

SAU #39 Board

Thursday, February 18th, 2021

Meeting Minutes- Approved 03 18 2021

Attendees:

Administrative Team: Adam Steel- Superintendent, Christine Landwehrle- Assistant Superintendent, Meg Beauchamp- Director of Student Services, Michele Croteau- SAU #39 Business Administrator, Anna Parrill- Principal CW, Dr. Kim Sarfde - Principal MVVS, Dr. Bethany Bernasconi, Mike Berry- Principal SHS, and Roger Preston- Director of Facilities.

Amherst School Board: Chair- Elizabeth Kuzsma, Vice Chair- Tom Gauthier, Secretary- Ellen Gruzdien, Terri Behm and Josh Conklin.

Mont Vernon Village School Board: Chair- Sarah Lawrence, Vice Chair- Peter Eckhoff, Scott St. Denis and Stephen O'Keefe.

Souhegan Cooperative School Board: Chair- Pim Grondstra, Vice Chair- Amy Facey, Secretary- Stephanie Grund, Steve Coughlan, George Torres, John Glover and Laura Taylor.

Board Minutes: Danae A. Marotta

Public: Marilyn Gibson, 166 Mack Hill Road, Amherst NH, Jenni Watkins, 17 Eastern Avenue, Amherst NH, Erin Tower, 29 Border Street, Amherst NH, Loren Hallett, 8 Old Lantern Way, Amherst NH, Lindsay Harrison, 23 Simeon Wilson Road, Amherst NH, Shannon Gascoyne, 5 Parker Farm Lane, Amherst NH, Tracey Carroll, 6 Brander Court, Amherst NH, Lisa Ericson, 31 North Main Street, Mont Vernon NH, Chiara Yates, 13 Ponemah Hill Road, Amherst NH, Alison Batey, 12 Joshua Road, Amherst NH, Kim Wyborney, 81 Amherst Street, Amherst NH, Emma Crisman, AMS Student, Amherst NH, Annie Shepherd, 13 Fairway Drive, Amherst NH, Tyler Lupoli, AMS Student, Amherst NH, and Nathan Greer, 12 Boylston Terrace, Amherst NH.

I. SAU #39 Chair Opening

Today, we will be conducting a school board meeting of the SAU #39 Board.

Before we get started, I'll read through a checklist to ensure that the meeting that we are holding is in compliance with the Right-to-Know Law.

As chairperson of the SAU #39 Board, I find that due to the state of emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order Number #12, pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04 and its extensions, this public body is authorized to meet electronically. Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order.

In accordance with the Emergency Order, I am confirming that:

1. We are providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possible by video and other electronic means. We are utilizing Zoom for this electronic meeting. All members of the committee and selected district staff have the ability to communicate contemporaneously in this meeting through this platform. And the public has access to contemporaneously watch and or listen to the meeting on Zoom and via phone by following the directions and links provided on our website: www.sau39.org.
2. We have provided public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting.
3. We are providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access. If anyone has a problem, please email awallace@sau39.org.
4. In the event the public is unable to access the meeting will be adjourned and rescheduled.
5. Please note that all votes taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote.
6. Finally, let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance. When each member states their presence please also state where they are and if anyone else is in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to-Know Law.

Kuzsma- Home and alone, Gauthier- Home and alone, Behm- Home and alone, Gruzdien- Home and alone, Conklin- Home and alone, Grondstra- (will be a couple of minutes late), Facey- Home and alone, Coughlan- Home and alone, Taylor- Home and alone, Torres- Home and alone, Grund- Visiting family out of state and alone, Glover- In transit, soon to be home and alone, Lawrence- Home and alone, Eckhoff- Home and alone, St. Denis- Home and alone, O'Keefe- Home and alone and Hinckley- Not present.

II. Consent Agenda

Ms. Kuzsma motioned to approve Consent Agenda items 1. Nov 19th, 2020 Draft Minutes-Revised (Tabled from 01 21 21), 2. Jan 21st, 2021 Draft Minutes, as amended 3. Jan 25th, 2021 Draft Minutes, 4. Oct 2020 Treasurer's Report, 5. Jan 2021 Treasurer's Report and 6. Jan 2021 Facilities Update. Mr. Coughlan seconded the motion. (See the roll call below) Motion passed.

Ms. Grund pulled the #2 Jan 21st, 2021 Draft Minutes.

The correction to line 265 “ *there is nothing in the process that says that they can object to his process*”.

Ms. Taylor noted that Ms. Kelli Braley is the SHS Athletic Director and not the Dean of Students, line #125 of page 23.

Mr. Gauthier inquired about the dividers for desks.

SAU #39 Facilities Director, Mr. Roger Preston, replied, the dividers came from the building administration from CW and AMS. They are Covid related devices.

Ms. Grund asked about the measuring of water at each of the buildings.

Mr. Preston replied that he likes to keep track as part of operations.

Mr. O’Keefe called a roll call: Kuzsma- Yes, Gauthier- Yes, Behm- Yes, Gruzdien- Yes, Conklin- Yes, Grondstra- not present, Facey- Yes, Coughlan- Yes, Taylor- Yes, Torres- Yes, Grund- Yes, Glover- Yes, Lawrence- Yes, Eckhoff- Yes, St. Denis- Yes, O’Keefe- Yes and Hinckley- Not present.

Mr. O’Keefe welcomed the public that are watching and encouraged them to provide their feedback during Public Comment time. There will be three public comment periods, with a limit of 3 minutes per person starting with one right now. After the first Public Comment, they will have a presentation by Superintendent, Mr. Adam Steel, to discuss the school start time changes for FY 21-22 then a comment by board member, Ms. Terri Behm. After that, they will have board discussion and another public comment for specifically the school start time changes. They will then take a motion in the affirmative to adopt the proposed schedule changes. Each board member will give their opinions and then there will be a final public comment.

III. Public Comment I of III

Ms. Marilyn Gibson, 166 Mack Hill Road, thanked the administration and the ASD Ways and Means Committee. She noted her concern, as a resident, that the duplication of jobs in the SAU staff is fiscally unsound. There have been costly expenditures regarding software and the grading system. There has been a tracking history with the SAU and the ASB and there has been a second Assistant Superintendent assigned. That is what the Curriculum Coordinators and Interventionists do, and she is very disappointed with that selection of a second Assistant Superintendent. There is more transparency that is needed, and the new position is just costly.

Ms. Jenni Watkins, 17 Eastern Avenue, Amherst NH, commented that she is concerned about the school start time. She has two current elementary school students and one about to join. She asked the Board to think about an acceptable time for a child to wake up and get to a bus stop. She is also concerned about the research that was used.

Ms. Erin Tower, 29 Border Street, Amherst NH, thanked Mr. Steel and the SAU Board, she appreciates the work that has gone into this. She noted that many parents have moved to the Amherst for the schools and the special education programs. She feels as if the Special Education students are being overlooked.

Ms. Loren Hallett, 8 Old Lantern Way, Amherst NH, noted her concern with the later start time specifically for the high school. A lot of this applies to all three schools. They have only cut 15 minutes off, 3:30PM is late. The high schoolers have had a lot of change and are looking forward to what they know. Additionally, most schools that have shifted across the country have severe attendance and graduation issues. When they are talking about sleep, it has been shown that the

hours do not change with later start times. Lastly, the idea of later start and dismissal, it is a privilege that the community members cannot afford. The average part time working student will miss about 2 hours of pay a day and about 10 hours a week.

Ms. Lindsay Harrison, 23 Simeon Wilson Road, Amherst NH, commented that she has been disappointed about what has happened over the past few weeks. These times are difficult with students being remote and they are all struggling. She is pleased that Mr. Steel had listened to the community about the start times. She has watched the board meetings and feels that everything has changed in the last 24 hours. She encouraged the board to read the surveys and listen to the community.

Ms. Shannon Gascoyne, 5 Parker Farm Lane, Amherst NH, commented that she has been following the topic for many years. It has taken the board a long time to make a decision without any resolution. She thanked the board for their consideration for all aspects. She has listened to all of the board meetings this month and believes that the plan that is being presented will provide the greatest academic good for their students in a way that causes least dominoes to fall. While it doesn't meet the needs of her family 100%, she still supports the board in moving this vote tonight.

Ms. Tracey Carroll, 6 Brander Court, Amherst NH, thanked the administration for creating the best plan for the students. She is concerned with the elementary students being taught in the later afternoon. This is going to reach the best solution for most.

Ms. Lisa Ericson, 31 North Main Street, Mont Vernon NH, commented that she wanted the reiterate the voices for the elementary students. There are other options that may not have been considered and not disrupt the elementary students as much.

Ms. Chiara Yates, 13 Ponemah Hill Road, Amherst NH, thanked Mr. Steel and the school board for accommodating the families. She is in full support of the proposed time change schedule. In her experience she can tell you that it does work.

Chairman O'Keefe closed public comment at this time and thanked the participants. He noted emails that he has received, for and against, will be placed in the record. *(SEE ADDENDUM)*

From: Elizabeth Kuzsma <ekuzsma@sau39.org>
Date: February 18, 2021 at 6:37:24 PM EST
To: Stephen O'Keefe <sokeefe@sau39.org>
Subject: Fwd: Time change

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Kim Wyborne <kwborne@comcast.net>
Date: Thu, Feb 18, 2021 at 6:36 PM
Subject: Time change
To: Elizabeth Kuzsma <ekuzsma@sprise.com>

For some reason I cannot get on correctly to comment, but I wanted to plead with the board to not

have AMS end 15 minutes after SHS. Logistical nightmare! Stressful for staff and parents/families. Please have AMS end at 3!!

IV. Presentation from Superintendent Steel Regarding Start Times

SAU #39 Superintendent, Mr. Adam Steel, thanked the school board and the community for this process. This community has made this process better. As he hears the public comments, he understands the frustration throughout this process. It is with the community that they have developed this plan and for that he is very thankful.

He reviewed the current challenges, first that the school start times for older students do not match science. In addition, their instructional hours per day are higher than regulations allow.

Feedback received are the following:

- Over 100 emails, closer to 300 at this point.
- Survey from Souhegan students
- Survey from AMS Launch Pad
- All Faculty Meeting
- All Souhegan Students
- Parent Information Night

Mr. Steel reviewed the community's priorities:

- High quality education
- Older kids having a later start time but being done by 3:00PM
- Prioritizing childcare options for elementary students
- Supporting athletics and other after- school activities for all grade levels
- The Souhegan 30 minute athletic- free activity window after school
- Work options for high school students after school
- Starting around Labor Day and ending no later than June 15th

He reviewed the educator's priorities:

- High quality education
- Maximizing the elementary learning window of 8-11AM
- Minimizing disruptions for athletics
- Long blocks of instructional times
- Adherence to Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA's)
- Maintaining overall instructional hours

Superintendent Steel explained NH ED 306.18. There is a minimum of 945 hours of K-6 and 990 hours for 7-12 per year. There is a maximum of 5.75 hours for K-6 hours and 6 hours for grades 7-12 per day. Regarding instructional time, lunch, passing time and homeroom is not included. What is included is class time, Advisory, and recess up to 30 minutes per day for grades K-6.

Their objectives are as follows:

- AMS/ Souhegan to start around 8:30AM and get out around 3PM.

- Ensure their school year starts around Labor Day and ends by June 15th
- Add outdoor and recess time for elementary students
- Do not add cost
- Protect Souhegan Club time of at least 30 minutes
- Minimize elementary kids not at bus stops in the dark
- Preserve after- school athletics and activity time for all students, work opportunities, etc.

He reviewed the Options Explored as the status quo, the flip, common start time and shifting later.

The final proposal is Souhegan 8:30-3:00, AMS 8:30- 3:15, Elementary 7:45- 2:15 with 175 days.

Superintendent Steel reviewed the Advantages:

- Ideal start and end times for older students
- Preserves ideal learning window for younger students
- Preserves athletics, work and activities for all students
- Allows for extended after school options for elementary students
- Does not require elementary parents to arrange childcare on both ends of the day
- Preserves the instructional hours and fixes compliance with regulations
- Likely in compliance with existing CBA's (subject to impact bargaining)
- Does not add cost, buses or other expenses
- Minimal impact to summer and additional outside childcare
- Preserves activity time at Souhegan and expands access due to transportation
- Builds in additional movement break for elementary students
- Support summer ESY and special program schedules

He reviewed the Disadvantages:

- Removes most older kids as a childcare option for younger kids in the afternoon. They can certainly work with those families for Souhegan families.
- Shortens summer by up to a week
- Changes snow days
- Some elementary students may have bus stops in darkness in the morning for parts of the year
- Less after-school time for AMS/Souhegan

He reviewed the elementary daily schedule. The bus routes would start at 6:30AM with a full hour. He is being conservative with this time. He believes that they can minimize that to 45 minutes which would eliminate the students in the morning darkness. Bus routes end at 7:30 and school starts at 7:45, which is 6.5 hours. School ends at 2:15 and bus routes start at 2:30. With a full hour, it will end at 3:30.

The AMS daily schedule would start with the bus routes starting at 7:35, ending at 8:20 and school starting at 8:30 and ending at 3:15. A few weeks ago, they had decided on the end time of

3:00. After further feedback from Dr. Bernasconi and staff, they decided on adding an additional 15 minutes. The bus route would start at 3:30 and end at 4:15. They need to look at refining the time to either 8:15 to 3:00, which appears to be a hard cut off.

The Souhegan daily schedule would start at 7:35, end at 8:20 and school starting at 8:30. Activity time starts at 3:00, bus routes start at 3:30 and ends at 4:15.

Superintendent Steel reviewed how the buses work and the breakdown of elementary instructional hours. The proposed elementary school day length is 6:30 and the existing is 6:40. The recess time is proposed at 30 minutes, existing is 25 minutes. Movement break is proposed for 15 minutes, existing is none. Lunch is proposed for 30 minutes right now it is 25 minutes. Total hours per day are 5:45 and existing is 6:15, total per year are proposed at 1006 and existing is 1062.

For AMS, the school day length is proposed for 6:45 and existing is 6:54. Passing time is 21 minutes and that will not change. Lunch will remain at 30 minutes; it should be noted that for grades 5/6 they have a 25-minute lunch and a 20-minute recess. Total hours per day are proposed for 5:54 and existing is 6:08. Total per year are proposed for 1033 and existing are 1043.

For Souhegan, the school day length proposed is 6:30 and the existing is 6:54 with passing time remaining at 16 minutes as well as lunch for 30 minutes. Total per day is proposed for 5:44 and the existing is 6:08 and total hours per year are proposed for 1003 with existing hours 1020.

