

# Middle School Start Times: Their History in Fairfax County Public Schools

The history of discussions about school start times (STs) in Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) goes back to at least 1991. This background information document provides a timeline from 1991 forward. It focuses on discussions, proposals, and actions around middle school (MS) and secondary school (SS) STs, but includes information around elementary (ES) and high school (HS) changes as well. The first FCPS intermediate schools were opened in 1960; prior to that time, ES served grades 1-7.

Year	Predominant School Start Times		
	ES	MS	HS
1961	8:45a	8:45a	8:15a
1986	8:40a and 9:15a	8:15a	7:40a
1987	8:40a and 9:10a	8:10a	7:40a
1991	8:45a and 9:20a	7:45a	7:30a
1996	8:35a and 9:00a	7:40a	7:20a
1997	8:35a and 9:10a	7:20a	7:20a
1998	8:10a - 9:05a	7:35a – 7:50a SS 7:20a – 7:30a	7:20a – 7:30a TJHSST: 8:30a
2006	7:50a - 9:20a	7:30a - 8:30a	7:20a - 7:30a
2007-08	8:10a - 9:25a	7:30a - 8:30a	7:20a - 7:30a TJHSST: 8:30a
2008-09	8:00a - 9:25a	7:20a - 8:10a SS: 7:20a	7:20a
2012	7:20a - 9:20a	7:20a - 8:05a	7:20a
2015-16	8:00a - 9:25a	7:30a SS: 8:00a	8:10a

Currently, all MS start at 7:30a, while the division’s 3 SS start at 8:00a.



## 1991

FCPS discussed changing ES STs as well as shifting from 2 ES bell schedules to 1. The MS ST was also considered during the discussions, which at the time was 7:45a. Staff recommended a range of MS STs from 7:30a to 7:45a.

A committee of 29 that included students, principals, teachers, and representatives of special programs, adult education, vocational education, transportation, financial services, facilities, student activities, school age childcare, and central and area offices met to consider school start times. They issued a paper, *Reversing the Bell Schedules*, on February 12, 1991.

FCPS transportation staff provided cost estimates of potential changes and estimated that it would cost \$37M to switch from 2 ES bell times to 1. Among other items, staff recommended that MS and HS be transported together on buses.

No action was taken related to MS start times in 1991 but by 1996 MS started at 7:40a.

## 1998

The Fairfax County Task Force on HS Opening Times explored the possibility of having all ES start at 8:00a and all MS/HS start at 9:00a. FCPS staff estimated the cost of the “2-bell flip” to be an additional \$31M per year.

No action was taken related to MS start times.

## 2000

FCPS contracted with DMG Maximus for a study of its transportation routing structure, costs, and quality of services to students. The consulting firm concluded that the FCPS transportation system, “has reached its limits in trying to overcome the constraints of a growing student enrollment, increasing traffic, and more extensive educational programs.” Moreover, the transportation system needed “restructuring, strategic logistical planning, and additional fleet resources.”

FCPS discussed piloting later HS STs at Madison HS. It chose not to proceed with the pilot.

No action was taken related to MS start times.

## 2004

An internal FCPS study estimated that a flip to 3 bell times would cost an additional \$39.8M per year. At the time, the total transportation budget was just \$88.9M.

No action was taken related to MS start times in response to the study, but by 2006, the MS ST was 7:30a.

## 2005

FCPS first contracted with Management Partnership Services (MPS) for assistance in studying ST options. At the time, FCPS transported more than 117,000 students daily, on a 3-tier bell schedule with 1,136 buses. The goal of the project was to “evaluate the feasibility of changing school start times to allow high schools to start between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.”

In analyzing FCPS, the consulting firm concluded that:

total transportation costs are within the national average, that existing service levels are generally good, but are degrading as increased demands are placed on the system, and finally that the bus routes and schedules are well designed and managed by a transportation department that is sophisticated in its use of technology and other planning solutions.

The consulting firm modeled different scenarios for later HS STs. Notably, the modeling included only 5 HS attendance pyramids that were felt to provide “a reasonable representation of the logistical and demographic characteristics of the entire county.” No changes were made to bus runs in the modeling, which included ignoring places where existing bus runs were not filled to reasonable capacity limits. The initial modeling of 5 scenarios resulted in an estimated 8-21% increase in fleet resources needed, with an average 16-17% increase.

After reviewing these initial results, the FCPS Advisory Group and the school board settled on these key constraints:

- ◆ HS should start between 8:15 and 8:30a.
- ◆ MS should start in the same tier as HS or after HS.
- ◆ ES should start between 7:50a to 8:00a, and in no case before 7:35a.
- ◆ ES students should not be at bus stops before morning civil twilight (7:08a) or after evening civil twilight (5:17p).

