



STATE COLLEGE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of the Superintendent

240 VILLA CREST DRIVE • STATE COLLEGE PENNSYLVANIA • 16801

TELEPHONE: 814-231-1016 • FAX: 814-231-4130

To: Board of Directors  
From: Robert O'Donnell, Vern Bock, Will Stout, Randy Brown  
Re: Proposed student day changes for 2018-2019 school year  
Date: September 8, 2017

“Both research and practice indicate that adding time to the school day and/or year can have a meaningfully positive impact on student proficiency and, indeed, upon a child’s entire educational experience.”

—*The National Center on Time and Learning*

---

Our commitment is to every student, every day. In that spirit, we are proposing two key elements that will improve student learning. With an elementary school day extended by 44 minutes, we would enhance student opportunities through increased core learning experiences, additional art, library, music, physical education (PE), a world language, consistent recess, as well as adding an integrated health and wellness curriculum. At the secondary level (grades 6-12), we desire a school day that starts 30 minutes later to naturally align with teenagers’ circadian rhythms (body clock) — specifically a student day that supports their physiological, emotional, social, and academic development.

Created in collaboration with teachers, staff members, parents and community members, this proposal aligns with the district’s strategic goals to engage and support the whole student, foster continuous growth for every child, and close individual achievement and opportunity gaps. Moreover, the daily experiences of students will more tightly align our work with our district’s mission: *To prepare students for lifelong success through excellence in education.*

For clarification, it is not our intention to increase elementary students’ workload. Our intent is to provide more time in the school day for students to learn what is currently being taught. Additionally, the increased time will allow for more in-depth and innovative learning experiences. Moving forward, we will continue with our efforts to update our curriculum and professional practices; our current work with language arts is an example of how students will experience more responsive and engaging learning with our teachers.

Beginning with our initial community discussions in April and continuing through our spring community forums, we have reflected on the feedback and have completed most of the detailed transportation work necessary to further inform this proposal. To that end, this refinement contains many changes that enhancements.

We have organized this document as follows:

- I. Proposed school day times for 2018-2019
- II. Elementary student day
- III. Secondary student day
- IV. Closing achievement and opportunity gaps
- V. Transportation
- VI. Budget implications
- VII. Outreach and communication
- VIII. Future considerations

Our hope is for the Board to take action on this proposal during its October 9 meeting. This would enable us to focus on the actions required to implement the proposed changes.

**I. Proposed school day times for 2018-19**

The below chart outlines preliminary school day times. Because we plan to implement these changes for the 2018-2019 school year, we will work through many detailed adjustments and building level operational updates throughout the 2017-2018 school year.

Schools	Current Times	Proposed Times
Elementary	8:44 a.m. - 2:50 p.m.	8:10 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.*
Middle	8:10 a.m. - 3:12 p.m.	8:40 a.m. - 3:42 p.m.**
High	8:10 a.m. - 3:16 p.m.	8:40 a.m. - 3:40 p.m.

\* This is a change from the spring proposal, which was 8:00 a.m.

\*\* The middle schools would have a second wave bus dismissal at 3:47 p.m. (currently 3:17 p.m.).

**II. Elementary student day**

By increasing our elementary student day, we expect this plan would result in improved student learning. This is consistent with research focusing on extending learning time beyond the average 6.5 hour elementary student day; our current elementary student day is six hours and six minutes.

For each student’s six-year elementary education, this proposal would increase learning experiences by approximately one additional year cumulatively for core subjects (language arts,

mathematics, science, and social studies). That is, students would experience an increase of approximately 424 hours of learning in these subject areas (24 minutes/day).

We know that better prepared teachers result in richer learning experiences for students. Our newly implemented curriculum requires that teachers differentiate learning for multiple levels of students in a range of subjects in the same class, thereby making learning more individualized. This demands complex planning and collaboration with colleagues and specialists to best meet students' needs. Consequently, teachers will individually get almost an additional 25 minutes per day for planning, as well as 50 minutes per week to collaborate in professional learning communities (PLCs). Finally, this proposal brings our elementary colleagues more in line with the level of planning that is provided to their secondary counterparts.