For next year, he is suggesting that they start the 31st of August. They would have 3, then 4 then 5 school days. The latest they would go, with snow days, would be June 15th

There are also things to do. First, elementary bus routes would need to be shortened/ tightened to eliminate dark bus stops in the morning. This will assist with getting to the 3:00 time for AMS. They need to consider an early bus or late bus options and have further discussion about that. They need to execute on their childcare options. He is encouraging each of the boards to reach out for impact bargaining with associations/PPC after adopted. Next, to publish an updated calendar for FY 22 likely starting the week before Labor Day. Lastly, they need to determine a Late Starts moving forward.

He thanked the Board for the time to get this completed and the community for their input.

Mr. O'Keefe thanked Superintendent Steel.

Mr. O'Keefe remarked that he asked Ms. Behm to give them an overview of the process for the newer board members and the public.

Ms. Behm thanked Chairman O'Keefe for this opportunity to speak.

Ms. Behm noted that the discussion of school start times is not new. Longtime Amherst residents have joked, "Oh, you're talking about that again? Good luck!" Multiple times they have tried, and it is a long process.

In 2017, a parent came to the Amherst School Board with her concerns over the school start times for our middle and elementary students. She brought with her research and strong recommendations from the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) that middle and high school students benefit from starting their school day no sooner than 8:30 a.m. In places where this change was made, students were more rested, less depressed, attendance was better, grades were higher, and new drivers had fewer accidents. The evidence was consistent and overwhelming, with benefits showing almost immediately.

I offered to chair an exploratory committee looking into the merits, challenges, and options for changing our times. Our committee included representatives from all three districts. We also had previous board members who worked (unsuccessfully) to change times several years prior and the parent who asked us to consider a change now. We respected the work that had been done previously and learned from it.

In addition, we spoke with parents, the Amherst Rec. Dept., the SHS and AMS Theater Club, school principals, and SAU leadership. We received lists of districts we play in sports from AMS and SHS and started speaking to the athletic directors. I spent a lot of time on Google Maps figuring out how far we go for games. Several of us became acutely aware of bus routing and schedules at other schools. Transportation factors into any of the options.

In 2018 I presented my committee's findings and recommendations to the joint SAU boards in February of 2018. Our primary goal was to have middle and high school start at 8:30 a.m., per CDC and AAP recommendation, and go from there.

At that time, there was a strong response from staff and administration that they did not want to change the length of our days, which provided some real challenges. However, we still felt that changing the start times would be a net positive for our students. Looking back at my notes for today, we actually suggested a 7:55 start for elementary and 8:30 start for AMS and Souhegan if we could find a way to turn buses around in less than 45 minutes (which it turns out we cannot).

One bit of research we highlighted at the time was Dr. Richard Schwab at the University of Pennsylvania who wrote, "*...if school start times were based on sleep cycles, elementary schools should start at 7:30 and high schools at 8:30 or 8:45... it would increase their students' sleep time and likely improve their school performance.*"

The specific challenges we highlighted, and offered some recommendations around, were:

- Buses- Ideally, we didn't want any children at a bus stop before 7 a.m. A lot of work has been done in the past two years to tighten up routes to support this eventual change.
- Sports- We have a limited number of lighted fields and many groups looking to use the same spaces. Timing with other districts for games was discussed and we looked into how other schools who had already changed were handling things.

- Neighboring districts- We researched and talked to districts who had already made changes, and other who were considering it. The length of our day was unique.
- Breakfast- Our work helped the pilot to try offering breakfast at our schools.
- Before and after school care- While an earlier start for elementary would help many families avoid needing daycare before school, and provide fewer transitions for those kids, we likely needed to expand options for after care. And probably add an early morning option at AMS.

These are the bulk of the concerns I've heard more recently as well. We tried to be very realistic and comprehensive, admitting that we didn't have solutions yet for every concern. We considered, but did not ultimately recommend:

1. Keeping the current order but just pushing everyone by 30 minutes. It was too much trouble with not enough reward and would have put elementary starting at nearly 9 a.m.
2. Everyone, K-12, on the same buses with all schools starting at nearly the same time. Since our campuses are spread, this would cause some kids to have long rides, we would need more buses, and the community was not comfortable mixing ages to that degree.
3. Flipping, with elementary first, and start times of 8 and 9. Starting the older kids this late, however, was dropped as hurting extracurricular options and commitments after school.

The SAU joint board voted unanimously to move forward and asked administration to come back with a proposal.

Once it was turned over to administration, several polls and forums occurred. To minimize disruption, Superintendent Steel's first proposal was keeping the current order but just pushing everyone by 20 minutes in the 2018-19 school year. Does this sound familiar? It was quickly decided from overwhelming community feedback that my committee's conclusion was shared, and this was too much churn without enough benefit, especially making things difficult for elementary parents and kids.

They went back to the Drawing Board in 2019. After we tabled a change for the 2018-19 school year, Superintendent Steel asked the Athletic Director at Souhegan to chair and convene a new committee that included board members, teachers, students, and administration. We met for nearly a year and brought new details to the SAU leadership. Additional polls were conducted. The SAU board heard a new proposal for the 2019-20 school year, but it was decided more work needed to be done and we hadn't solved enough of the logistical challenges. We decided we couldn't do it yet if we couldn't do it right. However, we committed once again to the idea and set a target of making this happen for the 2021-22 school year. Then, in 2020 a worldwide pandemic hit. Almost all attention rightfully turned to the task at hand of finding a way to support our school community under incredibly challenging circumstances. One thing this year has proven is we are resilient and can make even challenging schedules work if needed. In the fall, the SAU heard an updated proposal from Superintendent

Steel and tentatively approved, with a deadline of February 2021 (now) to hear how this would work on a more granular level at each school.

That brings us to tonight. As we near a final vote, the urgency among families has obviously increased to be heard on how changes would affect them. The proposal has changed a few times as new feedback has been received and options discussed with administration, including lessons learned this year.

I hope reviewing the original list from my committee soothes some fears that there are major factors that simply haven't been considered or planned around. Major work has been happening behind the scenes for more than three years. While several board members and administration have changed, our strong belief that this is best for students has not waived.

Even before COVID and remote learning, our SAU set goals to focus on social-emotional learning and support at all levels. I'm proud of the work that has been done and continues in our school community on this front. One of the major drivers for this change is to decrease depression among adolescents and increase their resiliency. None of us deal well when we are sleep deprived, and we are chronically shortchanging our adolescents by ignoring their natural circadian rhythms. The first class every day should not be a throwaway. No, students might not get more sleep, but they will get better sleep that serves them better.

Several community members have expressed a desire to "get back to normal" for at least a year before considering another major change. They are asking to table this once again. I counter that we are returning to a "new normal" no matter what we choose. Some of our youngest learners have never experienced the old schedule or even in person learning. Same for high school freshmen this year. My daughter is a freshman and I've seen the real positive difference of a later start for her. So have many parents I know with her peers in her grade. It would be far more disruptive to "change back" to our old pre-pandemic schedule and then change again the next year.

If we truly believe this is the right thing that will do the most good for the greatest number of students, then we should let them settle into it and start reaping the benefits as soon as possible, which is the 2021-22 school year. Thank you.

The Board thanked Ms. Behm.

V. Public Comment II of III

Ms. Kuzsma inquired if they had looked at adding two more school days, bringing it to 177, and bring them closer to the educational hours.

Mr. Steel replied that they have not looked at that, based on community feedback, he would not be in favor.

Ms. Grund asked about the length of time for the Souhegan Club , Jazz Band, Math Team, etc.

436 Mr. Steel replied that the activities can certainly meet for a longer period of time, but students
437 would have to get to athletics at that point. Sports really cannot start after 3:30 because of
438 daylight.

439
440 Ms. Gruzdien commented that looking at the comments are daunting. It looks as good as it can if
441 they are going to take this on. She inquired if they are currently over instructional hours every
442 day or is that looking at next year.

443
444 Mr. Steel replied in previous years they were. He has not considered this year.

445
446 Ms. Taylor asked Mr. Steel to give his reasoning for the Feb 17th changes to the Feb 5th proposed
447 schedule.

448 Mr. Steel asked for clarification.

449
450 Ms. Taylor replied that on Feb 5th Mr. Steel said the high school would get out first and then the
451 elementary school would be released after. Secondly, on Feb 5th, Mr. Steel committed to not
452 having AMS end after 3:00 PM. On Feb 17th (last night), Mr. Steel changed his proposal to
453 have elementary start/release times before high school and AMS end at 3:15. Why have these
454 priorities changed?

455
456 Mr. Steel replied that what has changed is their proposal that was on the table a couple weeks
457 ago. He has heard feedback from the community and educators. The 3:00PM remains a firm
458 issue for the community.

459
460 Mr. Conklin asked about the clubs and if there would need to be a late bus.

461
462 Mr. Steel replied that they need to have further conversation about that. It is all interrelated and
463 all interconnected.

464
465 Ms. Lawrence inquired about the consideration for student drivers and if they are allowed to
466 leave before the busses.

467
468 Mr. Steel replied in this iteration the students that are driving leave first. This would change the
469 current practice by 15 minutes.

470
471 Mr. O'Keefe asked about afterschool programming at the MVVS.

472
473 Mr. Steel replied that at the last MVVS meeting, the board spoke about the opportunity to
474 expand the school-based offerings. They have had conversations with the Amherst based
475 childcare and they are willing to offer it to the MVVS, the Boys and Girls Club, YMCA and
476 Hampshire Hills.

477
478 Ms. Behm inquired if they are committing to working with families as needed.

479
480 Mr. Steel replied, yes, he can make that commitment.

481 Mr. Glover inquired about the recapturing the extra 15 minutes for AMS and making it from 8:
482 15 to 3:00. He added that you have two adjoining schools starting at the same time.

483
484 Mr. Steel replied that it means that the high school students would have to start 15 minutes
485 earlier, so they have time to transition.

486
487 Mr. Glover mentioned that it kind of defeats the purpose of the later start time.

488
489 Mr. Gauthier noted that he sees a lot of uncertainty in the transportation.

490
491 Mr. Steel replied that this bus schedule they can deliver on and he is confident with the schedule
492 that they have now. With further work they can sharpen it and refine it. He was less confident
493 with the previous version with the elementary ending after the middle and high school because
494 those margins were very tight.

495
496 Ms. Grund asked Mr. Steel about the survey from the Advisory.

497
498 Mr. Steel asked Mr. Mike Berry, SHS Principal, to share the results.

499
500 Principal Berry replied that it was about 70% of the student body were not in favor. He is
501 confident that they can make that time useful. They need to work out the details.

502
503 Ms. Gruzdien commented that there are solutions and the topic around working families continue
504 to spin. She suggested they form a group of families that have these challenges and form some
505 solutions. She will volunteer to lead that group. She would like to see that 15-minute movement
506 break added on to the 30 minutes of outside time.

507
508 Mr. Torres inquired if they know of any districts that have made the change and then went back
509 to the old schedule.

510
511 Mr. Steel replied that in his research he has not heard about that.

512
513 Ms. Kuzsma mentioned that they have reached out to schools that have made the change and
514 although it might not be perfect, they would never want to switch back.

515
516 Ms. Taylor inquired about the congestion of the driving students. It is not insurmountable, there
517 is another exit, and might there be a need for an extra police officer.

518
519 Mr. Steel replied that they believe that it is manageable and not insurmountable.

520
521 Ms. Kuzsma noted that Mr. Steel hinted about the late start schedule. She inquired if they were
522 looking at an early release.

523
524 Mr. Steel replied that there are three options that exist, one is to maintain the current late start,
525 those are required by one of their CBA that they have in place. Second, would be an early release
526 and a third option and possibly preferred, is to trade in the time and have separate professional

development days. It would not extend the school year. That is something they would have to bargain and work with.

There were no further comments from the Board.

VI. Public Comment III of III

Ms. Alison Batey, 12 Joshua Road, Amherst NH, commented that she has heard from other Amherst residents that the kids need to be in school longer. As an educator, extending into June it is not productive. This plan meets the need for all of the learners and she appreciates being compliance. This calendar more closely meets other calendars in the state. She is in support of the proposed changes.

Ms. Jenni Watkins, 17 Eastern Avenue, Amherst NH, commented that there is an article called *“Early School Start Times and the Risk for Poor Performance”*. She also does not want to underestimate the logistical challenges.

Ms. Kim Wyborney, 81 Amherst Street, Amherst NH, commented that she is a lifelong resident of Amherst and a parent. She would like the board to consider a 3 PM ending time for AMS and SHS. She has concerns with the 30-minute unstructured time and it can set them up for potential issues. For the families that have students at AMS and Souhegan it can cause logistical issues. She urged the board to consider the proposal where AMS and Souhegan have an end time of 3PM.

Ms. Emma Crisman, AMS Student, Amherst NH, noted that the extra 15 minutes added to the AMS schedule will not help. Going back to the SHS survey, 70% did not want to change. She urged the board to listen to the students.

Ms. Annie Shepherd, 13 Fairway Drive, Amherst NH, added that she has something to share on behalf of her freshman, Hannah. She added that she was concerned about the busses if they do not get out on time and they drive with a sibling or themselves then they get blocked in for 30 minutes. She asked if there was a way to use the road behind the Theater. She reiterated her concern with the AMS students getting out at 3:15. She appreciates all of the hard work that has gone into this.

Mr. Tyler Lupoli, AMS Student, Amherst NH, commented that the change in start and end time is good for students. He is an in-person student and is going remote now due to the stress of the early start time.

The Board thanked the participants.

VII. Board Discussion

Ms. Kuzsma added that she has a remote child in the middle school and has seen a significant difference in her as a student and her academics have benefitted. They have been talking about this for years and are trying to keep all sides into consideration.

Ms. Kuzsma motioned to adopt the proposed start time changes as presented by Superintendent Steel. Ms. Behm seconded the motion.

Mr. O’Keefe opened the motion for discussion.

Mr. Gauthier noted that he still has concerns with transportation. They need to remove snow days and go to fully remote days. They need to remove the late start times and be moved to professional development days. He is hesitant to approve this with the transportation plans and AMS time not finalized other than a conditional approval.

Ms. Behm reminded the Board not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. She believes that they can tighten up the bus schedule. Conversations are still happening, and things are going to be finalized.

Ms. Grudzien mentioned that she does not have a comment at this time.

Mr. Conklin noted his support and added that they should move this forward tonight. Mr. Steel has been listening to the community for the past several years and has done great work. It is his view that the starting bell has been sounding on this for the last few years and they have remained in the starting blocks to achieve the best plan for the most students. He is certain that there are more hurdles ahead and he is confident in the administration and the board to remain flexible going forward.

Mr. Grondstra added that he has been on the board long enough to be a part of the different iterations of the start and end time committees. He sees huge benefits and has heard convincing arguments of why not to implement this. He believes that this is a good workable solution. He did his own survey of 4 SHS graduates and 75% were in favor of this change, this was keeping sports in mind. He supports an early bus option and is guessing that will be apart of the flexibility in the schedule. Lastly, he would like to get AMS and SHS synced up to end at the same time.