### 2004

SLEEP in Fairfax (SLEEP) was founded by 2 Fairfax County residents. A volunteer advocacy group, SLEEP was founded over concerns regarding early school start times amid growing awareness of teen sleep needs. SLEEP’s goal is in part “to synchronize the school clocks with students’ body clocks so teens are in school during their most alert hours and can achieve their full academic potential.”

A “bus run” is the trip a bus takes from when it picks up the 1<sup>st</sup> student until it drops off students at a school. A “bus route” is the trip a bus takes when it completes a bus run to its 1<sup>st</sup> school, then completes subsequent runs to its 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> schools.

These constraints resulted in an estimated 51% increase in the number of buses needed. The consulting firm’s [report](#) estimated a cost increase of \$44M per year. At the time, the total annual budget of the transportation department was \$87M. The consulting firm noted 3 primary drivers for the increased costs:

- ◆ At the time, the instructional day of secondary schools was typically 20 minutes longer than that of ES. This made afternoon bus scheduling difficult.
- ◆ The transportation window was reduced from 1 hour and 55 minutes to 1 hour and 35 minutes.
- ◆ The FCPS Advisory Group for the study did not allow any morning civil twilight conflicts for ES students, resulting in the splitting of many routes. Of the additional buses estimated to be necessary (which led to the \$44M annual cost impact), ~40% were added because of this constraint. It is unclear from the report whether, once buses were added to accommodate the civil twilight constraint, they were then made available to potentially address the time conflict constraints.

In conclusion, the report stated:

In our opinion, the costs can be reduced if the School Division is willing to loosen certain constraints that have the heaviest impact on resource demands...conduct of another simulation that loosens those constraints or use the following assumptions:

- ◆ Establish the same length instructional day for secondary and elementary grade levels.
- ◆ Increase the total time window in the morning series to one (1) hour and 55 minutes.
- ◆ Preserve, to the extent feasible, the existing “rolling bell” structure; clustering these more loosely around the primary time corridors.
- ◆ Loosen the requirements for the tier placement of middle and elementary schools such that these may be placed on any tier.
- ◆ Align the feeder structure such that the elementary schools with the longest bus routes are situated on the middle or last tier whenever possible, to minimize the need to split bus routes because of the twilight constraint.

No action was taken related to MS start times.

## 2006

MPS was retained by FCPS to complete a 2<sup>nd</sup> bell time study using different constraints for 3 scenarios, all of which had HS in the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 3 tiers and the earliest school start time (1<sup>st</sup> tier) at 8:00a. The transportation window in the new scenarios ranged from 1 hour, 35 minutes to 1 hour, 55 minutes. The study again developed estimates based on a sample of schools considered to be a reasonable representation of the county. The [report](#) estimated the costs of the scenarios to range from \$0 to \$9.2M annually (0-13% of the transportation budget at the time) but cautioned that, “on a practical level, a comprehensive redesign of the transportation system would be required to facilitate implementation of any of these changes.” The consulting team indicated that such an effort would be “highly complex and long-term” which may have had a chilling effect on district enthusiasm for changing school start times.

In addition to the bell time work, the consulting firm estimated costs/savings from other transportation areas:

- ◆ modifying or eliminating busing for some out-of-boundary programs – estimated annual savings of 8-12% (\$5.7M-\$8.4M)
- ◆ consolidating bus stops – estimated annual savings of 0-4% (\$0-\$2.9M)
- ◆ increasing non-transportation zones around secondary schools - estimated annual savings of 1-6% (\$0.9M-\$3.8M)
- ◆ optimizing school attendance boundaries to minimize transportation demands – estimated annual savings of 3-7% (\$2.1M-\$5.0M)

At the time, the total annual budget of the transportation department was \$107.4M.

No action was taken related to MS start times.

## 2007

**March:** In its March 12<sup>th</sup> work session, the FCPS school board delayed action on the MPS reports. The transportation director acknowledged that no written standards existed for routing parameters such as earliest pickup, length of ride, arrival times at schools, and some others.

FCPS staff estimated that bringing the current transportation system up to “basic standards, without bell schedule changes” would cost \$20M+ per year. This would include implementing these parameters:

September 1, 2006  
A columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* based in Fairfax published a [column](#) entitled, “Want to Improve Education? Let Kids Sleep.”

November 18, 2006  
The Virginia PTA Resolution on the Impact of School Start Times on Student Health was adopted at the VA PTA Convention. It acknowledged the importance of sleep and later school start times for teens.

