

March 19: Vote to Put Sleep to Bed

Don't go to sleep this Thursday - the School Board is making some critical decisions about school start times for your children.

The School Board needs to vote, as School Board Vice Chairman Tessie Wilson said, "to put sleep to bed" – not to continue dragging this on year after year. It's time to pull the plug on the SLEEP proposal – not just push it to next year for more research and debate – and expense. The results are in and the community has spoken. But the School Board apparently doesn't think so. At a recent School Board session, a new plan was introduced that sounds a lot like the frog in the kettle – slowly introduce the changes while you don't know you are being cooked. Five more years of adjusting routes and schedules, maybe one pyramid at a time. Curiously, it focuses only on transportation efficiencies, mentioning high school start times only in a background quote. This is SLEEP's new indirect and surreptitious way of keeping the issue alive.

Let's review what families in Fairfax are saying through the school surveys:

- Of the over **94,000** participants in the School Board-sponsored online survey 63 to 78 percent – including students, parents, staff, and community/business members – do not support the proposed bell schedule¹.
- Across all respondent groups, approximately **63 to 78 percent of respondents do not support the proposed bell schedule**. (71% of students, 63% of parents, 72% of staff, 78% of community/businesses)
- Approximately **1,600** parents, staff, students, and community members participated in the community dialogues. **76 percent** of community dialogue participants reported that FCPS should not adopt a bell schedule like the one proposed (Question 5).³

SLEEP doesn't like these results. In an email to supporters, SLEEP describes the FCPS online survey and community dialogues as "highly flawed and told us very little" and that the surveys took place in an environment with "gross misinformation and fear-mongering." For anyone who went to the community dialogue sessions, does this sound like what you experienced?

FCPS Transportation has already spent \$426,625 on this issue. **They can now save 3 to 7 million dollars** by implementing recently developed efficiencies, only some of which have been implemented. The question is what will you spend these savings on? By leaving the current bell schedule as is, or applying minor tweaks, \$7 million would be available for other school needs that directly affect teachers and students such as classroom supplies or lower teacher-student ratios. Or we can use up those savings on the costs of implementing the proposed new bell schedule (yes, the new schedule costs money – in spite of the press releases that tell you it is cost neutral.)

Here's the exit strategy that brings this to a close:

- Acknowledge that we spent nearly \$500,000 on redesign and in return stand to gain \$3 to \$7 million in savings by keeping our existing bell schedule and implementing transportation efficiencies – a great investment in these tough economic times. Focus on ways to promote more sleep and better health for teens -- within our busy lives.
- Say “well done” to everyone, bank the money – and move on.

Let your School Board representative know how you feel - before Thursday afternoon's meeting.

Sources:

¹ Fairfax County Public Schools, Department of Accountability *The FCPS Proposed Bell Schedule Survey: Results from the Online Survey, page 7.*

² Fairfax County Public Schools, Department of Accountability *The FCPS Proposed Bell Schedule Survey: Results from the Online Survey, page 1.*

³ Fairfax County Public Schools, Department of Accountability *The FCPS Proposed Bell Schedule: Results from the Community Dialogues, page 3.*

submitted by email