Ms. Facey added that this issue has given her the most challenge. As board members it is critical that they put aside their family situations and think about the greater good for all of the students. She valued the club time within the schedule at Souhegan. This schedule is a great compromise. While it is not perfect, they have hit the mark on most of the concerns. She would like to see more work done on the different times for AMS and SHS. There is more work to be done on the bussing, but it is not insurmountable. She believes that this is a solid plan with work to be done and it would not stop her from making a decision tonight.

Mr. Coughlan commented that he has been blown away by ED 306.18. He reminded the board that this board does not have the power to make the decision tonight only the individual boards and if they all agree. The vote tonight is a signal. He supports this and supported it in 2007, it is the right thing to do. The issue here is that it is an activation energy problem.

Ms. Taylor added that the last iteration of the proposed times was provided to the boards, parents, community, etc. at a parent virtual information session the day before this SAU meeting.

Ms. Taylor mentioned that this product seems to have been improved in the process. This afternoon the board has received 100 pages of comments from parents and she has not had time to review them. They need to provide more time for feedback and the dismissal for AMS and SHS should be aligned and no later than 3. She appreciates all of the creativity in the process and they are a lot farther than they have been.

Mr. Torres added that he is in support of this plan and no one is going to walk away happy with everything. He would like AMS and SHS to be synced but if that is not possible, he will still be in support.

Ms. Grund commented that she has appreciated what has come out of this. She would like to see them work on the time for AMS. Right now, she is not sure if she is in support. Right now, the students and staff are suffering from change fatigue. She suggested that they wait until March to hear about the 3:15 change.

Mr. Glover mentioned that he is pleased with the presentation tonight. He was in support of this in 2019 back when he was on the ASB. It was the SCSB that put the brakes on this due to club time and afterschool time. It was supposed to be delayed by one year and here they are at two years. He added that he does not see any problem to table this motion for a month. They have a week break next week and the people will have time to digest. There were several iterations of this plan and parents will have plenty of notice. He is in support because the research is compelling. He is solid on the 8:30- 3pm. This is not an issue where the children are in a position to decide.

Ms. Lawrence added that she appreciates the back work that has been done by the committees. She is in support of the changes and if they are going to look at the science then they need to look at all of the science. There is some data to show that their younger students may not benefit from the change. She would like to see some investigation into the younger students. She is in support and appreciates the creative solutions that have been put forth. She inquired if the board can maintain the right to reevaluate this.

Mr. Eckhoff commented that he is now in support. He added that there has been a ton of work done and he changed his vote in concern for the students. He knows the science is there and has a lot of concerns about the logistics.

Mr. St. Denis added that this is what is best for students. He thanked the students for their input.

Mr. O'Keefe mentioned that when this process was started years ago, he was skeptical. He is full in support of this and this is something that has profound benefits. He does not believe in delaying tonight's vote any longer and they should be voting this to their individual boards for final approval. They need to make a decision now for their next board meetings in March.

He added that Mr. Steel wants to make a final comment.

Mr. Steel reviewed the AMS Daily schedule with a 3:00PM end time. The length of hours would match the other schools at 6.5 and bus routes would start at 3:15 and end at 4pm. He clarified that they are not committing to having the bus runs completed by 3:15. It is not possible to have a 30-minute lunch.

He further explained that there are 4 things that they need to commit to as administration and school board if they change to the 3:00pm AMS end time. First, less instructional hours for the middle school, second, they are committing to shortening their bus stops for the elementary runs to make sure that they can do the 45 minutes. There will be unhappy parents as they have to eliminate stops. Third, they would continue their late bus so that students can participate with activities and clubs at AMS and SHS. Last, they would have to commit to the 25-minute lunch at AMS.

If the board is comfortable with this changing the AMS schedule back to 8:30 to 3. He wanted to offer that to the board.

Mr. O'Keefe asked for board discussion.

Ms. Gruzdien suggested that they should take one minute off of every period.

Mr. Steel noted that the lunch does not count as instructional time and so that gets taken off of the day. That means they do not hit their minimum hours for the year, lunch has to be shorter.

Ms. Grund commented that she has concerns about the lessened instructional hours and the shortened bus routes. She would like to hear from Dr. Bernasconi and parents.

Mr. Steel added that the other three options that the 15 minutes would come from are Launch Pad, Eagle and Specials. There is no good answer, that is why Dr. Bernasconi advocated for the extra 15 minutes.

Ms. Facey replied that she appreciates the information and she would still be in support of the 8:30 to 3:00pm option.

Mr. Gauthier added that this is a second time that they are adding the bulk of this move to the elementary students and parents by shortening bus routes and removing bus stops.

Mr. Conklin mentioned that he is in support of either. Ultimately, they need clarity tonight and they should move forward either way. He is more comfortable with the original plan.

Mr. Glover remarked that this is 15 minutes and not a lot of time. It eases a lot of burdens to keep it.

Ms. Kuzsma added that there are some baby steps that can be made and this should not prevent them from moving forward.

Ms. Behm commented that it was pointed out to her that group bus stops are safer and more efficient. She suggested that it goes back to the administration. She is willing to work to make this successful.

Ms. Grudzien added that they are overthinking this a bit. She suggested that they go with the 3:15pm option and everyone is making some sort of change.

Mr. Conklin commented that they are making the enemy of the perfect and should call the vote as quickly as possible.

Mr. O'Keefe mentioned that the 15-minute time adjustment is very impactful to the MV community. He suggested that they test it and make minor revisions and adjustments. It is unrealistic to work out a schedule tonight.

Mr. O'Keefe called a roll call: Kuzsma- Yes, Gauthier- No, Behm- Yes, Gruzdien- Yes, Conklin- Yes, Grondstra- Yes, Facey- Yes, Coughlan- Yes, Taylor- No, Torres- Yes, Grund- Yes, Glover- Yes, Lawrence- Yes, Eckhoff- Yes, St. Denis- Yes, O'Keefe- Yes and Hinckley- Not present. Motion passed

VIII. School Calendar

Mr. Steel explained that it is too soon to know what will happen for next school year. All the data suggests one of two things is likely as we go through the next six months or so. First, the second wave of Covid 19 cases tails off and they enter a low amount of cases and positivity rate. The other is that there is a third wave that comes between March and May, or after, of unknown strength and unknown characteristics. They need to begin the discussion about preparing for if they have a significant wave of Covid cases that affects the school year.

Everyone hopes that the next school year returns to near normal, however, it will not be normal for two reasons. First, while all of their staff that want to be vaccinated, and likely will have had the chance to be vaccinated by the start of the school year, virtually none of their students will be. It may be possible that some that are over 16 will be but none of the younger students. The second factor is that they do not know what the community will expect of them and they need to be prepared for that.

He has added a potential Covid calendar that is different from their current calendar that he would like the board to consider. First, they would start in mid-August, second, they would have a weeklong break in mid-October around Columbus Day and third, closure of school and remote after the holidays and travel.

First, it shows us starting on August 23rd as opposed to August 11th and much closer to where they normally start. This does preserve a weeklong break in October. The reason for this is the long length of time from the start of school till Thanksgiving. This current school year was exacerbated by Covid situations and getting to Thanksgiving was challenging. Lastly, they will build in remote only days after Thanksgiving, Christmas, and February/April vacations. They do not know if it will be needed, although, it is better to plan for it. The State has changed their

755 recommended February calendar. He is not looking for this to adopted by the board tonight but
756 wanted to open the discussion.

757
758 Mr. Eckhoff asked if it makes sense to move the October break to the 1st week of October.

759
760 Mr. Gauthier added that he has a hard time with this calendar. He noted that this is a huge burden
761 for parents to figure out what to do for 10 weeks of school time. Working from home is not a
762 convenience that everyone has.

763
764 Ms. Gruzdien commented that she is not in support of this calendar.

765
766 Mr. Glover added that he appreciates the foresight and the opportunity to give feedback. He
767 hopes that they do not have to implement this calendar.

768
769 Ms. Grund noted that if they had to take a Covid calendar she would prefer this one over the one
770 that was in her agenda packet.

771
772 Ms. Kuzsma added that she is not in support for the October week break.

773
774 Ms. Behm gave her support for the snow days. She mentioned that not everyone has help from
775 their families for childcare.

776
777 Ms. Taylor inquired about athletics.

778
779 Mr. Steel replied that they would work to make sure that the athletics could continue. It is much
780 safer if the school is fully remote.

781
782 Ms. Lawrence suggested the October break be a full remote week.

783
784 Mr. Steel added that he is not looking for approval and is looking for feedback, it is all that he
785 needed for tonight.

786
787 Mr. Glover remarked that there are 4 calendars that have been presented.

788
789 Mr. Eckhoff mentioned that he would be in support of a 4-day weekend around Columbus Day.

790
791 IX. Public Comment III of III

792
793 Mr. Nathan Greer, 12 Boylston Terrace, Amherst NH, commented that kids may be safer in
794 groups, but they need to get to that bus stop, and it is as unsafe as being at a bus stop alone. He
795 would not expect to see bus routes shortened as an option.

796
797 No other public comment.

798
799 The Board thanked Mr. Greer and the public that joined them for this meeting.

800

801 X. Meeting Adjourned

802

803 **Ms. Kuzsma motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:15PM. Ms. Facey seconded the motion.**

804 **The vote was unanimous, motion passed.**

805

806 **Mr. O’Keefe called a roll call: Kuzsma- Yes, Gauthier- Yes, Behm- Yes, Gruzdien- Yes,**

807 **Conklin- Yes, Grondstra- Yes, Facey- Yes, Coughlan- Yes, Taylor- Yes, Torres- Yes,**

808 **Grund- Yes, Glover- Yes, Lawrence- Yes, Eckhoff- Yes, St. Denis- Yes, O’Keefe- Yes and**

809 **Hinckley- Not present.**

810

811

From: Katie Patterson <katie.patterson0111@gmail.com>

Subject: Proposed start/end times

Date: February 18, 2021 at 10:02:49 AM EST

To: "PEckhoff@sau39.org" <PEckhoff@sau39.org>, "sokeefe@sprise.com" <sokeefe@sprise.com>, "slawrence@sprise.com" <slawrence@sprise.com>, "sstdenis@sau39.org" <sstdenis@sau39.org>, "JHinckley@sau39.org" <JHinckley@sau39.org>

Good morning,

I'm an MV resident and a mother of nine. I am very much opposed to the potential new start times, as are my high school kids. Three of my children graduated from SHS over the last few years. They did very well with the current schedule and feel it helped prepare them for early college classes, labs, and clinicals. On late start days, they just stayed up later the night before - they did not utilize it for extra sleep. I know the science supports this on paper but I do not think it will be taken advantage of by the majority of kids. As a mom of elementary aged children as well, these new times mean that my MVVS kids, who already have a difficult time getting up and out the door for an 8:35 start time, will need to be up an hour earlier and then will need to be in the car from 2:15 until at least 3:40 in order to pick up older siblings. This also puts my preschooler in the car for an even longer period of time. Please consider voting against this proposal. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katie Patterson

Sent from my iPhone

— — — —

From: Mandy Durie <mandydurie@gmail.com>

Subject: School start time vote today

Date: February 18, 2021 at 10:54:45 AM EST

To: slawrence@sprise.com, PEckhoff@sau39.org, JHinckley@sau39.org, sokeefe@sprise.com, sstdenis@sau39.org

Good morning School Board Members,

I do not envy the vote you have today as I know it's impossible to please everyone, and we have to do what's best for all of our children.

I would like to express my concern about changing the elementary school start time, and can only give you the experience of my family. I have three young children, two currently at MVVS, in Kindergarten and third grade, and one younger child. Starting school earlier will be a significant and likely detrimental change for my kids. I think all of our kids have shown remarkable resilience through this awful pandemic. They've adjusted in countless ways. They're not able to see their family or friends, participate in activities they once loved, and completely miss human interaction. They wear masks for six and a half hours every day, sometimes longer, and really don't complain. However, piling another significant change on them may be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

I drive my kids to and from school every day, because the flexibility in my schedule allows it, and I'm trying to do my part to help everyone stay distanced, which is difficult on a bus. My youngest child still takes naps in the afternoon and having to wake her up early from her nap to pick up her siblings would really impact her rest. I'm sure many of you can relate to a cranky toddler with a disrupted sleep schedule. As we cannot predict the future impacts of Covid on schools, I am planning to continue driving them next year.

**** This section has been removed due to personal content. ****

In my experience, explaining this virus and its impacts is completely overwhelming to young kids, and has caused so many impactful changes in their lives that are out of their control. I must implore you to not make yet another significant change in their lives right now.

I appreciate your time and consideration.
Respectfully, Mandy Durie

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Julie Smiley** <smilesjusa@yahoo.com>

Date: Wed, Feb 17, 2021, 10:38 PM

Subject: School Start Time

To: <terri.behm@gmail.com>

Hi Terri,

I'd really appreciate it, if you could forward this message to all of the school boards. My husband and I have invested hours of time over the past four years attempting to get a later start time passed. We have spoken at multiple board meetings over the years and have another commitment tmrw evening.

The proposed schedule is about as good as a solution to the necessity of a later start time that we're going to see at this point. Kids in most other countries manage on this schedule. They have plenty of time for an after school job and any other activity they choose. They really do. I've lived it. I know. There's a 3-4 hr work limit for kids on school days. There's plenty of time. Our kids can manage this. With this schedule, there's five to six hours between school getting out and a 9pm settling down for bed. That's plenty of time. If it's not, there's over scheduling happening and that's not healthy for our kids.

What our kids can't manage is getting enough sleep when many are waking up as early as 5:30 am to get on a school bus in the pitch dark. They'd have to be in bed, asleep, at 8:30 pm to get the MINIMUM recommended sleep—that's totally infeasible for teens due to their circadian rhythms. The irrefutable science behind this and the myriad detriments of insufficient sleep have been raised many times.

Frankly, people make a choice to participate in multiple sporting activities. School start times and the resultant lack of sleep currently are mandatory. Let's please make this change.

People have been trying to get this done for at least 10 years. It is not new. It's way past due. There's similar movement throughout the country because of the benefits to our kids. Eventually all schools will be on similar schedules and the sports issues will be rectified.

Julie & Seth Smiley
20 Holly Hill Drive
Amherst

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From: **Julie Smiley** <smilesjusa@yahoo.com>

Date: Thu, Feb 18, 2021 at 8:33 AM
Subject: Late Start
To: Adam Steel <asteel@sau39.org>

Hi Adam,

I don't have emails for the Boards voting tonight. Would you forward the following, please? As you know Seth and I have participated in a number of Board meetings on this over the past four years and I've invested a great deal of time on an associated committee. We have another commitment tonight and cannot make the meeting.