- ◆ no base school bus ride longer than 60 minutes
- ◆ no student pickup before 6:15a (Although this was well before the morning civil twilight constraint of 7:08a, it was found at this time that some pickups were scheduled as early as 5:23a.)
- ◆ no delivery to school more than 10 minutes before the bell
- ◆ MS and HS buses would seat 80% of actual capacity (44 instead of 52 students)
- ◆ ES buses would seat 2.5 students per seat (65 instead of 78 students)

**April:** In the April 23<sup>rd</sup> work session, the school board asked staff to re-engineer transportation bell schedules and routing to change HS STs and to improve certain service parameters. Staff indicated it could develop something for community review by Spring 2008.

**July:** On July 21<sup>st</sup> the FCPS school board chartered a Transportation Task Force (TTF). The charge of the TTF was:

To offer community perspectives as input to the conduct of the transportation reengineering analysis. It will also generate a report that provides the results from the following tasks:

1. Assess reengineering options and implications for the community:
  - a. No change (+safety assurance)
  - b. Baseline – Board approved assets required to achieve transportation performance parameters
  - c. Baseline and bell schedule
2. Identify pluses and minuses in adjusting parameters and bell schedule alternatives.
3. Draw lessons learned from other community studies.
4. Recommend solutions to problems identified during the conduct of the study.

TTF subcommittees considered a number of options, including:

1. The “Slide” - sliding all STs to later
2. “Flips” – changing the order of STs among the school levels (ES, MS, HS)

3. Tweaks – changing school transportation service parameters

## 2008

**February:** The Fairfax Education Association, the largest Fairfax County teachers’ organization, polled its members on their opinion about school STs. More than 2,300 members responded, the most of any FEA survey, and more than 750 comments were received. A large majority of respondents, 79%, believed that Fairfax HS started too early. Many of the comments were passionate on the subject.

**March:** The TTF released its report. Comprised of 68 diverse members, the TTF endorsed later STs for teens:

Like the School Board, the Task Force believes that **later start times would be beneficial for adolescents, particularly high school students**. This, in turn, serves FCPS Strategic Goal 6.7 to provide, “a safe and healthful learning environment.” It also helps FCPS meet its Student Achievement Goals to ensure that students, “achieve their full academic potential in the core disciplines,” (1.1), and, “make healthy and safe choices” (2.8).

The TTF recommended changes to school schedules and transportation parameters that could reduce costs from MPS 2.

Regarding transportation parameters, the TTF stated, “After carefully considering all of this information, the Task Force is proposing a number of changes to the services provided by the FCPS Transportation Department. These service parameters should improve service and, importantly, reduce system costs as well.” These were (verbatim):

- ◆ Retain the “Exception to Ride” program
- ◆ “Civil twilight” should be respected but not as an absolute barrier. Elementary school (ES) bus runs may start before civil twilight, but not more than ten days each academic year, and not by more than ten minutes even then.
- ◆ ES students should not ride the bus to their within-boundary base-school for more than 45 minutes.
- ◆ Middle school (MS) and high school (HS) students should have the same bus ride time limitations
- ◆ MS and HS students should not ride the bus to their within-boundary base-school for more than 60 minutes

- ◆ ES students should arrive no later than five minutes before school and no earlier than 25 minutes before school – a 5-25 minute arrival/drop off window – and are to be permitted to exit the bus and enter the school immediately upon arrival.
- ◆ HS and MS student arrival/drop off window is to be 10 – 25 minutes before school, with immediate entry.
- ◆ “Grandfathering” for school boundary changes may be permitted, but for not more than a single year following the changes.
- ◆ “Grandfathering” should not be used for non-boundary program changes.
- ◆ Current home-to-school walking distances should not be changed.
- ◆ Transportation should optimize bus stop placements by making better use of the permissible walking distance, up to, but not exceeding one-half (1/2) mile for ES students, with the goal being to reduce the number of bus stops and improving transport efficiency and run length.
- ◆ Transportation should optimize bus stop placements by making better use of the permissible walking distance, up to, but not exceeding three-quarters of mile for MS and HS students, with a goal of reducing the number of bus stops and improving transport efficiency and run length.
- ◆ ES students should not ride with MS or HS students, except for current rare and unusual circumstances related to centralized pick-ups, such as TJHSST.
- ◆ MS and HS students may ride the same bus at any time.
- ◆ Transportation should not be provided to a GT Center when the base school has a GT Center.
- ◆ The use of centralized pickup locations should be expanded for all students attending non-mandatory out-of-boundary programs.

