

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 20, 2020

9:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes, Vice Chair
Senator John Coghill
Senator Mia Costello

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Tom Begich

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 149

"An Act relating to the start time of a day in session for public high schools."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 149

SHORT TITLE: HIGH SCHOOL START TIME

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) COSTELLO

01/21/20	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/21/20	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/20/20	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

KATIE MCCALL, Intern
Senator Mia Costello
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented SB 149 on behalf of the bill sponsor.

NORM WOOTEN, Executive Director
Association of Alaska School Boards
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions about SB 149.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:00:38 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Costello, Hughes, and Chair Stevens. Senator Coghill arrived shortly thereafter.

SB 149-HIGH SCHOOL START TIME

[9:00:50 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 149, "An Act relating to the start time of a day in session for public high schools."

He stated his intention to hear the bill and set it aside for future review. He invited bill sponsor Senator Costello to the table.

[9:01:12 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO, speaking as sponsor of SB 149, said she has been watching the results of an online poll [about high school start times] conducted by a high school student and the support is rising each hour.

[9:02:04 AM](#)

KATIE MCCALL, Intern, Senator Mia Costello, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said SB 149 is the Smart Start bill which would change the start time for high schools in Alaska to 8:30 a.m. or later. The aim of the bill is to improve academic achievement by ensuring that students are alert and adequately prepared for the school day. Medical research has shown strong support for later start times, particularly for high school students.

MS. MCCALL said adolescent sleep deprivation is a growing concern as it has adverse impacts on student health and success in the classroom. Without adequate sleep, the health, behavior, and safety of adolescents are negatively affected.

MS. MCCALL said the National Sleep Foundation supports the theory that teenagers experience a biological shift in their natural circadian rhythms. Adolescents' natural sleep patterns result in a later-to-bed, later-to-rise cycle. In adolescence,

the brain chemical melatonin is secreted from 11 p.m. until 8 a.m. Early school start times interrupt the natural sleep pattern of teenagers, so these students are in class when their brains and bodies are still in biological sleep mode.

MS. MCCALL said teenagers already face disproportionately high mortality rates, and motor vehicle accidents are a significant contributor. Driving while drowsy only increases the likelihood of an accident. According to an article by Dr. Perri Klass, in members' packets, sleeping less than four hours puts someone at the same risk as driving with double the legal alcohol limit. Teen drivers are already inexperienced behind the wheel, but sleep-deprived teenagers become an even greater hazard to themselves and others.

MS. MCCALL shared that districts have seen positive results after moving to a later start time. The School Start Time Study followed two Minneapolis-area districts that changed their high school start times from 7:20 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. in one district and from 7:20 a.m. to 8:40 a.m. in another. The study found many positive benefits, including improved attendance and enrollment rates, less sleeping in class, less student-reported depression, fewer student visits to school counselors for behavior and peer issues, and more even temperament at home.

[9:05:43 AM](#)

MS. MCCALL said the School Start Time Study was a longitudinal study that revealed that the later school start time had lasting positive impacts.

MS. MCCALL said research supports the theory that students perform better later in the day. The Oxford Handbook of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Sleep and Behavior states that high school students tend to perform better in courses that are later in the day and perform better on cognitive tests that are given in the afternoon.

MS. MCCALL said the American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends that teenagers, ages 13 to 18 years, should regularly sleep 8 to 10 hours per day for good health. Adolescents who do not get enough sleep are more likely to be overweight, not engage in daily physical activity, suffer from symptoms of depression, and engage in unhealthy risk behaviors such as drinking, smoking tobacco, and using illicit drugs. These adolescents also perform poorly in school.

MS. MCCALL said the Juneau School District has already implemented later start times in the high schools. Juneau-Douglas High School and Thunder Mountain High School begin at 9:15 a.m. and end at 3:35 p.m. Yaakoosgé Daakahídi High School begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m.

MS. MCCALL said an article in the Fairbanks Daily News Miner reported that the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District surveyed 3,000 parents, staff, students, and community members. According to the survey, 65 percent of respondents indicated respondents would "support" or be "very supportive" of changing start times.