I would like to remind the Board that hundreds of people have spoken in favor of changing start times over the years. It would be unfortunate if a few loud dissenters overrule at the last minute while others have quietly expressed their opinion many times over the years.

The proposed schedule is about as good as a solution to the necessity of a later start time that we're going to see at this point. Kids in most other countries manage on this schedule. They have plenty of time for an after school job and any other activity they choose. They really do. I've lived it. I know. There's a 3-4 hr work limit for kids on school days. There's plenty of time. Our kids can manage this. With this schedule, there's five to six hours between school getting out and a 9pm settling down for bed. That's plenty of time. If it's not, there's over scheduling happening and that's not healthy for our kids.

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People have been trying to get this done for at least 10 years. It is not new. It's way past due. There's similar movement throughout the country because of the benefits to our kids. Eventually all schools will be on similar schedules and the sports issues will be rectified.

Julie & Seth Smiley

Sent from my iPhone

From: **Peter Maresco** <pfmaresco@yahoo.com>

Date: Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 6:16 PM

Subject: Thoughts

To: Adam Steel <asteel@sprise.com>, Christine Landwehrle <clandwehrle@sprise.com>, ekuzma@sprise.com <ekuzma@sprise.com>, pgrondstra@sau39.org <pgrondstra@sau39.org>, Christine Landwehrle <clandwehrle@sau39.org>

Hi Everyone,

Hope all is well with all of you! Sorry I haven't been too involved with things in a while but, even though I am now retired, things have still been a bit hectic. I just wanted to reach out to all of you to give you my thoughts on some things I've been reading about and hearing within the town.

The two things that stand out in my mind are 1) the bond for the new elementary school and upgrades to the Middle School and 2) the change in start time. I have to be honest, the bond is surprising to me. My last year on the board was the 2016/2017 term and, at that time, we were talking about closing one of the grammar schools (as part of a move to become one district) because there really weren't enough students to support the buildings we had. I guess the trends could be different as more people are moving out of bug cities but, given that so many people are being impacted financially by everything going on now, I think it may be tough to get support from the people for that amount of money.

Which brings me to the start time change. I understand the reasoning (since we have been discussing that since 2009) and I know you tried to come up with a compromise but the idea of Middle and High School students ending their school day at 3:45 seems like a non-starter to me. That means that any after school club or sports practice cannot start until 4:45 meaning kids will be getting home at dinner time and would have less time to do homework or have any part time job unless they now stay up an hour later, but seems to counter the benefit of starting the school day later. From the things I have heard, a large majority of the students and a large majority of the parents are against the idea and are upset with the way the new start time was approved.

The reason I wanted to share my thoughts with you is because there is another overriding factor that could become an issue. I will start by saying that, please don't take anything I write here as criticism. I am writing because I hope you all know that I care greatly about the school and will be forever grateful for the experiences and opportunities it provided for my kids. The other factor that has been troubling me is things I have been hearing about what will be coming soon with the recent change of power in Concord. With Republican control of both the Senate and the House in Concord, one of the big things they will be pushing for is funding for school choice and an increase in Charter Schools. I questioned how they could push for that with many of our local public schools struggling with decreasing population and greater pressure from the public to keep taxes low. The basic idea is that they would like to give people options if they are unhappy with their local school and use the free market pressure to have the public schools change their ways to be more competitive with the charter schools. I also don't think that is a realistic approach because I don't think any public school is structured to change things that rapidly to keep up with "free market pressure" so I worry about what happens to students in school when some of these transitions might be taking place.

Again, sorry for being wordy (but I'm sure you expected that!) but I just wanted to give you something to consider. I was concerned about asking for a large bond, which I'm sure would have a major impact on taxes even though rates are good now, while people feel alienated by having a new start time forced on them despite their opposition. All of this happening in an environment where people might have more school choice available had me concerned.

If there is anything I can do to help, please let me know.

Pete

From: **Deb Dionne** <ddionne10@gmail.com>

Date: Sat, Jan 30, 2021 at 2:32 PM

Subject: Proposed school time change

To: afacey@sau39.org <afacey@sau39.org>, gtorres@sau39.org <gtorres@sau39.org>, jglover@sau39.org <jglover@sau39.org>, ltaylor@sau39.org <ltaylor@sau39.org>, pgrondstra@sau39.org <pgrondstra@sau39.org>, scoughlan@sau39.org <scoughlan@sau39.org>, sgrund@sau39.org <sgrund@sau39.org>

Good afternoon members of the Souhegan Cooperative School Board,

I wanted to reach out to share my concerns as a parent regarding the upcoming school start change. I strongly feel that I need to speak up and advocate against this proposed schedule time change. First, I will apologize for the length of this email, I am not known for my brevity in writing. Also I also want to preface that I greatly appreciate all the hard work you all do and this email is by no means to minimize that.

I have been so impressed with the transparency that the SAU has been providing these past few years, which is why I was completely surprised to hear very little information about the time change set to occur next year. Yes, I know this isn't a new idea on the table and has been explored since 2018 or even before then. However since March we have been living in a world where so many people are in survival mode and are working so hard to keep it together (including myself). It is hard to look into next school year when I can barely look ahead to the next month. And perhaps there has been other communication but I've just been saturated with so much other information that I missed it. I recall a quick mention in an email communication from the SAU home around November, that was presented in a way that seemed like this was a "done deal," but that is all I've heard. And quite honestly, even if there was communication, I'm not sure what place I would be to fully grapple with it. Every email communication I do receive from the SAU is always a moment of panic...are we moving remote, do we have to quarantine, etc. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate those updates, but when you are operating in survival mode - it's the flight, fight, freeze response. I'm not sure how much more information I can handle and I know I'm not alone in that thought. Again, it's hard to look ahead to the future when you are just trying to survive in the moment.

I do not dispute the science of sleep. I understand the why. However I'm struggling to understand "why" behind the significant change in time. I don't recall the change being this drastic when it was presented before. As a parent of a first grader, I'm very concerned with after school care. My children (6 and 3) go to an in home daycare in Amherst where she relies on high school students after school to help watch the kids while she brings her own children to their activities...including a middle schooler who leaves at 3 to go to gymnastics in Peterborough. I'm concerned about the availability of childcare for my children after school. Sure I can send my first grader to the after school program at Wilkins, but that will be an added expense and doesn't resolve that I will potentially have lack of care for my 3 year old if my daycare doesn't have help after school. And if I do not have after school care, I'm then forced with the decision of ripping my children away from an environment that I trust, that they have an attachment to and feel comfortable in.

I understand your school board position is focused on Souhegan, as it should be. However, I would argue this is not just a Souhegan issue - this is an issue that impacts the entire SAU#39. There are many families in the SAU who will be faced with lack of childcare afterschool, especially those who rely on high school or middle school students as babysitters, or to get their younger siblings off the bus and watch them after school. Are we parents left to our own devices and hope for the best? What about the financial implications that it will have, and/or parents needing to try to make work accommodations to get their kids earlier? There has been zero communication about what the additional resources will be for after school care for the elementary school students, which is very frustrating. Many parents have already been financially strapped this year because of the pandemic and have needed to make arrangements through their work to be home with kids while they've been unable to be at school either through remote or needed quarantine, etc. Are there even available resources to count on next school year afterschool? It's hard to plan when we don't even know what next year looks like. So much attention has been for the plans of the SHS impact. It's difficult to understand how a SAU that has 4 schools involved is only focusing on one. There is an equal amount of impact for the students at those schools as well, and I'm not aware of any communication about parent input or parent groups, student groups, etc., as they have done at the high school.

I am also very concerned what after school life will look for my kids as they get older. Sure, who knows what my kids will be interested in afterschool when they reach the middle and high school level. However I do not want them limited by the activities available to them or the limited afterschool hours to be able to participate in the things they like to do, especially if any sports or activities start at 4pm. And if they are involved in things outside of the Amherst community - are they then forced to pick between the options? These kids have already lost so much this year, it's not fair for them to be losing out on other opportunities that they love and or family time in the evening because they are out straight afterschool. That will only impact their mental health negatively. And I guess I wonder, will the extra sleep in the morning even help if they are just staying up later to fit everything in afterschool when the timing is more tight? A board member at the SAU meeting said maybe older kids getting the student off the bus in the afternoon now may be able to help in the morning. Anecdotaly, I know many 9th graders this year who are not reaping the benefits of the later start this year - they are only staying up later because they don't have to get up so early! Doesn't all of this go against the intention of their "need to sleep" in the morning? We are only perpetuating the problem here.

Moreover, while academics are crucially important, I would argue that their social and emotional well being is just as important. What impact will this time

change have on all of that? The mental health needs in the world are only increasing and even more so through this pandemic. Sadly in our community we know this all too well. I could reference multiple articles from the CDC and National Alliance on Mental Health about the importance of mental health, how covid has impacted mental health, as well as articles written about the long term effect from Covid. Please do not forget how important the "whole child" is. It's not just about the sleep!!

I know change is hard. I'm not saying I disagree with the idea of a later start, however I will say that I completely disagree with the significant change in times. Many parents I have spoken to feel the same. They also feel completely blindsided by this and that they have no say. Students who I've talked to feel even more strongly against it and feel like their voices are not being heard. At the October 2020 SAU board meeting, the SHS Community Council Liaison, Delaney Facques, shared the results of the survey from a few years ago - "almost 500 responses, 70% replied that play sports, 75% have a time commitment, 30% watch a younger sibling, and 70% were not in favor of the change." Is there recent data from students about how they feel about the 3:45 end time? I'm only hearing that Souhegan students are being surveyed about what schedule they like best, not whether or not they agreed with the time change. What happened to the student voice?

I hear the argument that other schools have done the same. Yes they have - but Bedford, Oyster River, or Portsmouth, the schools often referenced, are dismissed at 3:10, 3:05, or 3:15 respectively. The last survey from the district about this was in February 2018, 3 years ago. The SAU board minutes from April 2018, reflect that 45% supported the change. I'm also confused as there is a note from October 2019 SAU board minutes that 2/3 of parents supported the change, so I'm unclear of what the actual data is. 45% to 2/3 is vastly different. Furthermore, a lot has changed since then. A lot has changed even in one year. I would implore you, as members of the Souhegan Board, to update your data and survey students and parents about this, and encourage the other boards to do the same. Not just limit the focus on SHS. The one question survey put out by the SAU this past Friday, Jan. 29th., only asked how parents feel about a later start. There is no information about the end time. There is a lack of transparency about what is actually happening here.

I do not envy your position and I know you have all put in countless hours for your service, the ongoing meetings, the budget, the building proposals, the covid task force to only name a few and I greatly appreciate all your hard work. My ask is that we really look at whether this is truly the best time, during a pandemic, to be changing more. These kids' worlds have been turned upside down for the past year and they are craving normalcy. Why add one more thing

and one more change to their lives? I understand that this has already been put on hold and we do need to move forward with life after the pandemic, I just wonder if this is truly the right time to do so. Many people are barely holding it together and are at their breaking point. Facilities has been pushed to next year and now deliberative/voting is being pushed ahead to June. Is it unreasonable to ask that we do not decide on a major school change in the middle of a pandemic when many of us are not in the right frame of mind to fully understand what impact this will have?

I appreciate your consideration in this matter.

Thank you,
Deb Dionne
28 Hickory Drive
Amherst, NH

From: **Molly Atkinson** <mollya323@gmail.com>

Date: Sun, Jan 31, 2021 at 8:40 PM

Subject: Late Start Times for 2021-22

To: <pgrondstra@sau39.org>, <ltaylor@sau39.org>, <jglover@sau39.org>, <scoughlan@sau39.org>, <afacey@sau39.org>, <gtorres@sau39.org>, <sgrund@sau39.org>

Dear School Board Members,

I write to respectfully ask that you reconsider implementing later start times for the 2021-22 school year. Given the 3 semesters of interrupted learning, **the focus of administrators, faculty, and staff needs to be keeping students learning and engaged for the remainder of this academic year**, not on the logistics of implementing a later start time in September. Why are you asking them to devote valuable time to this change during such a volatile period when the district has been discussing this move for years? I do not challenge the data, rather the timing of this significant change.

As you know, the shift to a later start is complicated with many logistical challenges. I ask that you please **postpone implementing later start times** until the 2022-23 school year to allow full attention to supporting our students *this* year. Once all students are back in school working out the logistics can resume, hopefully next year.

Sincerely,

Kristin Atkinson
20 Blueberry Hill Rd, Amherst, NH 03031
Parent of class of 2021 & 2024 students

From: **Kim Wyborney** <kwyborney@comcast.net>
Date: Fri, Jan 29, 2021 at 5:09 PM
Subject: Letter to the Board
To: pgrondstra@sau39.org <pgrondstra@sau39.org>, sgrund@sau39.org <sgrund@sau39.org>, ltaylor@sau39.org <ltaylor@sau39.org>, jglover@sau39.org <jglover@sau39.org>, scoughlan@sau39.org <scoughlan@sau39.org>, afacey@sau39.org <afacey@sau39.org>, gtorres@sau39.org <gtorres@sau39.org>

1/29/21

To Souhegan Cooperative School Board,

I am writing hoping for some clarification. I come to you from my parent hat, however as an SAU employee, there will inevitably be some overlap. I have been a lifelong resident of Amherst, I have 3 children (2 at SHS, and 1 at AMS), and consider myself to be well connected in our community. I have read the studies and have an understanding as to the reasoning for the proposed time change. I do however, have some other questions I was hoping you could help answer for me. I have not been able to watch all the board meetings, or pore through all the board minutes. I am a single mom, working full time AND part time, with 3 kids and often just don't logistically have the time or bandwidth do so. On top of this, as we are all aware, the mental health needs of our schools have had a high acuity as of late, and much of my energy is poured into addressing those needs. I only add this to express that because I have not been able to watch meetings or speak out before, does not negate the fact that this is an issue I am following, am interested in, and invested in. I rely on the elected members of the board to make best decisions on my behalf, and so I am coming to you directly with some hopes for clarification. I love this town, this community, and this school system. Because of that, I felt the need to speak out, something I have never done before, as I have been so pleased with the work done thus far!

I thought the best way to communicate my questions is to make a list, as I am trying to understand where things stand on this issue, and what I can expect for myself as a parent and employee for next year.

