



Anchorage School District

Education Center

5530 E. Northern Lights Blvd. • Anchorage, AK 99504 • 907-742-4000 • www.asdk12.org

March 17, 2020

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Anchorage School District (ASD) administration supports SB 149 High School Start Time. This bill addresses school start time research to better meet student needs. The start time issue is not new in ASD. In the fall of 2017, a West High School student, Matthew Park, began an online student petition through change.org, titled, *"Push start times in ASD high schools to 8:30 a.m."*

In a few short months, the petition gathered more than 5,000 signatures. In the appeal for signatures, Matthew articulated a clear motive for desired change,

"As the next school year approaches, the daunting idea of yet another year of heavy workloads and lack of sleep crosses the minds of thousands of high school students around Anchorage. With the first classes of the day starting at 7:30 a.m., students are exhausted, unfocused, and held back from performing to the best of their academic abilities."

At the beginning of the 2017-18 school year, the matter of school start time was an initiative for the School Board. The Board tasked ASD administration to evaluate the possibility of modifying school start times based on existing science and several community recommendations.

The District hired Western Demographics, a private entity with extensive, nationwide experience and expertise in this field, to provide informed and refined research on the topic, facilitate scenario development, conduct community wide and district-level surveys, and to host open house meetings in multiple schools across the District.

National research on optimized school start times suggests that middle and high school students should not start school until after 8:30 a.m. Likewise, university research and hospital studies indicate improvements in middle and high school student performance and wellness given later start times.

Middle and high school students who get eight hours or more of sleep experience less depression, have more energy, are less likely to use tobacco and consume junk food, and make better decisions. Furthermore, a Rand Corporation study indicates that high school student safety could improve dramatically with later start times. Research suggests elementary students rise early and tire by mid-afternoon.

Our research found that school districts that changed to later secondary start times report improved grades and GPA's, higher test scores, less tardiness, and increases in attendance rates and graduation percentages. Most importantly, they do not change back once they adjust to the

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research proven times. The data and feedback gathered from other school districts supports the research and science. It is our belief that the probable performance and wellness benefits gained by students, primarily in high schools and middle schools, warrants a change in start times.

The Anchorage School Board consequently voted not to change the school start times when it came before them for a vote. The primary public testimony against the change came internally from staff who found it difficult to alter their schedules. What became evident is that daily routines are some of the most difficult things to change. Research tells us as well that the human element in change theory is the most complex piece of any change.

You see, if high schools were to go later, all other school times would need to adjust, respectively. ASD operates on a four tier bus system. Presently, it runs in the order of high schools, middle schools, elementary schools, and finally, preschools, beginning at 7:30 a.m. in 45-minute rotations. Hence, if high schools change, so would all other school levels unless additional funds were provided for transportation. ASD sought to make the change with minimal cost due to the state revenue in transportation remaining flat.

In summary, while our families, students, staff, and community may have experienced some anxiety initially in changing daily routine behaviors, support for this late start bill is grounded in the understanding of what is best for Alaskan adolescents' health. The research is very clear on teen brains—they need a later start time as their internal clocks after puberty are literally pushed back two hours. Even when they try to go to bed early, their brains cannot shut off.

Thank you for providing an opportunity for me to offer support for SB 149 High School Start Time. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deena M. Bishop', with a stylized, cursive script.

Deena M. Bishop, Ed.D.
Superintendent