Other suggestions for the school board to consider included the “Cool Counties Initiative” and the use of Consortia to decentralize special courses and programs (Appendix Q).

In Phase I, the TTF developed “5 bell schedule alternatives that would provide” later start times for adolescents. In Phase II:



The TTF spent almost 3 months identifying the impacts of each of these alternatives on FCPS students, on FCPS employees, and on the greater Fairfax community. ... after much discussion the Task Force determined that later HS and MS start times can be achieved in an acceptable way, and selected a bell schedule that does this.

The proposed bell schedule continued the existing 3-tier system. It included ES on the 1<sup>st</sup> tier, HS on the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, and MS on the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier, with some ES in each tier to balance bus needs. ES was split roughly 55%, 25% and 20% between tiers.

The proposed bell schedule was:

Tier	School Level	Start Times	End Times
1	Elementary	7:50 – 8:10	2:30 – 2:50
2	High	8:35 – 8:55	3:25 – 3:45
3	Middle	9:20 – 9:40	4:10 – 4:30

The TTF noted that the time windows were approximate, not rigid, and stated that:

The FCPS Transportation Department should develop rolling bell schedules that start as many elementary schools as possible in Tier 1 and Tier 2, while balancing the tiers and starting high schools as close to the beginning of the tier 2 window so that they can end by 3:30 p.m., preferably even before. Elementary schools placed in the first tier should be those with the shortest routes and the fewest bus riders so as to minimize problems with civil twilight.

While not unanimous, the TTF Report noted this consensus:

We believe the bell schedule we propose, when combined with the service parameter changes we recommend achieves these beneficial later start times for the adolescents in Fairfax County in a way that is acceptable to the community.

Of those eligible to vote and voting on a bell schedule, more than 80 percent favored the proposed bell schedule over making no change. The final vote was 22 for the change, 5 for making no change, with 13 abstentions. These votes were taken by roll call (Appendix R).

April 2008  
The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors decided to add questions about sleep quantity to the Fairfax County Youth Risk Survey instrument.

**May:** The FCPS school board rejected 13 of 16 TTF transportation service parameter recommendations.

**June:** The Fairfax County Council of PTAs surveyed 6,000+ Fairfax County parents. The survey found that a majority supported later HS STs



as well as a specific proposal recommended by the FCPS Transportation Task Force (TTF) in March. A significant majority (61%) supported the TTF recommendation as proposed and another 24% liked the plan better than the current schedule but wanted some improvements. Only 15% preferred the current schedule to the TTF proposal.

**July/August:** Transportation staff developed school-by-school bell schedules that included later MS and HS STs. The staff presented its [first draft](#) to the school board at its July 14<sup>th</sup> work session and a [second draft](#) at the August 14<sup>th</sup> work session. As staff refined its model, costs continued to decrease. Iteration 2 was estimated to have a \$4.3M cost.

**September:** Public input on possible ST changes was postponed from fall to winter, in order to follow district budget hearings.

**November:** Transportation staff developed Iteration 3 of school-by-school bell schedules. One of the main goals of Iteration 3 was to reduce transportation costs to below \$4.3M. The TTF chair pointed out that the new bell schedules included fixing \$20M in pre-existing problems with the current transportation system and so the stated “cost” represented more than \$15M in savings to FCPS.

November 2008  
Advocates supported the un-mirroring of morning and afternoon runs where it would save money.

## 2009

**January:** FCPS released a report outlining a potential bell schedule that could be implemented with no added cost (Iteration 3). The plan required 1,128 buses, fewer than the 1,144 in use at that time for the 2008-09 school year.

Iteration 3 quickly lost political support for the following reasons:

- ◆ Staff released a draft sports schedule during live forums (attended by 1,592 stakeholders) that identified conflicts but did not propose solutions. The schedule included proposed swim practices close to midnight. Students were told they would have to choose between healthy morning start times and extracurricular activities.
- ◆ The FCPS community engagement (online polling and community meetings) efforts were impacted “by rumors and misinformation, and fear of changing to an unknown system,” including some coming directly from school officials, such as one MS that introduced the survey with the comment, “Middle school after school programs would be eliminated” with a change to later STs. The online survey received 94,129 responses, including 29,286 from students in grades 6-12.
- ◆ Proposed MS STs of 9:40 a.m. were deemed “too late.”

A [Washington Post article](#) in 2012 blamed the school board’s rejection of Iteration 3 on the “many students, parents and teachers [who] said the change would have too great an impact on work schedules, child-care arrangements and after-school activities.”

- ◆ While the range of bell times for elementary schools remained unchanged, many individual elementary schools had large changes, including swaps where one school moved from 7:50a to 9:20a and others moved from 9:20a to 7:50a. One school board member described such changes as “poison pills.”