- Is this a “done deal”? What exactly is the new proposed time? I am hearing different thoughts on this, and most people say they have no idea what is actually happening. People are saying they feel blindsided and without a voice. The only time change I see is 8:45-3:45, but I am hearing people say there may be other options.
- When was the last time you surveyed individuals about their interest in the time change? I am under the understanding it was 2-3 years ago? I believe in the minutes I read that the last survey showed 45% in favor. Would that mean that 55% (or majority) were against it? What population was surveyed? Our world looks so different than it did even just one year ago. I’d be curious if we are using the current pulse on where people are at. We also have had many new employees in that time that didn’t have an opportunity to weigh in and capture their thoughts.
- Is there just a focus on SHS? Is this primarily driven by the SHS schedule? In all that I’ve been reading, it only seems to reference SHS – what about the other schools in the SAU as they will also be greatly affected?
- When was AMS staff asked about how they felt about the time change? Where does Clark/Wilkins fit into this? Mont Vernon Village School? How does this affect their daily schedule?
- I am hearing of a schedule at SHS that would incorporate a “flex” period at 3pm to allow for students who need to work, sports, etc to be able to leave at this time, but it would allow all students to use the time as they see fit- whether that is staying for extra help or going home to work on things. Is this the case? Do we propose that most students will stay until 3:45 (aside from those that have to because of transportation issues)? Would students be allowed to leave at 3 to get to a job when it’s actually considered academic time? Wouldn’t that be a conflict with the DOE “rules”? If this is the case, my daughter will lose her 3-6pm job at the Boys and Girls Club which will certainly negatively affect her college resume. Yikes. So many repercussions in that alone.

- If the SHS students can potentially leave at 3, how does this affect AMS students who may rely on siblings for rides home after school?
- I am hearing that clubs can be held before school. Can you explain how this differs from students coming in early for school to attend clubs? If a student wants to be in a club they have to come in early, thus starting their day at the earlier time we are trying to avoid?
- Has Community Council been told this is a “done deal” and they are only now having a voice in voting on the proposed schedules? My son is on Community Council and has this understanding. Is he wrong?
- Are the students in favor of this? Have they been surveyed recently – not about the schedule change- but about the time change specifically?
- What is the information with minutes vs days based? Is there an option that we have shorter days and extend the school year? Our SAU gets out at least one week earlier than surrounding districts. Is this a potential compromise? Certainly there are studies about gaps that develop over long breaks in instruction.
- Do you feel 3:45 is a fair time for students to get out of school and get home? Will the Mont Vernon students who can have up to a 45 minute bus ride be home around 4:30 when during daylight savings has it dark at that point? Again, many studies on daylight and mental health. Perhaps a later release works in other parts of our country. We live in the Northeast where it is cold and dark, and need to account for this.
- What about staff that may have a second job in the afternoon/evening? I have a second job a couple of nights a week where I am on call for local hospitals doing psych assessments. Having a later start/end time may impact this, and I wonder about other staff or parents who may be in a similar position? (On another note I have seen an uptick in activity there as well with increased hospital visits for mental health needs thus showing the overall acuity of needs at this time during the pandemic.)

Given my career path, my lens always has been and always will be mental health, and in this case that of our students and staff. I understand the data about sleep cycles. Certainly sleep is a large factor in our mental health – that evidence is clear. However, I do have some concerns about later release, as it does not give the students a large opportunity for a “break” from school to evening. Some students need this time to decompress, get outside, participate

in preferred activities, be with family, etc. The nature of daylight plays a large factor in our mental health. There is something to be said about the correlation of the uptick in mental health needs during the winter months - especially in the Northeast.

I would also like to emphasize my main concern in all of this: and this is for people's ability to sustain another large change. This pandemic has changed all of our lives. We are all longing for a return to "normalcy". We await it each day. There seems to be hope with talk of vaccines and changes in trends of the virus. To add in another big change at this time has me concerned. I work within the school and have a pulse on the staff. People are really struggling. Teachers are stretched thin. They have risen to a demand like no other. And they have done exceedingly well. But I am hearing that people are not in favor of the change right now, and just feel helpless and burnt out to be able to speak up about it. I have heard things from "I had no idea this was happening now", to "I hate it", to "there's nothing we can do about it now". In fact, a staff member used the word "defeated" to me recently. I have seen some in tears.

I have not yet met any staff or parent that is excited about this. In fact I have heard parents talking about looking for alternative schools for their children and staff looking for other jobs that better fit their already taxed schedules. In my professional opinion and "boots to the ground" experience, people cannot handle another big change right now. Please understand that people are at their breaking point. This is why we may be seeing different reactions from indifference to anger. People are burnt out.

Other large topics have been deferred. Can this possibly be revisited as well? We are all collectively grieving the loss of what was once familiar. It's difficult to make good decisions during times of grief. I think you would relieve the unnecessary pressure on parents and staff to plan for significant changes in the face of a current uncertain world, allow for some space for a sense of return to normalcy, and truly help assuage the rising mental health needs across our schools and community – ultimately you'd be doing what is in the best interest for our students at this time, which is what this is all about to begin with.

Your hard work on these difficult topics and decisions has not gone unnoticed. As I mentioned earlier, I rely on the board members I have elected to make best decisions for our school community. I, in turn, ask you rely on those of us who are living this daily and reporting back to you about our concerns based on what we are seeing and experiencing. Let's work together and come up with a good plan. There is time. There is no rush to make changes right now in the midst of a global crisis. In times such as this, our focus needs to be on the mental health

and safety of our community. I feel right now this change will negatively affect that. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kim Wyborney

From: Victoria Parisi <parisi.victoria@gmail.com>

Subject: Re: Support Start Time

Date: February 5, 2021 at 6:59:18 PM EST

To: Pim Grondstra <pgrondstra@sau39.org>

Cc: Amy Facey <afacey@sau39.org>, George Torres <gtorres@sau39.org>, John Glover <jglover@sau39.org>, Laura Taylor <ltaylor@sau39.org>, Stephanie Grund <sgrund@sau39.org>, Stephen O'Keefe <sokeefe@sau39.org>, Steve Coughlan <scoughlan@sau39.org>, pgrondstra@sprise.com

Hi Pim,

Thank you for your response.

My children will be at Souhegan in just a couple years, so I think this is important for me to share my opinion with the SCSB as well as ASB.

Thank you,

Victoria

On Fri, Feb 5, 2021 at 6:51 PM Pim Grondstra <pgrondstra@sau39.org> wrote:
Hi Victoria,

Thank you for contacting the Souhegan Cooperative School Board. I understand your concerns and will be sure to pass them on to Superintendent Steel. Additionally, your email will be entered into the minutes of our next SAU39 board meeting.

While this Board is focused on what is best for Souhegan High School (students, parents, faculty, and taxpayers), the possible changes to start and end times are SAU39 wide and will impact all three districts.

We all take our board roles seriously and vow to support all of the students as best as we can.

If you haven't already done so, I recommend that you also contact the Amherst School Board with your concerns.

Kind regards,
Pim Grondstra
Chair, Souhegan Cooperative School Board

On Thu, Feb 4, 2021 at 10:31 AM Victoria Parisi <parisi.victoria@gmail.com> wrote:

I strongly support the change in start time. The administration asked for this. They are the experts who the Board has hired and should be followed for their expert opinions relating start time to science and what is best for students. I also think 3:45 is late for dismissal and hope you'd work with administration to figure out a way, AFTER passing start time, to shorten the day. I am glad to see that the flex period is scheduled for the high school.

Change is hard, and parents have had plenty of chances to weigh in over the last 3 years and in the 10 years before that. The opinion will change every time you survey parents. Unless you survey and then make a change within 3 months, there will always be a discrepancy.

Please stay true to science and be a leader in education.

Thank you,
Victoria Parisi

--

Victoria Parisi

From: Pim Grondstra <pgrondstra@sau39.org>

Subject: Re: Concerns about changing school start times

Date: February 5, 2021 at 6:55:17 PM EST

To: Hickman Family <hickmanfamilynh@gmail.com>

Cc: Amy Facey <afacey@sau39.org>, asb@sau39.org, George Torres <gtorres@sau39.org>, John Glover <jglover@sau39.org>, Laura Taylor <ltaylor@sau39.org>, Steve Coughlan <scoughlan@sau39.org>, Stephanie Grund <sgrund@sau39.org>, Adam Steel <asteel@sau39.org>, Stephen O'Keefe <sokeefe@sau39.org>

Hi Ms. Hickman,

Thank you for contacting the Souhegan Cooperative School Board. I understand your concerns and see that you have copied both Superintendent Steel and SAU39 Board Chair O'Keefe on your email, which will be entered into the minutes of our next SAU39 board meeting.

While this Board is focused on what is best for Souhegan High School (students, parents, faculty, and taxpayers), the possible changes to start and end times are SAU39 wide and will impact all three districts.

We all take our board roles seriously and vow to support all of the students as best as we can.

If you haven't already done so, I recommend that you also contact the Amherst School Board with your concerns.

Kind regards,
Pim Grondstra
Chair, Souhegan Cooperative School Board

On Wed, Feb 3, 2021 at 1:30 PM Hickman Family
<hickmanfamilynh@gmail.com> wrote:

To the Amherst and Souhegan School Boards:

Thank you for your commitment to our children's education. I understand you have a tough, and many times, thankless job with your decisions you have to make. I understand that not every person will agree with your choices, but you don't know how people feel unless they share their thoughts. This is the reason for this letter, just to share my thoughts and concerns about the proposed change in start time, and by no way a complaint. I urge you to please reconsider the proposal for the later start time. I believe there are many points (some included in this letter) that may have been overlooked in the proposal of the change in start times. I think that these points need to be looked at and addressed.

Obviously, the past year has been overwhelming for most families and we are hoping for the return of a normal school year for the fall. At this point, we do not know what the world will look like in the fall, but we do know that students' education will need to be a priority. Whether we are still dealing with COVID-19 and social distancing or not, I do not feel that this is the time to be making such a large change.

Next year I will have children in just about every school and as much as my older children would love to sleep in, they do not actually want the start time to change. They are more concerned about the end time than the start time in this proposal. School is to prepare children for college and real life; I believe that a later start will form bad habits. I think they need to develop personal skills to get their work done and get to bed in order to get up in the morning and be ready to start their day. I do not think with the proposed start time changes that the students will get more sleep. For various different reasons they will stay up later since they wake later. Homework will be worked on later in the night since they do not have to get up as early and they will not have time earlier in the day.

It will just shift times, not allow them to gain sleep time. My children, as many others in town, are active and this will make it more difficult for them to get homework done before activities. The later dismissal leads to less time before after school activities, which is when they are currently doing their homework. One thing blends into another, and then all of sudden it's 9 PM, and they are sitting down to finish any of their homework that is left. That's our reality, and it is also many other families' realities. Amherst is an active town outside of school, the late start times could potentially discourage the enrollment in those programs.

It will also narrow their choices of activities; with a later end to school, they may not be able to do school activities (which will have to start later) as well as out of school activities. My younger children, pre-COVID, volunteered at a nursing home in Milford with children from other towns. They were able to do this because they have the time in between school and their after school activities, there was enough time in the day. The later dismissal would lead to the compacted time and there would be no time allowed for activities such as this. The fact that other towns are not changing their start times (and end times) means Amherst children miss out on opportunities. There are many activities that are available to kids that involve other towns, which is important to broaden children's horizon and to meet peers in other towns.

The time between activities and school at Souhegan allows students to get help from teachers, get homework done, get something to eat before activities and drive siblings home. It gives more opportunity for students to figure out time management. I do not think that children should have to choose between getting extra help and participating in an afterschool activity. If that hour is removed, now do students have to make the decision between getting help or going to practice, and other than having an impact on their skill/ development, it could have an impact on their playing time/ roles etc. Then there is the whole other aspect of peer pressure, as every other child knows that the reason for the late arrival or absence from practice is related to receiving help.

Currently, the after school sports for the fall and spring mostly start in the 4 pm time frame. Due to the later dismissal, would the children be missing more school for early departures to away games, or would they be rushed to warm up with less prep time for the competitive game? These children are in school for an education and that should be the priority, but many enjoy sports, which would take them out of school. This does not make sense to me. They should have the opportunity for both school and activities (sports or otherwise). The fields at Souhegan that do have lights will not be able to accommodate all teams (both Middle School and High School) to practice under the lights at the same time in the late fall, so how would that work? It is nice with the outdoor sports to have the consistency of a predicable schedule and to have practices right afterschool.

Another factor to consider is afterschool jobs. One being babysitting for the younger children. If the older students are dismissed from school later they will not have the opportunity to earn money watching younger children afterschool. It's the perfect time for middle school students to start watching younger children, during daylight hours and only for a small amount of hours. Any other afterschool jobs they will not be able to start working until later, which would mean work later and again stay up later to finish homework.

I heard the resolution for time between school and activities would be a flex period at the high school. My first concern with that is does that cause their education to suffer. Secondly, why couldn't the flex period be applied as the student feels fit in their schedule? They make their schedule as a college student does, sees when the classes they need are offer and sign up for the one that fits their schedule and hope they get it. I do understand that if everyone has the same flex period it gives everyone the same time to get help and the teachers are available, but if students are dismissed early for events then this flex period is not serving its purpose. That addresses the high school, but are teachers going to stay later for the middle school to help students afterschool? This change greatly affect the Middle School as well, what about their afterschool activities? What about their babysitting opportunities? What about their opportunities to do activities with other towns? They have many of the same issues, but the Middle School is not the focus of this changed start time proposal. Again, other school's end times will not be changing so for sports, they will miss school for games and they may not be able to participate in school and non-school activities. The younger middle school students still enjoy playing outside in the snow, which may not be an option if they get out of school (and off the bus) later and it's dark by the time they get home.

For the elementary student's parents that work, it is easier to flex their schedule to start their day a little bit later and get their children on the bus and to have their older children/ neighbors/ babysitters get them off the bus. If the older students are not available to get them off the bus now parents have additional costs to have someone take care of their younger children. It is not as easy to leave work in the middle of the afternoon, as it is to arrive a little later. This will now add another expense for the families, which many have struggled over the last year and a loss of income for the high school students trying to earn money for cars, insurance, social activities etc.

The last item I would like to address is family time. There are many families that try to make time for family dinners, as that may be the only time they spend together in the midst of their busy lives. This is an important time for families, but with parents that work and students involved in activities, the later school start causes everything to be later it makes it harder to schedule that time.

For the many reasons outlined above, and more that are not in the letter for respect of everyone's time, I am not in support of the time change. This is a topic that should be researched throughout the community more in depth and should be presented with better supporting information. There are too many questions that are left unanswered to make me, and others I speak with, comfortable regarding this change. Please consider these points when considering the new start times proposal for the all schools of SAU#39.