### **Community concerns**

During our community outreach over the last several months, we collected feedback regarding the following aspects that affect our elementary students' experiences:

- A. Homework
- B. Options for kindergarten students
- C. World language and culture
- D. Recess and physical activity
- E. Before school programming
- F. Music ensembles

#### **A. Homework**

The increased time for learning during the school day will result in decreased homework. Also, our homework policy is currently being reviewed by our Board of Directors and will be finalized during the fall of 2017 and will include changes.

#### **B. Options for kindergarten students**

The proposed day would allow teachers to implement more developmentally appropriate activities for kindergarten students, which our teachers strongly desire. Our plan is not to add more curriculum into the day. Rather, we intend to implement imaginative free play and additional physical activity.

Many districts still have a half-day kindergarten program. Our district believes a full day program provides a richer, more varied learning experience for students. However, we do have families that select a half-day option for their child, and they will continue to have this choice.

#### **C. World language and culture**

We believe that the implementation of a foreign language and culture in our elementary schools will further improve the development of our elementary students. This will provide them a foundation to achieve future success in an increasingly diverse society. Additionally, in the 2014 parent survey, the majority of parents that supported exploring a longer school day indicated a desire to add a world language experience for elementary students.

The increased school day provides the ability to add world language and culture as an additional special that meets once every five days for 50 minutes. Early exposure to a foreign language is a

gateway to future language acquisition. As we look forward, after six years of exposure to a foreign language and culture, sixth graders would be eligible to take a first level high school foreign language course. This will create an opportunity for students to meet college foreign language requirements in middle school and, as a result, open up the high school schedule for more options, to possibly include a second language.

The culture-focused experiences would align well with Board policy 105-School Climate/Inclusive Excellence.

*Inclusive Excellence is the understanding that working, living, and learning environments benefit when diversity in thought, learning, and personal characteristics is recognized and utilized. Inclusive Excellence helps us to engage in civil conversation with those who hold views that differ from our own; and to socialize with persons who have had different life experiences. In both class and field experiences, inclusive excellence is addressed through ample opportunities to learn about diverse cultures, both locally and globally.*

Should our Board support the proposal to move forward, we will then engage our elementary community in conversations regarding the development of a specific world language and culture curriculum.

**D. Recess and physical activity**

The district recognizes the importance of recess. This proposal provides for an additional 30 minute recess each week resulting in consistency across all elementary schools, as well as 10 minutes more of physical education (PE) weekly. This results in an additional 18 hours of recess and six hours of PE during the course of the year. Currently, our teachers have the latitude to assess their students' physical and emotional needs throughout the school day to provide additional breaks and other physical activity as needed. Because of the additional time in the proposal, the teachers would have more opportunities to be responsive.

**E. Before school programming options**

Should the Board approve the proposed school day changes, our Community Education Extended Learning (CEEL) program would continue to offer both before and after school programming options. For elementary students, the before school programming would begin at 7:30 a.m. More details will be released during the winter registration window.

**F. Music ensembles**

Currently, optional elementary music ensembles (band, choir, orchestra) for grades 4 and 5 meet before school. We have been exploring solutions that encompass before, during, and after school options. Our next steps will include discussions with our music teachers and outreach to families.

### III. Secondary student day

At this time, our secondary schools' start time of 8:10 a.m. runs counter to the body of evidence in sleep research recommending a later start time for adolescent students. The overwhelming research calls for a secondary start time between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m., including from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

According to the AAP,

*“The AAP strongly supports the efforts of school districts to optimize sleep in students and urges high schools and middle schools to aim for start times that allow students the opportunity to achieve optimal levels of sleep (8.5–9.5 hours) and to improve physical (eg, reduced obesity risk), mental (eg, lower rates of depression) health, safety (eg, drowsy driving crashes), academic performance, and quality of life.”*

Our proposal would have secondary school start 30 minutes later, at 8:40 a.m. This step and the AAP's recommendations are consistent with the recent RAND Corporation report: Later School Start Times in the U.S.: An Economic Analysis.

