



To: Board of Education
FROM: Superintendent, John J. Hood
DATE: May 9, 2024
RE: School Start Times- Superintendent Recommendation

Over the past few months, we have engaged in extensive dialogue with various employee groups and departments to both inform and solicit input on the proposed adjustment to our school start times. Our gratitude is extended to all who participated and shared their valuable insights through our school start times survey. The candid feedback on this pivotal issue is greatly appreciated.

As you are aware, the topic of start times elicits impassioned responses, reflecting the deeply personal nature of this matter, which is intricately tied to family and work dynamics. Dr. Hanne Hoffmann's research on the potential benefits of later start times for high school students, particularly in terms of mental health and academic performance, was a focal point of our discussions. While the majority of our staff acknowledged the compelling nature of this research, they also expressed concerns about potential unintended consequences.

One of the main concerns was the impact on our students and staff if Okemos was the only school district to make the change. There was more of a willingness to consider a start times change if it was applied statewide, or at least across the Ingham ISD schools to remove many of the barriers to implementation and help mitigate many of the negative impacts on Okemos students.

Staff wondered about students missing additional instructional time to attend athletics, impacts on attendance at extracurricular activities, and limiting after-school time for employment. They shared concerns about equitable access to school opportunities should activities that connect students to school be moved before school with no district transportation to get there to participate. It was shared that elementary students cannot go later in the day and an earlier

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dismissal would be good for that population, but also safety concerns about students at the morning bus stop in the dark and being home before older siblings after school.

Staff members were concerned about the impact on childcare and the potential for increased expenses to our families. For our staff members who have students in childcare or attending schools in other districts, they shared that a proposed change would likely cause an extra financial and logistical burden because of the difference in the schedules. Others shared the additional difficulty of attracting and retaining employees, as being one of the only districts to change may unintentionally deter people from applying or staying, particularly if childcare costs increase. Staff who do not have children at home seemed more supportive of the change.

While Okemos is a leader in innovation, we heard that the capacity for additional change within the district is currently low. Staff want us to focus on quality implementation of the many initiatives the district is already working on districtwide including: multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), literacy training, universal accommodations, universal design, mental health, NWEA data, standards-based grading, the Filter First law for clean drinking water, education around policy changes, a revised teacher evaluation system, improving student connectedness, and implementing the 2022 Bond – to name but a few.

After consideration of many factors, including feedback from our employee groups, on May 13, I will recommend to the Board of Education that we:

- do not implement a stand alone start time change at this time;
- educate to bring greater awareness to the importance of sleep for our teens;
- interrogate district practices to allow additional opportunities for student sleep; and
- advocate to promote a potential start time change at the county or statewide level.

It is my belief that advocating for a county or statewide change would help alleviate many of the identified barriers to effective implementation and represent the most beneficial path forward for our students and staff.

I am thankful for the open and constructive dialogue that took place within each employee group, as well as for the thoughtful reflections centered on the well-being of our students, families, employees, and district as a whole. The feedback regarding organizational capacity and collaborative approaches to driving positive change is invaluable and deeply appreciated.

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