomes which will outweigh the numerous challenges outlined above. In fact, we envision fewer opportunities for students, later end times for events, the expansion of the typical five-day week to a standard six-day week for students and staff associated with activities and reduced venue availability for recreation programs which are serving future high school athletes.

We ask you to strongly consider the negative impact on high school activities programs when analyzing the current school bell schedule proposal.

Respectfully submitted by the membership of the NRAAA