In the proposal, the dismissal time for middle schools would shift from 3:12 p.m. (first wave) and 3:17 p.m. (second wave) to 3:42 (first wave).

Because the high school day dismissal time would be 24 minutes later at 3:40 p.m., our high school principals will collaborate with students, counselors and teachers to identify needs for students who participate in co-curricular, extra-curricular or internship experiences and provide flexibility in academic scheduling. To provide flexible options to students, we will offer the following opportunities beginning with the 2018-19 school year: zero period (7:45 - 8:30 a.m.) and online learning course options. Additionally, we will communicate scheduling review options with our counselors; although this practice is currently in place, we will promote this service to parents and students to a higher degree during spring and summer 2018.

#### **Athletics**

Because many of our student athletes compete at times requiring early dismissal from school, we have started collaborating with the Mid Penn Conference to improve how we schedule competitions, including more Saturday competitions and other ways to reduce the amount of competitions during the week.

Below is a list of athletics teams and their typical dismissal times for away competitions in the Harrisburg area.

<b>High School</b>	<b>Typical Dismissal Time</b>
9th Grade Basketball	2:00 p.m.

Tennis	12:30 p.m.
Cross Country	1:30 p.m.
Soccer	1:30 p.m.
Volleyball	2:00 p.m.
Field Hockey	2:00 p.m.
Wrestling	3:00 p.m.
Basketball	3:00 p.m.
Lacrosse	2:00 p.m.
Softball	2:00 p.m.
Golf	1:00 p.m.

#### **IV. Closing achievement and opportunity gaps**

In many ways, SCASD is a high-performing district. However, we must serve our historically underperforming (HU - English language learners, students with learning disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students) students better. National and state level assessment results reinforce our critical need to improve, particularly when compared to school districts with a similar level of affluence. One example: Our third grade HU students' performance in math and reading ranks 378th and 375th, respectively, among 500 school districts statewide.

Research shows it's imperative to have more time during the day to close the achievement gap. According to the [National Center on Time and Learning](#): "Both research and practice indicate that adding time to the school day and/or year can have a meaningfully positive impact on student proficiency and, indeed, upon a child's entire educational experience."

This past school year, our district engaged in a year-long strategic planning effort, which included students, parents, staff, and members of the community. Through this process, we established a goal to close achievement and opportunity gaps for all students.

At the elementary level, 8% of our students are achieving in the bottom quartile compared to a national norm group as measured by Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) math and reading assessments. Notably, these students' scores are growing substantially less than similar students, as their median growth percentile was at the 15th percentile from fall to spring; the growth for these students should be at or above the 50th percentile. That is, our struggling students show less academic growth than other similar students across the country.

The following information was obtained from our district's administration of the PSSA assessments in grades 3-8 grades during the 2015-2016 school year (PSSA data is not yet available for the 2016-2017 school year). This data is for HU students, which is comprised of English Language Learners, students with learning disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students.

- In English Language Arts, 733 of 2,736 students (26.8%) were classified in the HU subgroup by the state. 50.6% of these students scored basic or below basic toward attaining grade level academic standards.
- In mathematics, 737 of 2,749 students (26.8%) were classified in the HU subgroup by the state. 68.5% of these students scored basic or below basic toward attaining grade level academic standards.

Although the above assessment information is only from two different assessments, these highlight the need for us to better support our most at-risk learners.

Our current elementary day does not allow interventions/enrichment to occur outside of core instruction, i.e. students are missing valuable learning in science and social studies to receive an intervention. Our proposal would allow us to structure our language arts period so that students will longer miss core instruction to receive necessary intervention/enrichment services.

By shifting the secondary day to a later start time, we're addressing physiological needs that research shows increases students' achievement, health and overall well-being. Healthier students learn better. Additionally, a recent RAND Corporation Study states that later school start times for adolescents support better academic performance and reduced rates of car crashes (<https://goo.gl/vw13C2>).