**March:** The FCPS school board voted to, “Reject the proposed bell schedule change (known as Iteration 3) and confirm the existing structure.” The existing structure at that time was primarily HS first, followed by MS and then ES. The board considered numerous amendments and substitute motions with votes generally divided, 6 members in favor of continuing to work towards a solution and 6 opposed.

**April:** FCPS released Iteration 5, which included changes to STs for many ES and MS, but almost no change for HS. The planned ST for MS shifted from 7:30a - 8:30a to 7:50a – 8:10a, but a number of MS remained at a 7:20a - 7:30a ST. All of the SS remained at 7:20a – 7:30a.

**Iteration 5**

	2007-2008	2009-2010
ES	8:10a - 9:25a	8:00a - 9:25a
MS	7:30a - 8:30a	7:20a - 8:10a
HS	7:20a - 7:30a	7:20a

The revised bell schedule was implemented without community engagement. The transportation department reduced its number of buses from 1,267 to 1,092 and also reduced its number of staff positions.

**2010**

**September:** The FCPS transportation department issued an RFP for school bus routing analysis and optimization. SLEEP advocated for consideration of student needs, including the biological imperative for sleep; and, the improved use of the district’s existing bus routing software, including data entry (e.g., actual miles per hour on primary roadways in both the morning and the afternoon in both directions – with traffic and against traffic). The then-current data in the FCPS system was an estimated average which kept the software from being able to accurately plan optimal routes.

April 2009  
 SLEEP shares sample alternatives using a parametric software tool to illustrate how some changes could decrease costs to the system and model options that don’t move any ES or MS STs. Some models show opportunities to save millions of dollars.

Fall 2010  
 On the [Fairfax Youth Survey](#), 46% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported getting less than 8 hours of sleep on a school night.

## 2011

2011

A paper is published in the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, using data from Chesapeake and Virginia Beach. The study found higher teen vehicular crash rates occurred in jurisdictions with earlier HS STs versus those with later HS ST.

*Verona, et al*

2011

The Northern Virginia Healthy Kids Coalition released 9-5-2-1-0 for Health to communicate 5 key behaviors that promote healthy weight and overall good health for children:

- 9 - Get at least nine hours of sleep per day.
- 5 - Five servings of fruits and vegetables per day
- 2 - Limit screen time to 2 hours or less outside of school
- 1 - Get at least 1 hour of physical activity per day
- 0 - Eliminate sugar-added beverages

## 2012

**January:** New FCPS school board members were sworn in. During their campaigns, 10 of the 12 said they would vote for “a new FCPS policy to require that high schools start after 8:00a in the morning”, and 8 said they would be willing to “put forth a motion to vote on such a policy.”

**February:** The FCPS school board and superintendent agreed to change the existing regulation on a full-day schedule to allow students to opt out of a 1<sup>st</sup> block class or classes. To do so, students had to be able to still meet graduation requirements and could replace an in-person class with an online class or take a college level course at a local college (dual enrollment). Families took advantage of this option. The demographics of students opting out of 1<sup>st</sup> block reflected the demographics of the district.

**April:** Recognizing the growing body of research regarding teen sleep and circadian rhythms, the FCPS school board passed a [resolution](#) on a 10 to 2 vote setting a goal to start high schools after 8:00a. and directing the superintendent to study how other districts have been able to implement this goal. The school board directed staff to report on other districts that have HS starting after 8:00a and those that have successfully changed HS STs to later in the morning, including how they:

- ◆ scheduled elementary, middle and high schools
- ◆ arranged transportation for elementary, middle and high school students to and from school
- ◆ scheduled sports and after-school activities for HS students around their start and end times

- ◆ used successful change management techniques to involve and prepare parents, teachers, students and other stakeholders and the school division for a different schedule, in cases where a shift to later STs occurred.

A *Washington Post* [editorial](#) supported the resolution:

The reason the idea won't go away is that it makes too much sense. Every bit of scientific research and experience shows that teenagers have different sleep patterns and that later start times are beneficial to students, schools and the community.

**June:** FCPS staff provided a history of the failed attempts to change STs in FCPS along with transportation information from the 40 largest suburban districts, 10 of which had HS starting after 8:00a. FCPS staff recommended that the school board hire a consultant to “perform the research [of school systems with later starting times], determine what actions were taken that make the change successful, and to prepare a specific plan for Fairfax County based upon their research” and to ensure this work was done in a timely and objective manner.