MS. MCCALL reviewed past proposals to implement later start times. According to a 2018 KTUU article, the Anchorage School Board considered a proposal to change school start times. The Anchorage School District said this would improve performance, attendance, and graduation rates for middle and high school students.

CHAIR STEVENS asked if districts currently could do this, and SB 149 would mandate that high schools change the start time.

MS. MCCALL agreed that schools can change start times now and that the bill says that 8:30 a.m. is the earliest that high schools can begin.

[9:09:55 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked whether the Anchorage School District has any plans to change the start time. She recalled that Chugiak High School still starts at 7:30 a.m.

MS. MCCALL replied the proposal was ultimately unsuccessful, but there is considerable support for it, especially from students and parents. Many students are still advocating for later start times.

SENATOR HUGHES said she could not imagine a survey in which teenagers would not support a later start time. She asked why the Anchorage School District did not change the start time. She acknowledged that in her area, busing is often a challenge.

MS. MCCALL answered logistics of busing is a considerable barrier, but there are successful examples in some districts. For example, Juneau made it work. She related her understanding that it comes down to deciding whether to change elementary and middle school times due to busing schedules. This bill only

addresses the high school start time since the logistics are left to school districts to decide.

SENATOR COSTELLO said she did not want to make light of the fact that teens are asking for this. She read from the change.org survey from Matthew Park, a student at West High School:

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 AM, students are exhausted, unfocused, and held back from performing to the best of their academic abilities.

SENATOR COSTELLO said when the legislature has previously considered start times, it was clear that school districts have the option to make that choice since Alaska favors local control. However, the legislature sets policy and if every decision were left to districts, there would be no need for the education committees.

[9:13:52 AM](#)

SENATOR COSTELLO quoted from an article by Lisa Alexia in members' packets, "Starting school later is perhaps the single greatest investment you can make in education, health, and safety of high school students in Alaska." She reported the American Medical Association, Centers for Disease Control, and the American Academy of Pediatrics all endorse high school start times being no earlier than 8:30 a.m. based on solid research demonstrating the profound improvements that starting later can have on mental health, learning, and safety.

SENATOR COSTELLO shared that she has a Master of Arts in Teaching and is a nationally recognized high school teacher. When she was pursuing her teaching degree, she read that a new idea in the field of education takes 32 years to reach fruition in classrooms, even when the concept is backed by research. However, the turnaround time in medicine is three years. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game's policies are entirely based on research with great results. However, the legislature cannot seem to apply research-based policies for students. She expressed support for the bill so students can derive the benefits.

CHAIR STEVENS said that in his experience, high school and college always started too early.

MS. MCCALL added that extra-curricular activities start before school, so students frequently come to high school at 6:00 a.m. or 6:30 a.m. In her experience many of these students are also involved in after school activities. If the high school start time is moved to 8:30 a.m., some students will arrive at 7:30 a.m., which is much better than 6:00 a.m.

[9:18:03 AM](#)

SENATOR COGHILL asked for the range [of start times] in Alaska.

MS. MCCALL replied she reached out to the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), but it does not have data on specific districts and start times. She said she would do more research and follow up with the answer.

SENATOR COGHILL suggested the committee directly ask the Department of Education and Early Development for the information.

CHAIR STEVENS agreed.

[9:19:15 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS opened public testimony. He asked Mr. Wooten if he had any comments on SB 149.

[9:19:33 AM](#)

NORM WOOTEN, Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB), Juneau, Alaska, replied that the association has not adopted a resolution for this, so he is not authorized to comment on the bill. He offered to communicate with his members so board members can provide comments during public testimony.

SENATOR COGHILL suggested that the AASB could provide information and any discussion on high school start times.

MR. WOOTEN responded that he would mention that and perhaps the association could provide some information to the committee.

[9:21:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS held SB 149 in committee and noted that written testimony could be emailed to senate.education@akleg.gov.

[9:22:06 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 9:22 a.m.