Thank-you for your time, dedication and consideration of this and all school issues,

Michelle Hickman
5 Thistle Drive
Amherst, NH

From: jennco_23@yahoo.com
Subject: School Start Times
Date: February 4, 2021 at 1:01:06 PM EST
To: sokeefe@sau39.org

Dear Mr. O'Keefe,

I am a parent of a 4th grade student at Wilkins and an upcoming Kindergarten student. I am writing out of concern regarding the proposed schedule change for our district. I am particularly troubled with the largest change affecting grades 5-12 and deeply concerned that the current proposal, while trying to address the issue of adolescent sleep, is overlooking the negative effects this will have on our students as a whole.

I am not opposed to, and actually do believe that we need, later start times. None of our students should be getting on a bus in the dark [at 6:30](#) in the morning, as was the case in my neighborhood prior to this year. However, I cannot support the proposed plan as it is due to the dramatically late dismissal time and I implore you to consider alternatives.

First, please consider that the proposed schedule changes for the middle school and high school will affect a student body ranging from ages 10 through 18. I think we can agree that what may work for a 18-year-old high school student does not necessarily work for a 10-year-old fifth-grader. Our youngest middle school students do not have nearly enough time for outdoor play, a critical component of brain development, during the school day as it is. The proposed

dismissal time of [3:45](#), especially for students depending on bus transportation, will allow for very little (if any in the winter) daylight time after school. Please also take into consideration that these younger students have a much earlier bedtime, also crucial for brain development and physical growth. It is already a race from the bus, to homework, to dinner and bed. With the later dismissal, there will be even less time for the after school schedule and extracurricular activities, let alone the family time that is, again, essential to childhood development.

I believe it is also imperative to take into account the families that depend on high school students for the care of younger siblings after school. While I have heard many times recently that it is not the responsibility of the school to ensure childcare, the strain that this could put on many of our families should be a societal concern.

I also suspect that, especially for our older students, less time after school for homework, sports, jobs or any other after-school activities will just cause later bedtimes to fit it all in. While I don't have any high school students yet, as a business owner in Amherst of 20 years, I have employed them. The drastically later dismissal would assuredly affect the ability of any students wishing to obtain an after-school job. I am concerned that these students will take positions working later into the night which will in turn affect their sleep.

While I do not disagree that later start times are beneficial, the proposed later dismissal times are aggressive and certainly not beneficial to the majority of our students and their families. I sincerely hope that alternatives will be considered.

- Our school day is longer than most, can we remove the extra 20 minutes?
- Can it be taken into consideration to flip the start times so that the elementary students start after the high school students? Just switching those start times would still provide an aproximatley 40 min later start for middle and high schools while eliminating many of the after-school problems that the later dismissals would create.
- It is my understanding that in NH grades K-6 require less instruction time, is there anyway to play with those extra minutes to shorten the elementary day even further so that no one is being dismissed [at 3:45](#)? Clearly it would be problematic for our elementary children to have [a 3:45](#) dismissal as well.
- Can the bus routes be reevaluated to allow less time between drop-offs?

These are just a few thoughts that I've had. I am extremely concerned that the current proposal is focused solely on academics with complete disregard to the needs of our youngest middle school children, not to mention what is best only for a small portion of our student body (grades 9-12). Our district's mission is to develop the whole child and support all learners, it would be short-sighted and irresponsible to ignore the issues that the proposed later start times would create for many of our students and their families.

I want to close this with a sincere thank you. I know that the challenges that we face as a district are intricately nuanced and the answers are often not easy to come by. I truly appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Way

From: Victoria Parisi <parisi.victoria@gmail.com>

Subject: Support Start Time

Date: February 4, 2021 at 10:31:16 AM EST

To: sokeefe@sau39.org, sokeefe@sprise.com

I strongly support the change in start time. The administration asked for this. They are the experts who the Board has hired and should be followed for their expert opinions relating start time to science and what is best for students.

I also think 3:45 is late and hope you'd work with administration to figure out a way AFTER passing start time to shorten the day.

Change is hard, and parents have had plenty of chances to weigh in. The opinion will change every time you survey parents. Unless you survey and then make a change within 3 months, there will always be a discrepancy. Please stay true to science and be a leader in education.

Thank you,
Victoria Parisi

Begin forwarded message:

From: Shannon Gascoyne <shannongascoyne@hotmail.com>

Subject: Start Time Support

Date: February 3, 2021 at 11:59:12 AM EST

To: "sokeefe@sau39.org" <sokeefe@sau39.org>

Cc: Adam Steel <asteel@sau39.org>

Chairman O'Keefe,

I am including my letter below and request that you forward to members of the SAU 39 board. I am not sure if there are rules regarding quorum when communicating via email, so I am sending this to you to distribute in the most appropriate manner. If there is another avenue I should take, please let me know.

Thank you,
Shannon Gascoyne
Amherst, NH

Hello Board Members,

I am writing to address the topic of school start times. I appreciate the many opportunities you afford the public to speak at your meetings and how accessible they are online and streaming. I am grateful to the boards and the administration for grappling with this important topic over the years. A look back through the archives reveals that this has been a topic of debate and concern long before my kids arrived in the district, our current Superintendent, and well before many of you took up your seats on the boards. I was recently interested to learn that in 2009, an extensive effort was undertaken, supported at the time by Community Council and SCSB but voted against by ASB and split at MVVS. Systemic change is hard and can take decades. The winds of time shift public sentiment to and fro. What hasn't shifted is the science and research supporting this as the most developmentally and academically appropriate move for adolescents. Sadly, the other grim reality that hasn't shifted are the statistics involving teen depression, suicide, obesity, and anxiety. All have been on the rise since this issue first came before the boards in 2009. An opportunity for adequate sleep at the appropriate time is proven to make a positive impact in all of these areas, and enhance academic performance.

I understand that under the current proposal the end time is later than many would wish. Unfortunately, we are captive to the instructional hours requirement of our calendar, unless a days-based calendar is something the boards wish to take up. While the end time isn't perfect, the start time is the paramount issue of concern to me for the following reasons;

- Parents and students have the ability to make choices regarding extra-curricular schedules; parents and students cannot choose when the school day begins.
- Students suffering with issues impacted by sleep deprivation are unlikely to be the ones standing at a podium at a school-board meeting speaking

up. They are often the ones struggling in silence, or they are the all too common over-scheduled and anxiety riddled individuals convinced that "we can and must do it all to be successful in the future and get accepted into college." It is absolutely true - this plan won't allow our kids to "do it all." Given the statistics surrounding depression, anxiety and stress, maybe that isn't such a bad thing.

- There is ample evidence to support our current start time being detrimental to academic performance, health & well-being, and brain development in students ages 13-18. The science is clear.

Thank you for your informed and thoughtful deliberation on this important issue.

Respectfully,

Shannon Gascoyne
Amherst, NH

sources:

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/134/3/642/tab-figures-data>

<https://www.mnsleep.net/about-us/school-start-time-faqs/>

<https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/students-grades-and-health-improve-later-high-school-start-times>

<https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/features/schools-start-too-early.html>

<https://www.startschoolater.net/wake-up-calls-fast-facts.html>

<https://www.startschoolater.net/myths-and-misconceptions.html>

Myths and Misconceptions - Start School Later

Every community, large or small, can find many, often hundreds of, ways to run schools at later, healthier hours. Some of these ways may involve re-routing or adding buses, and sometimes this will involve one-time or even recurrent costs.

www.startschoolater.net

Wake Up Calls (Fast Facts) - Start School Later

The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2019 showed that 77.0% of U.S. high school students get fewer than 8 hours of sleep on school nights. This is an increase from the 2017 findings, which showed that 75.4% of U.S. high school students get fewer than 8 hours of sleep on school nights, and 43% get 6 or fewer hours.

www.startschoolater.net

	<p><u>Schools Start Too Early subsection title section title site title</u></p> <p>Links with this icon indicate that you are leaving the CDC website.. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) cannot attest to the accuracy of a non-federal website. Linking to a non-federal website does not constitute an endorsement by CDC or any of its employees of the sponsors or the information and products presented on the website.</p> <p>www.cdc.gov</p>
	<p><u>Students' grades and health improve with later high school start times University of Minnesota</u></p> <p>Later high school start times improve student grades and overall health, according to a new University of Minnesota study, released today. The three-year project, using data from more than 9,000 students attending eight high schools in three states, found that, when switching to a later start time:</p> <p>twin-cities.umn.edu</p>
	<p><u>School Start Time FAQs Minnesota Sleep Society</u></p> <p>Adjusting school start times in my district will take a lot of time and effort. Is it really worth it? Yes. Two decades worth of concrete and indisputable evidence from around the world on adolescent sleep rhythms, sleep loss and the effect of later school start times reveals: better academic performance, improved graduation rates, less depression, substance use, tardiness and obesity and ...</p> <p>www.mnsleep.net</p>

From: Kim Wyborney <kwyborney@comcast.net>

Subject: Letter to Board

Date: February 1, 2021 at 7:53:02 PM EST

To: "slawrence@sau39.org" <slawrence@sau39.org>, "peckhoff@sau39.org" <peckhoff@sau39.org>, "jhinckley@sau39.org" <jhinckley@sau39.org>, "sokeefe@sau39.org" <sokeefe@sau39.org>, "sstdenis@sau39.org" <sstdenis@sau39.org>

2/1/21

Dear Mont Vernon School Board,

I am writing hoping for some clarification. I come to you from my parent hat, however as an SAU employee, there will inevitably be some overlap. I have been a lifelong resident of Amherst, I have 3 children (2 at SHS, and 1 at AMS), and consider myself to be well connected in our community. I have read the studies and have an understanding as to the reasoning for the proposed time change. I do however, have some other questions I was hoping you could help answer for me. I have not been able to watch all the board meetings, or pore through all the board minutes. I am a single mom, working full time AND part time, with 3 kids and often just don't logistically have the time or bandwidth to do so. On top of this, as we are all aware, the mental health needs of our schools have had a high acuity as of late, and much of my energy is poured into addressing those needs. I only add this to express that because I have not been able to watch meetings or speak out before, does not negate the fact that this is an issue I am following, am interested in, and invested in. I rely on the elected members of the board to make best decisions on my behalf, and so I am coming to you directly with some hopes for clarification. I love this town, this community, and this school system. Because of that, I felt the need to speak out, something I have never done before, as I have been so pleased with the work done thus far!

I thought the best way to communicate my questions is to make a list, as I am trying to understand where things stand on this issue, and what I can expect for myself as a parent and employee for next year.

- Is this a "done deal"? What exactly is the new proposed time? I am hearing different thoughts on this, and most people say they have no idea what is actually happening. People are saying they feel blindsided and without a voice. The only time change I see is 8:45-3:45, but I am hearing people say there may be other options.
- When was the last time you surveyed individuals about their interest in the time change? I am under the understanding it was 2-3 years ago? I believe in the minutes I read that the last survey showed 45% in favor. Would that mean that 55% (or majority) were against it? What population

was surveyed? Our world looks so different than it did even just one year ago. I'd be curious if we are using the current pulse on where people are at. We also have had many new employees in that time that didn't have an opportunity to weigh in and capture their thoughts.

- Is there just a focus on SHS? Is this primarily driven by the SHS schedule? In all that I've been reading, it only seems to reference SHS – what about the other schools in the SAU as they will also be greatly affected?
- When was AMS staff asked about how they felt about the time change? Where does Clark/Wilkins fit into this? Mont Vernon Village School? How does this affect their daily schedule?
- I am hearing of a schedule at SHS that would incorporate a “flex” period at 3pm to allow for students who need to work, sports, etc to be able to leave at this time, but it would allow all students to use the time as they see fit- whether that is staying for extra help or going home to work on things. Is this the case? Do we propose that most students will stay until 3:45 (aside from those that have to because of transportation issues)? Would students be allowed to leave at 3 to get to a job when it's actually considered academic time? Wouldn't that be a conflict with the DOE “rules”? If this is the case, my daughter will lose her 3-6pm job at the Boys and Girls Club which will certainly negatively affect her college resume. Yikes. So many repercussions in that alone.
- If the SHS students can potentially leave at 3, how does this affect AMS students who may rely on siblings for rides home after school?
- I am hearing that clubs can be held before school. Can you explain how this differs from students coming in early for school to attend clubs? If a student wants to be in a club they have to come in early, thus starting their day at the earlier time we are trying to avoid?

- Has Community Council been told this is a “done deal” and they are only now having a voice in voting on the proposed schedules? My son is on Community Council and has this understanding. Is he wrong?
- Are the students in favor of this? Have they been surveyed recently – not about the schedule change- but about the time change specifically?
- What is the information with minutes vs days based? Is there an option that we have shorter days and extend the school year? Our SAU gets out at least one week earlier than surrounding districts. Is this a potential compromise? Certainly there are studies about gaps that develop over long breaks in instruction.
- Do you feel 3:45 is a fair time for students to get out of school and get home? Will the Mont Vernon students who can have up to a 45 minute bus ride be home around 4:30 when during daylight savings has it dark at that point? Again, many studies on daylight and mental health. Perhaps a later release works in other parts of our country. We live in the Northeast where it is cold and dark, and need to account for this.
- What about staff that may have a second job in the afternoon/evening? I have a second job a couple of nights a week where I am on call for local hospitals doing psych assessments. Having a later start/end time may impact this, and I wonder about other staff or parents who may be in a similar position? (On another note I have seen an uptick in activity there as well with increased hospital visits for mental health needs thus showing the overall acuity of needs at this time during the pandemic.)

Given my career path, my lens always has been and always will be mental health, and in this case that of our students and staff. I understand the data about sleep cycles. Certainly sleep is a large factor in our mental health – that evidence is clear. However, I do have some concerns about later release, as it does not give the students a large opportunity for a “break” from school to evening. Some students need this time to decompress, get outside, participate in preferred activities, be with family, etc. The nature of daylight plays a large factor in our mental health. There is something to be said about the correlation of the uptick in mental health needs during the winter months - especially in the Northeast.

I would also like to emphasize my main concern in all of this: and this is for people's ability to sustain another large change. This pandemic has changed all of our lives. We are all longing for a return to "normalcy". We await it each day. There seems to be hope with talk of vaccines and changes in trends of the virus. To add in another big change at this time has me concerned. I work within the school and have a pulse on the staff. People are really struggling. Teachers are stretched thin. They have risen to a demand like no other. And they have done exceedingly well. But I am hearing that people are not in favor of the change right now, and just feel helpless and burnt out to be able to speak up about it. I have heard things from "I had no idea this was happening now", to "I hate it", to "there's nothing we can do about it now". In fact, a staff member used the word "defeated" to me recently. I have seen some in tears.

I have not yet met any staff or parent that is excited about this. In fact I have heard parents talking about looking for alternative schools for their children and staff looking for other jobs that better fit their already taxed schedules. In my professional opinion and "boots to the ground" experience, people cannot handle another big change right now. Please understand that people are at their breaking point. This is why we may be seeing different reactions from indifference to anger. People are burnt out.