The school board created a work group to develop an RFP and to then guide the work of a consultant. Chair Janie Strauss appointed Sandy Evans, Patty Reed, Ryan McElveen, and Ted Velkoff to serve on this school board committee. Many of the school board members seemed to be leaning toward hiring a firm with change management expertise, which was one of the recommendations of the Transportation Task Force in 2008.

**July:** The ad-hoc committee on school STs developed the scope of work for the RFP with a deliverable titled, “Blueprint for Change.” It was approved by the full board. The RFP included these tasks:

- ◆ Conduct a literature review.
- ◆ Develop optional approaches and prepare an Alternatives Analysis.
- ◆ Develop and implement a Community Engagement Plan.
- ◆ Develop a Blueprint for Change.

**August:** For the 2012-13 school year, some HS began varying their schedules once or twice per month. On those days of alternate schedules, the student day often began at 8:00a.

Fall 2012  
On the [Fairfax Youth Survey](#), 46% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported getting less than 8 hours of sleep on a school night.

**2012-13 HS Schedule Variations**

School	DOW	First class	Frequency
Annandale HS	Varied	8:27a for all but 9 <sup>th</sup> graders	2x/month October-May
Chantilly HS	Friday	7:56a	Weekly
Langley HS	Wednesday	8:20a	Weekly
Marshall HS	Wednesday	8:00a	Weekly
McLean HS	Wednesday	8:26a	Weekly
Oakton HS	Wednesday	8:20a	Weekly
TJHSST	Thursday	9:00a	Weekly
West Springfield	Wednesday	8:00a	Weekly

**September/October:** FCPS issued a request for proposals with a schedule calling for work to begin in 2013.

## 2013

**March:** SLEEP, the Fairfax County Council of PTAs, and the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers co-sponsored a community event, “Sleep Night.” The Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics announced support for later HS STs, joining the Medical Society of Northern Virginia. Other organizations on record supporting the positive impact that later morning school schedules have on teen sleep included:

- ◆ Virginia PTA
- ◆ League of Women Voters-Fairfax Area
- ◆ FCPS School Health Advisory Committee
- ◆ Fairfax Zero Tolerance Reform
- ◆ Northern Virginia Healthy Kids Coalition (9-5-2-1-0 Campaign)
- ◆ Real Food For Kids
- ◆ Coalition of the Silence

FCPS contracted with Children’s National Medical Center (CNMC) to develop the Blueprint for Change. The goals of the requested work included:

- ◆ no elementary bus pickups prior to civil twilight
- ◆ HS dismissed by 3:00 p.m. for athletics
- ◆ reduce morning drop-off time between the bell to a 10-minute window (this was adjusted to 20-minutes to give students time to access the breakfast program).

**May:** FCPS hired a new superintendent, Dr. Karen Garza, and also had a relatively new Assistant Superintendent for Facilities and Transportation, Jeff Platenberg.

October 2013  
US Secretary of Education tweeted that it is  
“Common sense to improve student achievement that too few have implemented: let teens sleep more, start school later.”

## 2014

**February:** The FCPS school board adopted the Evans Motion to earmark any transportation efficiencies found in the spring to offset potential costs to implement later HS STs (vote: 9 to 3).

**March:** Staff of the FCPS transportation department developed several scheduling options and reviewed them with a variety of stakeholder groups to identify challenges and opportunities. Working together, the Smart School Start team (CMNC) and FCPS planned meetings to gather broader input on potential scenarios.

**April:** The FCPS school board voted to preview 4 scenarios with the public and obtain community input over the next 2 months, intending to implement changes in 2015-16. The “Flip” option included the SS at 7:50a or 8:20a, with all regular HS at 8:00a or 8:10a. The Flip also kept ES on their current schedules. The “HS Later” option included 1 MS at 9:00a.

### 2015-16 CMNC Scenarios

Scenario	ES	MS	HS	Estimated Cost
“MS Late”	7:50a – 9:15a	9:30a	8:30a	\$7.6M
“MS Early”	7:45a – 9:10a	7:20a	8:10a – 8:20a	\$4.7M
“MS/HS Flip”	8:00a – 9:20a	7:20a	7:50 – 8:20a	\$5.6M
“HS Later”	7:40a – 9:15a	8:20a – 8:30a	9:15a	\$2.8M

Referencing the Fairfax Youth Survey results finding that 56% of FCPS HS seniors were getting less than 6 hours of sleep on a typical school night, Dr. Judith Owens, the director of sleep medicine at CNMC who helped develop the 4 scenarios, noted

If you looked at that from the standpoint of how many kids in Fairfax County are going hungry and you found that 56 percent of kids were going hungry and only 3 percent were getting an adequate amount of food, I think there would be no question about what your next step would be.