## **V. Transportation**

We currently begin picking up secondary students at 6:38 a.m. The new secondary student bus pick up times would begin at approximately 7:30 a.m., which addresses our concerns regarding our early morning transportation practices, with only two buses picking up students prior to 7:30 a.m.

In addition, the new start times would cause the earliest student pick-up times for elementary students to be 7:00-7:10 a.m. Out of 60 elementary bus runs, we currently project only three buses that would pick up prior to 7:10 a.m. Although the earlier elementary start could mean some students sometimes having to wait briefly for buses in low light conditions, we would continue striving for on-time pickups to minimize waiting times. During the month of January when we experience the latest sunrise of the year, the [civil dawn](#) (just prior to sunrise) occurs between 7:00 and 7:05 a.m. Because of the complexity of our transportation operations, we will continue to refine them in an effort to improve morning pick up times.

Should the proposed school times be implemented for the 2018-2019 school year, we will see the below estimated times for morning student pick up and afternoon drop off.

	<b>Current elementary student busing times</b>	<b>Proposal’s impact on elementary student busing times (2018-2019)</b>	<b>Current secondary student busing times</b>	<b>Proposal’s impact on secondary student busing times (2018-2019)</b>
First Pick-up to School Drop Off	7:34 - 8:40 a.m.	7:10 - 7:55 a.m.	6:38 - 7:50 a.m.	7:19 - 8:35 a.m.
Initial to Last Drop Off	2:58 - 4:03 p.m.	3:08 - 4:14 p.m.	3:30 - 4:40 p.m.	4:00 - 5:10 p.m.

To help clarify the above ranges, we’ve included the below information.

- Only one elementary bus route has students scheduled to be dropped off after 4pm.
- The proposal would result in approximately two-thirds of all students arriving home within 30 minutes of dismissal.
- Because the earliest bus pick up times are almost 25-30 minutes later than our current times, this would help us with the decision making time frame when experiencing or anticipating poor road conditions due to winter weather.

To achieve the student day proposed schedule, we will need to add three bus drivers to our complement. No additional school buses will need to be purchased; the required additional buses will come from our existing fleet. We are currently examining the impact that the extended day would have on work hours required for bus drivers.

We currently transport students to five private/charter schools that utilize our high school buses. These same students are then transported on shuttle buses to their respective schools. We have engaged in discussion with the local private/charter schools regarding the student day proposal. Our intent is to maintain the same transportation arrangements for these private/charter students in order to avoid excessive increases to transportation costs. At this time, three of the five have committed to the new times; we are in discussions with the remaining two and expect resolution by the end of September.

## **VI. Budget implications**

For this plan to be realized, we have estimated required staffing increases. Due to the addition of a fifth elementary special, we estimate the need for 8 to 10 additional teaching positions. Also, we anticipate a need for an increase in support staff hours to support the new elementary student schedule. Collectively, we anticipate increased staffing costs to be approximately \$1 million, including salary and benefits expenses. Even though the elementary teachers’ day would be longer, they are not receiving additional compensation because they are now in line with the secondary teacher day.



Our estimated increase in annual transportation costs was originally \$550,000 for additional equipment and driver costs. Based upon our analysis thus far, we believe the cost will fall below this original estimate, potentially as low as \$250,000.

## **VII. Outreach and communication**

Prior to presenting the proposal for Board approval on Oct. 9, we will hold two public informational sessions, on Sept. 19 at Park Forest Middle School and on Sept. 20 at Mount Nittany Middle School. Both will start at 7 p.m. Additionally, principals will facilitate discussions with their schools' respective Parent-Teacher Organizations.

## **VIII. Future considerations**

As with any large scale complex change, we expect to take advantage of opportunities to continuously improve how we serve our students and their families.

As we consider evaluating our district's work with students, we propose that Board-approved goals, measures and benchmarks within the district's strategic plan be utilized for how we determine the success of these changes.

Pending Board support of this proposal, we have commitments from the below professionals to help us provide parent workshops focusing on best practices to support children through the changes in sleep patterns due to school time shifts.

1. Dr. Orfeu Buxton
2. Dr. Anne Marie Chang
3. Dr. John Solic