Other large topics have been deferred. Can this possibly be revisited as well? We are all collectively grieving the loss of what was once familiar. It's difficult to make good decisions during times of grief. I think you would relieve the unnecessary pressure on parents and staff to plan for significant changes in the face of a current uncertain world, allow for some space for a sense of return to normalcy, and truly help assuage the rising mental health needs across our schools and community – ultimately you'd be doing what is in the best interest for our students at this time, which is what this is all about to begin with.

Your hard work on these difficult topics and decisions has not gone unnoticed. As I mentioned earlier, I rely on the board members I have elected to make best decisions for our school community. I, in turn, ask you rely on those of us who are living this daily and reporting back to you about our concerns based on what we are seeing and experiencing. Let's work together and come up with a good plan. There is time. There is no rush to make changes right now in the midst of a global crisis. In times such as this, our focus needs to be on the mental health and safety of our community. I feel right now this change will negatively affect that. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kim Wyborney

From: Kim Wyborney <kwyborney@comcast.net>

Subject: Letter to Board

Date: January 29, 2021 at 5:13:08 PM EST

To: "sokeefe@sau39.org" <sokeefe@sau39.org>

1/29/21

Dear Chairman O'Keefe,

I am writing hoping for some clarification. I come to you from my parent hat, however as an SAU employee, there will inevitably be some overlap. I have been a lifelong resident of Amherst, I have 3 children (2 at SHS, and 1 at AMS), and consider myself to be well connected in our community. I have read the studies and have an understanding as to the reasoning for the proposed time change. I do however, have some other questions I was hoping you could help answer for me. I have not been able to watch all the board meetings, or pore through all the board minutes. I am a single mom, working full time AND part time, with 3 kids and often just don't logistically have the time or bandwidth do so. On top of this, as we are all aware, the mental health needs of our schools have had a high acuity as of late, and much of my energy is poured into addressing those needs. I only add this to express that because I have not been able to watch meetings or speak out before, does not negate the fact that this is an issue I am following, am interested in, and invested in. I rely on the elected members of the board to make best decisions on my behalf, and so I am coming to you directly with some hopes for clarification. I love this town, this community, and this school system. Because of that, I felt the need to speak out, something I have never done before, as I have been so pleased with the work done thus far!

I thought the best way to communicate my questions is to make a list, as I am trying to understand where things stand on this issue, and what I can expect for myself as a parent and employee for next year.

- Is this a "done deal"? What exactly is the new proposed time? I am hearing different thoughts on this, and most people say they have no idea what is actually happening. People are saying they feel blindsided and without a voice. The only time change I see is 8:45-3:45, but I am hearing people say there may be other options.

- When was the last time you surveyed individuals about their interest in the time change? I am under the understanding it was 2-3 years ago? I believe in the minutes I read that the last survey showed 45% in favor. Would that mean that 55% (or majority) were against it? What population was surveyed? Our world looks so different than it did even just one year ago. I'd be curious if we are using the current pulse on where people are at. We also have had many new employees in that time that didn't have an opportunity to weigh in and capture their thoughts.
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student wants to be in a club they have to come in early, thus starting their day at the earlier time we are trying to avoid?

- Has Community Council been told this is a “done deal” and they are only now having a voice in voting on the proposed schedules? My son is on Community Council and has this understanding. Is he wrong?
- Are the students in favor of this? Have they been surveyed recently – not about the schedule change- but about the time change specifically?
- What is the information with minutes vs days based? Is there an option that we have shorter days and extend the school year? Our SAU gets out at least one week earlier than surrounding districts. Is this a potential compromise? Certainly there are studies about gaps that develop over long breaks in instruction.
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- What about staff that may have a second job in the afternoon/evening? I have a second job a couple of nights a week where I am on call for local hospitals doing psych assessments. Having a later start/end time may impact this, and I wonder about other staff or parents who may be in a similar position? (On another note I have seen an uptick in activity there as well with increased hospital visits for mental health needs thus showing the overall acuity of needs at this time during the pandemic.)

Given my career path, my lens always has been and always will be mental health, and in this case that of our students and staff. I understand the data about sleep cycles. Certainly sleep is a large factor in our mental health – that evidence is clear. However, I do have some concerns about later release, as it does not give the students a large opportunity for a “break” from school to evening. Some students need this time to decompress, get outside, participate

in preferred activities, be with family, etc. The nature of daylight plays a large factor in our mental health. There is something to be said about the correlation of the uptick in mental health needs during the winter months - especially in the Northeast.

I would also like to emphasize my main concern in all of this: and this is for people's ability to sustain another large change. This pandemic has changed all of our lives. We are all longing for a return to "normalcy". We await it each day. There seems to be hope with talk of vaccines and changes in trends of the virus. To add in another big change at this time has me concerned. I work within the school and have a pulse on the staff. People are really struggling. Teachers are stretched thin. They have risen to a demand like no other. And they have done exceedingly well. But I am hearing that people are not in favor of the change right now, and just feel helpless and burnt out to be able to speak up about it. I have heard things from "I had no idea this was happening now", to "I hate it", to "there's nothing we can do about it now". In fact, a staff member used the word "defeated" to me recently. I have seen some in tears.

I have not yet met any staff or parent that is excited about this. In fact I have heard parents talking about looking for alternative schools for their children and staff looking for other jobs that better fit their already taxed schedules. In my professional opinion and "boots to the ground" experience, people cannot handle another big change right now. Please understand that people are at their breaking point. This is why we may be seeing different reactions from indifference to anger. People are burnt out.

Other large topics have been deferred. Can this possibly be revisited as well? We are all collectively grieving the loss of what was once familiar. It's difficult to make good decisions during times of grief. I think you would relieve the unnecessary pressure on parents and staff to plan for significant changes in the face of a current uncertain world, allow for some space for a sense of return to normalcy, and truly help assuage the rising mental health needs across our schools and community – ultimately you'd be doing what is in the best interest for our students at this time, which is what this is all about to begin with.

Your hard work on these difficult topics and decisions has not gone unnoticed. As I mentioned earlier, I rely on the board members I have elected to make best decisions for our school community. I, in turn, ask you rely on those of us who are living this daily and reporting back to you about our concerns based on what we are seeing and experiencing. Let's work together and come up with a good plan. There is time. There is no rush to make changes right now in the midst of a global crisis. In times such as this, our focus needs to be on the mental health

and safety of our community. I feel right now this change will negatively affect that. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kim Wyborney

— — — — —

From: Deb Dionne <ddionne10@gmail.com>

Subject: School start time change

Date: January 28, 2021 at 4:35:39 PM EST

To: "sokeefe@sau39.org" <sokeefe@sau39.org>

Good afternoon Chairman O'Keefe and the SAU Board,

I wanted to reach out to share my concerns as a parent regarding the upcoming school start change. I strongly feel that I need to speak up and advocate against this proposed schedule time change. First, I will apologize for the length of this email, I am not known for my brevity in writing. Also I also want to preface that I greatly appreciate all the hard work you all do and this email is by no means to minimize that.

I have been so impressed with the transparency that Adam and the ASB school board has been providing these past few years, which is why I was completely surprised to hear very little information about the time change set to occur next year. Yes, I know this isn't a new idea on the table and has been explored since 2018 or even before then. However since March we have been living in a world where so many people are in survival mode and are working so hard to keep it together (including myself). It is hard to look into next school year when I can barely look ahead to the next month. And perhaps there has been other communication but I've just been saturated with so much other information that I missed it. I recall a quick mention in an email communication from the SAU home around November but that is all I've heard. No mention in any of the articles the school board provides to the Amherst Citizen, etc. And quite honestly, even if there was communication, I'm not sure what place I would be to fully grapple with it. Every email communication I do receive from the SAU is always a moment of panic...are we moving remote, do we have to quarantine, etc. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate those updates, but when you are operating in survival mode - it's the flight, fight, freeze response. I'm not sure how much more information I can handle and I know I'm not alone in that

thought. Again, it's hard to look ahead to the future when you are just trying to survive in the moment.

I don't dispute the science of sleep. I understand the why. However I'm struggling to understand "why" behind the significant change in time. I don't recall the change being this drastic when it was presented before. As a parent of a first grader, I'm very concerned with after school care. My children (6 and 3) go to an in home daycare in Amherst where she relies on high school students after school to help watch the kids while she brings her own children to their activities...including a middle schooler who leaves at 3 to go to gymnastics in Peterborough. I'm concerned about the availability of childcare for my children after school. Sure I can send my first grader to the after school program at Wilkins, but that will be an added expense and doesn't resolve that I will potentially have lack of care for my 3 year old if my daycare doesn't have help after school. And if I do not have after school care, I'm then forced with the decision of ripping my children away from an environment that I trust, that they have an attachment to and feel comfortable in.

There has been zero communication about what the additional resources will be for after school care for the elementary school students, which is very frustrating. Are we parents left to our own devices and hope for the best? What about the financial implications that it will have, and/or parents needing to try to make work accommodations to get their kids earlier? Many parents have already been financially strapped this year because of the pandemic and have needed to make arrangements through their work to be home with kids while they've been unable to be at school either through remote or needed quarantine, etc. Are there even available resources to count on next school year afterschool? It's hard to plan when we don't even know what next year looks like. Moreover, so much attention has been for the plans of the SHS impact. What about the other schools?? There is an equal amount of impact for the students at those schools as well, and I'm not aware of any communication about parent input or parent groups, student groups, etc., as they have done at the high school. Why is that?

I am also very concerned what after school life will look for my kids as they get older. Sure, who knows what my kids will be interested in afterschool when they reach the middle and high school level. However I do not want them limited by the activities available to them or the limited afterschool hours to be able to participate in the things they like to do, especially if any sports or activities start at 4pm. And if they are involved in things outside of the Amherst community - are they then forced to pick between the options? These kids have already lost so much this year, it's not fair for them to be losing out on other opportunities that they love and or family time in the evening because they are out straight

afterschool. That will only impact their mental health negatively. And I guess I wonder, will the extra sleep in the morning even help if they are just staying up later to fit everything in afterschool when the timing is more tight? It is only perpetuating the problem. Moreover, while academics are crucially important, I would argue that their social and emotional well being is just as important. What impact will this time change have on all of that? The mental health needs in the world are only increasing and even more so through this pandemic. Sadly in our community we know this all too well. I could reference multiple articles from the CDC and National Alliance on Mental Health about the importance of mental health, how covid has impacted mental health, as well as articles written about the long term effect from Covid. Please do not forget how important the "whole child" is. It's not just about the sleep!!

I know change is hard. I'm not saying I disagree with the idea of a later start, however I will say that I completely disagree with the significant change in times. Many parents I have spoken to feel the same. They also feel completely blindsided by this and that they have no say. Students who I've talked to feel even more strongly against it. Yes, I hear the argument that other schools have done the same. Yes they have - but Bedford or Oyster River, the schools often referenced, are dismissed at 3:10 or 3:05 respectively. The last survey from the district about this was in February 2018, 3 years ago. The board minutes from April 2018, reflect that 45% supported the change. I'm also confused as there is a note from October 2019 board minutes that 2/3 of parents supported the change, so I'm unclear of what the actual data is. 45% to 2/3 is vastly different. Furthermore, a lot has changed since then. A lot has changed even in one year. I would implore you to update your data and survey students and parents about this, not just limit the focus on SHS. Other schools besides SHS matter too.

I do not envy your position and I know you have all put in countless hours for your service, the ongoing meetings, the budget, the building proposals, the covid task force to only name a few and I greatly appreciate all your hard work. My ask is that we really look at whether this is truly the best time, during a pandemic, to be changing more. These kids' worlds have been turned upside down for the past year and they are craving normalcy. Why add one more thing and one more change to their lives? I understand that this has already been put on hold and we do need to move forward with life after the pandemic, I just wonder if this is truly the right time to do so. Many people are barely holding it together and are at their breaking point. Facilities has been pushed to next year and now deliberative/voting is being pushed ahead to June. Is it unreasonable to ask that we do not decide on a major school change in the middle of a pandemic when many of us are not in the right frame of mind to fully understand what impact this will have?

I appreciate your consideration in this matter.

Thank you,
Deb Dionne
28 Hickory Drive
Amherst, NH

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From: **Nikki Fairbanks** <nikki.pattee@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, Feb 11, 2021 at 8:14 PM
Subject: School start time
To: <asb@sau39.org>

Dear ASB Members,

I'd like to voice my concerns with the new proposed start times for next school year. I understand this is a difficult problem both logistically and economically and I respect that not everyone will be happy with whatever is chosen. I felt the need to email you because unlike our wonderfully vocal high schoolers, elementary students don't have the same ability to voice their concerns and opinions, that task falls upon their parents.

My concern is that two years ago there was a community input hearing about a change similar to what is being proposed now (with elementary starting later) and it was deemed a poor choice at that time. Not only did we hear from multiple elementary educators about how the best instructional time for our young learners is before lunch, we heard a number of concerns from parents. My children are remote this year and we start our school day at the old time of 8:30 because it is so apparent that they are ready to learn earlier in the day. I have so much empathy for teachers as I've been guiding my remote learners this year!

Secondly, our district already has the latest release time in the area for elementary students meaning any extra curriculars they wish to participate in are already a struggle with timing. Typical activities like dance, karate, gymnastics have classes for younger kids earlier in the afternoon (ironically because they too understand that age group needs to be done with their day earlier) so to push our release time by up to 45 minutes will exclude Amherst students from partaking in activities with kids from neighboring towns.

Thirdly, the later release will also mean many students will be getting off the bus in the dark. That is such a huge safety concern now that bus stops have been consolidated and young students have to walk further to get back home at a time when adults are driving home from work.

Finally, I also feel strongly that using this year as a guideline for what works is wildly off base. Not only are people willing to put up with it because we all feel the need to pitch in, but many parents are working from home and can facilitate the later start time. When society goes back to "normal" that will no longer be the case. Also please keep in mind how many parents are using the extra hour in the morning that the school is offering because 9:30 is too late for them to get to work. In my house I have switched to second shift and weekend work to allow my students to be remote. This is not a choice I make willingly, I do it to keep my family safe and alive. This is not a schedule we can sustain in the long term and making assumptions for next year based on the current school year feels wrong.

I fully support our middle and high school students starting later but I do not believe that decision should be made at the expense of the elementary students.

Thank you for your time,
Nikki Fairbanks

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From: **Barzaga, Michelle** <MBarzaga@elliott-hs.org>
Date: Wed, Feb 10, 2021 at 8:51 PM
Subject: School start times
To: ASB@sau39.org <ASB@sau39.org>
Cc: Adam Steel <asteel@sau39.org>

Hello Mr. Steel and school board members,

I wanted to reach out regarding the new proposal to switch elementary kids to start at 9am to allow for a later start at the middle and high schools. I am in favor of the older kids starting later in the morning however this cannot come at the cost of the younger kids. As a family with two working parents and three young kids I'm really struggling to figure out how this is going to work long term.