**May/June:** A total of 8 community input sessions were held across the district to get community input.

**June:** FCPS conducted an online survey to collect community input to shape the final Blueprint for Change.

January 2014

Delegate Kaye Kory’s HB34 to start HS at/after 8:00a had a hearing in the House Education Committee.

March 2014

The University of Minnesota released a large study that demonstrated later HS STs improved grades and health. The 3-year project, using data from 9,000+ students attending 8 HS in 3 states, found that, when switched to a later ST:

- ◆ attendance, standardized test scores, and academic performance in math, English, science, and social studies improved.
- ◆ tardiness, substance abuse, symptoms of depression, and consumption of caffeinated drinks decreased.

The study also found a 70% drop in car crashes involving teen drivers at Jackson Hole HS (WY), which shifted to the latest start time of 8:55a.

May 13, 2014

Article appears in *The New York Times*: [To Keep Teenagers Alert, Schools Let Them Sleep In](#). It mentions FCPS’ efforts.



**July:** The CNMC presented its report to the FCPS school board in a work session. Based on that report, and the announcement that the Fairfax County Athletic Council supports Option 3, board members and Superintendent Garza voiced nearly unanimous support to refine and improve Option 3, the MS/HS Flip. As it was characterized at the time, implementing the flip would mean that all Fairfax students will have a start time after 8:00a for at least 10 of their 13 years in FCPS. The only years where a student would start school before 8:00a would be MS. Students attending the SS would never start before 8:00a.

Fall 2014  
On the [Fairfax Youth Survey](#), 47% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported getting less than 8 hours of sleep on a school night.

One refinement goal was to move the MS ST as late as possible, within reasonable budget parameters. As the superintendent noted, the board consensus was to see a minimum MS ST of 7:30a or 7:35a. To facilitate this modification within a reasonable cost, CNMC suggested other potential tweaks, such as a standardized length of day across all schools or an 8:40a start for Thomas Jefferson High School.

August 2014  
The American Academy of Pediatrics publishes its [position paper](#), recommending that MS and HS delay the start of class to 8:30a or later.

The MS ST is ultimately set at 7:30a. FCPS planned to continue to offer a free MS after-school program 5 days a week.

**September:** With strong consensus, the FCPS school board agreed to post Superintendent Garza's preferred plan as New Business on September 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Blueprint for Change Preferred Plan with Standard Length of Day (6 hours, 45 minutes)**

	ES	MS	SS/HS
2014-15	8:00a - 9:20a	7:20a - 8:05a	7:20a – 7:30a
Preferred Plan	8:00a - 9:20a	7:30a	8:00a - 8:10a

At the time, Dr. Garza indicated her goal to continue working to get the middle school start times closer to 8:00a in the future.

Notes from the board’s work session indicated that the preferred plan returned the district’s bus fleet size to what it had been in 2009. Despite increases in student enrollment since 2009, the bus fleet had shrunk.

**October:** The FCPS school board voted 11 to 1 to implement the new bell schedule. The school board indicated a desire to continue working to improve MS STs. In the adopted plan:

- ◆ ES starts between 8:00a and 9:20a
  - 40 ES had no change in ST
  - Only 8 ES shifted by 10 minutes. These schools start at 8:30a or 8:35a

November 2014  
National Geographic *Sleepless in America* documentary features SLEEP.

- ◆ MS starts at 7:30a
- ◆ SS starts at 8:00a
- ◆ Regular HS starts at 8:10a
- ◆ TJHSST starts at 8:40a

## 2015

Blueprint for Change bell schedule implemented. A total of 47 buses were added to implement the new schedule, at a cost of \$5.4M, mostly due to the decision to keep all SS students at an 8:00a ST. Despite the added cost, the school board decided it was important to keep secondary school 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders on the 8:00a schedule with the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders in those buildings.

Additional bell adjustments were made in response to unexpected issues (mostly to support the breakfast program). This resulted in the addition of 11 more buses, at a cost of \$1.3M.

There was little in the local press regarding implementation challenges. In *The Connection*, the superintendent [reported](#) a smooth and successful start. The *Washington Post* [reported](#) smooth traffic on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of school “despite new start times.”

Fall 2016  
On the [Fairfax Youth Survey](#), 52% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported getting less than 8 hours of sleep on a school night.

