

## Tim Lamkin

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**From:** Lisa Alexia <lisa.alexia@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, February 23, 2020 11:09 PM  
**To:** Senate Education  
**Cc:** Katie McCall  
**Subject:** Follow up to Friday's testimony, SMART START SB 149  
**Attachments:** Alaska School Start Time Equivalents 2017 by THE MIDNIGHT SUN TEAM.pdf

Dear Senators,

I thank you for the invitation to submit testimony, and although I was not able to present in person, I submitted written comments which you received on Friday morning, and made comments at the Caucus in Anchorage on Saturday Feb 22.

I watched the recording of the Friday hearing and wanted to followup on a couple questions that emerged.

Regarding Senator Hughes' question as to why the start school later bill didn't pass in Anchorage—much confusion and delay surrounded the school board hearings on this issue that fall, due to lack of a teacher contract. By the time the decision was made, it was by a new school board with some members that had not been involved in the previous several years' research and community outreach. The fact that Anchorage went through this entire process but still didn't change the start times, I believe demonstrates why decisions about public health and safety need to be made at a higher level and based on epidemiology, (such as seat belt laws and vaccination requirements) as local decisions may not rely on the best science but rather, more seasonal and political whims.

Senator Coghill brought up a key issue about the issue of school start times in Western Alaska and wanted to know if schools there have compensated for their longitude with a later start time. And Katie was prepared for this question, having learned that each district sets its own start time and that the state does not keep track of that information. This is true, and it makes the research more time-consuming. Both the CDC and the Midnight Sun Team did research this question by calling school districts directly.

The answer is complicated. The CDC listed Alaska as having more schools that start closer to recommended times than much of the nation. They didn't take into account the population size of the communities queried (at last check, the two largest cities, Anchorage and Fairbanks, both start their high schools at 7:30), nor did the CDC adjust for how far west the town was to calculate a solar equivalent school start time. Thus the true picture is far worse than the CDC conveyed. (If you'd like me to send you a copy of that study, let me know).

The Midnight Sun Team of students referenced in my 2017 editorial (included in the documents for this bill) also researched this question by calling around to about a dozen different communities, and making adjustments for longitude. I have attached a PDF of that spreadsheet. Some of these figures will have changed if start times have adjusted, such as in Juneau; some numbers represent middle school start times rather than high school (So, for example, Anchorage high schools actually start at 7:30, meaning their solar equivalent start time on Halloween is 5:45 am). You can see in the middle column, School Start Time Equivalent October 31st, AKDT, that under daylight saving time, there might be no place in the state that meets the intent of the recommendations to start after 8:30 a.m.

What this means, is that if this bill is passed, it sets only a very minimum bar for districts—however, because it would affect Anchorage and Fairbanks, it could have a significant population benefit on the two largest cities. They could potentially decide to shift ALL the schools later or rearrange the bus schedules, but regardless, they'd be forced to address and improve the situation for at least the teens, who are on a later sleep cycle. Passing this law would not be enough to help in the far western reaches of the state, but it's an important start, and there are a few western villages

that would benefit from this. The truth is, communities revolve around the schools, so entire communities would in fact adjust, and benefit, from later start times.

Lastly, Senators, it is important to be aware of these issues with regard to bills in the House concerning time zones. Eliminating Daylight Saving Time could be just as important to protecting students' learning and health. HB 43, while titled "Eliminate Daylight Saving Time" is quite misleading; the second part of this act would petition the US DOT to hold hearings about changing the time zones in AK—with consideration of changing to Pacific Standard Time. This would be equivalent to permanent DST. And HB 173 clearly proposes to make Daylight Saving Time permanent. Permanent DST would mean that every school start time in the last column below would be an hour earlier. (Imagine starting school at a solar equivalent start time of 4:45 in the morning December on St. Paul Island—which is further south than Juneau!)

Thus, both of these time zone acts, if passed completely as intended, would contravene the intent of starting school later.

Feel free to let me know if any questions.

Thank you,  
Lisa Alexia, PA-C