Adam, in a recent video you said something along the lines of, "because the later start time is working now it shows it can work long term" but I very strongly politely disagree with this. It is "working" because we are in pure survival mode and have no other choice. This school year I am at Wilkins dropping off my kids

at 8am sharp when the doors open and then off to work. While I am grateful that we have this option as opposed to the 9:30 start time, it has definitely taken a toll on the kids. **Both of my kids (2nd and 3rd grades) teachers will attest that in the afternoon they are significantly more tired than the other kids who arrive when the school day starts.** I've heard a lot of people on social media say, well with a 9am start time we will have just have morning care for working families.... But this puts the working families (which is a large portion of this town) at a HUGE disadvantage and a continued hardship. This cannot be our answer for what is best for the town. To have so many little kids sitting in a classroom 90 minutes + before any learning even begins and THEN expecting them to do well learning for a whole school day.

If we are doing this because science says teens need more sleep we must consider the other children in town and I can guarantee you the science does not say elementary kids are going to do good with an 8am to 345 Monday through Friday schedule. That's a 40hr work week which is hard on working adults!

Also important is that these kids, even at just 7 & 8yrs old, pick up on the inequity of their situation. At least once a week for the entire school year they ask me, "how come I can't start school when everyone else does?" Or "how come I can't sleep in like the normal kids get to?" As if being a working parent isn't hard enough, now my kids see me as the bad guy. Right now I am able to use the pandemic as an excuse. I can't imagine this being the norm in a town with so many working families.

I believe in one of the discussions I heard that extending the school year by 5 days was an option. This would be such a big help for working families and I hope it can be given significant consideration. For the past three years we have struggled to arrange childcare for the first few weeks/days of the summer since most camps haven't started yet.

I have to close by saying how tremendous our teachers are. The educational and mental health growth I have seen in my two elementary age kids this year shocks me into happy tears. They are so wonderful, and loving, and brilliant, I just cannot say enough positive things about the Wilkins teaching staff.

Additionally the work that you Mr. Steel and the rest of the administration have done to keep our schools open during this pandemic is second to none. My friends and family from all over the state and country are always in awe when I tell them what our experience has been like. This email is in no way a criticism of anyone.

Thank you for listening.
Michelle

Michelle Barzaga, MPH

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From: 'Tracey Carroll' via Amherst School Board <asb@sau39.org>

Date: Thu, Feb 11, 2021 at 11:29 AM

Subject: School Start Times

To: <asteel@sprise.com>, <clandwehrle@sprise.com>, Anna Parrill
<aparrill@sau39.org>, <asb@sau39.org>

Hello esteemed board, Superintendent Steel, Assistant Superintendent Landwehrle and Principal Parrill,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed changes to school start times. I have been following along the past few years regarding the many different proposals. I currently am a parent of a 3rd and 1st grader at Wilkins. I

understand the science regarding the need for a later start time for the middle and high school age students and will soon be a parent of a student in this population. My concern is regarding our elementary aged learners. It feels as though the sacrifice is coming at their expense. I am concerned with what quality of instruction will be retained with such a later day for these young learners with the proposal of a 9am-3:45pm school day. I am hoping that you will be bringing the opinion and suggestion of your experts who teach these learners to the meeting on Feb 18th so that we may all better understand their stance on this proposal. With the later start time, many of these students may need to be entered into morning care as the flexibility of employers may soon be running out. Depending on what our COVID status looks like in the fall there may be restrictions on how many children may be entered into these programs. Having to be enrolled in a before school program would be elongating the days for these young learners and potentially requiring them to have longer days than what adults are required to be in work for. As it stands my children would most likely not be home on the bus until approx 4:30pm when the time for both school dismissals and bus pick ups are factored in and then the trek home. I'm not only concerned about the end time but truly what level of instruction will be happening for these students. A 5 year old kindergartener in school until almost 4pm seems like there is an increased risk for behavior issues as well as decreased success in learning.

I have heard in your weekly announcement, Superintendent Steel, that you felt as though this year the 9am start time was working for families, I would have to disagree with this statement. This late start is a burden on working families and we are missing valuable time of instruction for young learners when they are ready to learn. I want to be sure that you have feedback that this time is "working" this year as it is our only option but I am concerned regarding you feeling that is being done so with ease.

I support the intent for moving the start times for the high school and middle school students back to optimize their ready to learn time, but please consider when the optimal ready to learn time is for our elementary school students. I believe that you should continue to consider having the elementary students start before the middle and high school students. I heard in your weekly announcement that there is a concern about after school care, programs are available after school just as they are before school and therefore providing increased weight on either end raises concern about fairness in the decision making process. I understand that many students and families of the middle and high school age students are concerned with the end times in relation to sports and after school activities and is another driving factor as to why the consideration for this group to start first.

I applaud your openness for feedback and discussion and look forward to optimizing the best solution for all.

Thank you for your time and hard work,

Tracey Carroll

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From: '**Jen Coville**' via **Amherst School Board** <asb@sau39.org>

Date: Thu, Feb 4, 2021 at 11:21 AM

Subject: School Start Times

To: asb@sau39.org <asb@sau39.org>

Dear Amherst School Board members,

I am a parent of a 4th grade student at Wilkins and an upcoming Kindergarten student. I am writing out of concern regarding the proposed schedule change for our district. I am particularly troubled with the largest change affecting grades 5-12 and deeply concerned that the current proposal, while trying to address the issue of adolescent sleep, is overlooking the negative effects this will have on our students as a whole.

I am not opposed to, and actually do believe that we need, later start times. None of our students should be getting on a bus in the dark at 6:30 in the morning, as was the case in my neighborhood prior to this year. However, I cannot support the proposed plan as it is due to the dramatically late dismissal time and I implore you to consider alternatives.

First, please consider that the proposed schedule changes for the middle school and high school will affect a student body ranging from ages 10 through 18. I think we all can agree that what may work for a 18-year-old high school student does not necessarily work for a 10-year-old fifth-grader. Our youngest middle school students do not have nearly enough time for outdoor play, a critical component of brain development, during the school day as it is. The proposed dismissal time of 3:45, especially for students depending on bus transportation, will allow for very little (if any in the winter) daylight time after school. Please also take into consideration that these younger students have a much earlier bedtime, also crucial for brain development and physical growth. It is already a race from the bus, to homework, to dinner and bed. With the later dismissal, there will be even less time for the after school schedule and extracurricular

activities, let alone the family time that is, again, essential to childhood development.

I believe it is also imperative to take into account the families that depend on high school students for the care of younger siblings after school. While I have heard many times recently that it is not the responsibility of the school to ensure childcare, the strain that this could put on many of our families should be a societal concern.

I also suspect that, especially for our older students, less time after school for homework, sports, jobs or any other after-school activities will just cause later bedtimes to fit it all in. While I don't have any high school students yet, as a business owner in Amherst of 20 years, I have employed them. The drastically later dismissal would assuredly affect the ability of any students wishing to obtain an after-school job. I am concerned that these students will take positions working later into the night which will in turn affect their sleep.

While I do not disagree that later start times are beneficial, the proposed later dismissal times are aggressive and certainly not beneficial to the majority of our students and their families. I sincerely hope that alternatives will be considered.

- Our school day is longer than most, can we remove the extra 20 minutes?
- Can it be taken into consideration to flip the start times so that the elementary students start after the high school students? Just switching those start times would still provide an approximately 40 min later start for middle and high schools while eliminating many of the after-school problems that the later dismissals would create.
- It is my understanding that in NH grades K-6 require less instruction time, is there anyway to play with those extra minutes to shorten the elementary day even further so that no one is being dismissed at 3:45? Clearly it would be problematic for our elementary children to have a 3:45 dismissal as well.
- Can the bus routes be reevaluated to allow less time between drop-offs?

These are just a few thoughts that I've had. I am extremely concerned that the current proposal is focused solely on academics with complete disregard to the needs of our youngest middle school children, not to mention what is best only for a small portion of our student body (grades 9-12). Our district's mission is to develop the whole child and support all learners, it would be short-sighted and irresponsible to ignore the issues that the proposed later start times would create for many of our students and their families.

I want to close this with a sincere thank you to all who serve on the board for all that you do. I know that the challenges we face as a district are intricately nuanced and the answers are often not easy to come by. I truly appreciate your time and effort overseeing our schools and school community.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Way

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From: **C B** <bryson.claire@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, Feb 18, 2021, 4:07 PM
Subject: Start and End Times for SAU 39
To: <ekuzsma@sprise.com>, <tbehm@sprise.com>, <TGauthier@sau39.org>, <EGrudzien@sau39.org>, <jconklin@sau39.org>, <pgrondstra@sau39.org>, <ltaylor@sau39.org>, <jglover@sau39.org>, <scoughlan@sau39.org>, <afacey@sau39.org>, <gtorres@sau39.org>, <sgrund@sau39.org>, <asteel@sprise.com>

To the members of the SAU 39 School Boards,

I'm somewhat disappointed to hear the newest iteration of the plan for changing start and end times in the district. It is a vast improvement over the initial plan to have AMS and SHS end at 3:45, but it still concerns me. We were told in the YouTube update of February 5 that students at AMS and SHS would end school "no later than 3:00". This newest plan has AMS ending at 3:15. Busses leaving school at 3:30 effectively means that the dismissal time for anyone riding a bus is 3:30.

I imagine you received some negative feedback from parents of younger students regarding a plan that would have Clark-Wilkins dismiss at 3:45. That was an awfully late end time to propose for our youngest students. I appreciate that this newest plan, eliminating that very late end time for CW seeks to find as good a compromise as possible. But, I would argue that it isn't there yet. I urge you to take a little more time to work with this before taking a final vote.

A large part of the problem seems to be with having the elementary students begin and end school before the high school. Certainly, the issue with buses leaving school thirty minutes after the official dismissal is problematic. It's clear that it is necessary, however, if CW isn't dismissed until 2:15. Elementary bus routes take longer, are less efficient, and less predictable. My guess is that if the district proceeds with this plan, we will find that even a 3:30 bus dismissal from AMS/SHS is an impossibility, and that the bus

departures will actually be even later. You've already indicated that you know that those very late end times are problematic for students and their families.

Yesterday, I started reading the argument that the elementary students needed to be in school for peak learning hours of 8-11. If the elementary school starts closer to 9:00, it is still possible to capitalize on those morning hours. Educators are some of the most creative people around. They can and would adjust their schedules to meet the children's educational needs. Class times like morning meeting, calendar math, etc. can be moved a little later in the day to allow instructional time to take place earlier. I'm confident our elementary teachers can make the timing work for our children.

I used to be a second grade teacher in a school with a 7:50-2:10 school day. I can speak, anecdotally, to productivity with little kids with such an early start. Many kids will be ready for the day at 7:45. But, a large number will come to school so late and so consistently, that teachers will end up waiting to begin any instruction until those frazzled late-comers have had a chance to transition and settle in - every day. When I hear the proposed time of 7:45 for CW, I'm just glad I don't have little kids any more.

I think the plan suggested in the update on February 5 was closest to a solution that would really work for most families and our children, with a little tweaking. I'm so happy to see that you are willing to shorten the length of the school day. That will be so good for our kids at all ages and also allows you some flexibility with scheduling. How about this for a proposed schedule: SHS/AMS 8:15-2:45, CW 9:00-3:15.

Thank you for all the time that you have all given to these discussions and planning sessions. You have shown that you are willing to take your time to get to the best possible solution for as many students, as possible. Having just received the newest plan yesterday, have you really had the time to carefully weigh the pros and cons and gather feedback from parents, teachers, and students to give it your approval? I hope you will take that time, look into small changes that could still be made, and when ready vote to approve a plan that works for all - with later start times, reasonable end times, and a middle and high school day that begins and ends before the elementary day.

Thank you,
Claire Bryson

From: **Perrin Enriquez** <perrinenriquez@gmail.com>

Date: Thu, Feb 18, 2021, 5:27 PM

Subject: Letter of record to AMS and Souhegan School Board

To: <TGauthier@sau39.org>, <EGrudzien@sau39.org>, <jconklin@sau39.org>, <pgrondstra@sau39.org>, <ltaylor@sau39.org>, <jglover@sau39.org>, <scoughlan@sau39.org>, <afacey@sau39.org>, <gtorres@sau39.org>, <sgrund@sau39.org>, <tbehm@sau39.org>, <ekuzsma@sau39.org>

Good afternoon,

Please accept this letter into the minutes of the meeting scheduled for Thursday, February 18, 2021. I write to you today regarding the proposed AMS dismissal time and bus departures presented on February 17, 2021 by Superintendent Steel. I would like to have a clear understanding of how the current proposal mitigates a later end time. From experience I know that many AMS students rely on SHS drivers (siblings and neighbors) for their transportation. High school drivers enable teens to arrive home in a timely fashion. Students are able to get to jobs and after-school activities on time. The proposed AMS 3:15 pm dismissal time will mean that SHS students will wait probably close to 20 minutes for their sibling/friend to arrive at the SHS campus (3pm SHS bell and 3:15pm AMS bell plus travel time to SHS). With buses departing at 3:30pm, it is likely that these student drivers are placed in the queue after the buses similar to our current procedure. I predict that most kids who live in Mont Vernon or beyond the Village, will get home around 3:45-3:50pm. This is nearly 45 minutes after they have been dismissed and seems to defeat the purpose of moving the dismissal bell to 3pm.

Additionally, high school students who do not participate in a sport, seek after school help or are a member of a club, are hanging out for 30 minutes waiting for the bus. I have read statements in which community members have declared that parents should simply go to the school to pick up their kids if they are dissatisfied with the bus times. I find this shortsighted especially given the economic climate and dual working households.

Perhaps there is a way to dismiss AMS students at 3pm so they can meet up with their SHS sibling and depart closer to 3:10. I know that the AMS academic schedule is not as flexible but perhaps we can move Eagle Block to the end of the day or move Eagle for the 7th and 8th grade AMS kids who are more likely to have an older sibling.

I realize that there is no perfect solution, yet I urge you to please listen to the SHS and AMS kids. Over the past 48 hours my kids have reported that the time change is still being discussed in Launchpad and in Advisory. Generally speaking the Souhegan kids are strongly against it and at AMS I understand that the faculty as well as the students are in opposition.

I believe we can agree that this is complicated and it's tough when community members complain that this topic has been on the table for years. It's hard work to find the right solution. I urge the school boards to go back to the drawing board regarding the dismissal time for AMS and SHS.

Thank you for your time and attention to my feedback.

Best regards,
Perrin Enriquez