## 2017

**January:** In the January 30<sup>th</sup> public hearing on the budget, the budget proposal included potentially eliminating:

- ◆ some MS/HS late buses
- ◆ eliminating busing to AAP centers when there is a local Level IV option
- ◆ the later HS STs

In addition to testimony against making those cuts, testimony was given in 1 other relevant area:

- ◆ A representative of the Bus Drivers and Attendants Advisory Council (BDAAC) stated that the division only had 94% of the drivers needed. He blamed the reduction in potential work hours (an unintended consequence of Blueprint for Change) and the increase in the number of teacher workdays (when no buses operate). Other representatives of the BDAAC lobbied for paying drivers on holidays and teacher workdays.

Fall 2017  
On the [Fairfax Youth Survey](#), 51% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported getting less than 8 hours of sleep on a school night.

## 2018

Fall 2018  
 On the [Fairfax Youth Survey](#), 52% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported getting less than 8 hours of sleep on a school night.

## 2019

Fall 2019  
 On the [Fairfax Youth Survey](#), 55% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported getting less than 8 hours of sleep on a school night.

## 2020

**March:** COVID-19 pandemic. All Virginia schools are required to switch to virtual education for the remainder of the school year.

**April:** The April 20<sup>th</sup> school board work [session](#) included a discussion of MS STs. Data provided during the session noted some improvements in MS ride times.

### Changes in MS Bus Rides

	Bus Type	Minutes			
		Longest AM Ride	Average AM Ride	Longest PM Ride	Average PM Ride
2014-15	Reg Ed	80	29	85	24
	Sped	76	47	76	41
2015-16	Red Ed	68	28	63	22
	Sped	81	40	80	38
2019-20	Red Ed	68	28	79	22
	Sped	70	44	82	39

At the time, the transportation system needed:

- ◆ ES: 1046 reg ed and 389 sped buses

- ◆ MS: 532 reg ed and 122 sped buses
- ◆ HS: 699 reg ed and 231 sped buses

The COO presented 4 new potential plans for bell times, in response to the school board’s request to analyze just moving MS STs.

**Proposed New Bell Times to Shift MS STs Later**

	Existing	Plan 1	Plan 2	Plan 3	Plan 4
ES	8:10 - 2:55 9:20 - 4:05	No change	8:00 – 2:40 9:15 – 3:55	8:40 – 3:20 9:45 – 4:25	7:30 – 2:10 9:05 – 3:45
MS	7:30 – 2:15	8:20 – 3:05	8:35 – 3:15	8:40 - 3:20	9:30 – 4:10
HS	8:10 – 2:55	No change	9:15 – 3:55	8:00 – 2:40	8:20 – 3:00
TJHSST	8:40 – 4:00	No change	9:15 – 4:35	9:30 – 4:10	9:30 – 4:10
Total cost/(savings)		\$54.4M	\$54.3M	(\$4.5 M)	(\$4.5M)
Increase/(Decrease) in Bus Fleet		332	331	(40-45)	(40-45)

The details of Plans 3 and 4 included:

- ◆ They allowed for after-school activities.
- ◆ They shortened the school day by 5 minutes, eliminating 2 built-in snow days.
- ◆ They potentially shortened TJHSST by 1 period.

Then, Plan 3 required some ES to start later than they currently did while Plan 4 potentially increased the number of ES bus stops for 28 ES in order to address civil twilight concerns.

**August:** FCPS releases the schedule for virtual learning for the 2020-21 school year. The MS classes began at 7:30a as part of the division’s goal to provide a “sense of normalcy” for students. HS and SS classes began at 8:10a, which was a slight shift for SS. Live, face-to-face virtual instruction for all secondary students was provided Tuesday through Friday; Mondays were reserved for independent learning activities.

**2021**

**March:** Between March 2<sup>nd</sup> and March 16<sup>th</sup>, MS students returned to school under a hybrid approach. On in-person days, MS started at 7:30a.

Fall 2021  
On the [Fairfax Youth Survey](#), 60% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported getting less than 8 hours of sleep on a school night.

## 2022

**July:** The FCPS final budget included a recommended FY 2023 expenditure “to update the 2020 study on the fiscal and operational requirements needed to create healthy start times for middle school students.”

**November:** FCPS released an RFP requesting a consulting firm to “to develop an Action Plan to help the School Board of Fairfax County Public Schools attain its goal of starting middle schools at or after 8:00AM.” Perhaps because of the short lead time for a proposal response (11 business days that included the Thanksgiving holiday), the RFP did not receive any responses.

Fall 2022  
 On the [Fairfax Youth Survey](#), 56% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported getting less than 8 hours of sleep on a school night.

## 2023

**January:** A second RFP was released.

**October:** The project was awarded to Prismatic Services, Inc. Due to changes in key FCPS leadership positions, the project did not begin in earnest until January 2024.