



Hayfield Athletic Booster Club

February 9, 2009

Mr. Brad Center
Fairfax County School Board
8115 Gatehouse Road, Suite 5400
Falls Church, VA 22042

Dear Mr. Center:

The Hayfield Secondary Athletic Booster Club respectfully requests that the School Board make no changes to school hours. Later start times will significantly impact participation in athletic activities at FCPS high schools and secondary schools, including Hayfield Secondary.

Hayfield Secondary's boundary changes over the past years have impacted our sports programs significantly. We are finally getting back to a stable population and looked forward to future successes with our sports teams. Shifting our school day 75 minutes later would negatively affect many aspects of our athletic programs. Hayfield's school day would end at 3:30, thus practices couldn't possibly begin until approximately 4:00 p.m. Students wouldn't get home until after 7:00 p.m., delaying homework time and missing dinner. Ideally, practices would start approximately one hour after the end of the school day (4:30) to allow time for academic support, but a 4:30 start for practice would cause an even later return home for our athletes. Therefore, the new bell schedule will deny opportunities for our athletes to visit teachers/staff for academic support. They may be able to come before school for this support, if teachers are available, but that negates the assumptions that SLEEP advocates.

The proposed shift in the high school schedule adversely affects many aspects of our athletic programs:

- Bus transportation to games and offsite practice facilities could be delayed as late as 5:30 p.m.
- Access to County pool facilities and playing fields may be limited since some are available to high school teams only until 6 p.m. to allow for community use.
- Travel time, to games and practice facilities, would increase due to rush hour traffic.
- HSS uses other practice facilities such as Hayfield Elementary. Their fields, as well as several fields on our campus, are not lit and will limit practice time.
- Cross country afternoon meets would be limited by darkness.
- Golf team use of golf courses could be curtailed since courses are currently available at 2:30 p.m., before the end of normal working hours when the general public requires access.
- Back-to-back game schedules – for example, freshman/junior varsity/varsity volleyball, field hockey and basketball games which currently start at 4:00, 5:45 and 7:30 p.m. respectively could be pushed back significantly.
- Freshman and junior varsity football games are currently scheduled back-to-back on Thursday nights, with the JV team usually not returning to school before 10 p.m. These games would need to be rescheduled to different nights, reducing field availability for varsity practices and affecting coaching schedules.
- Teachers who coach would face additional after-school pressures, attempting to both provide academic support and get to practices and games in the same small window of time. The scheduling of additional game nights would also adversely affect coverage by our Athletic Trainers.
- County-wide, the demand for lit fields would increase as high school teams seek practice space later in the day. This also affects youth and community leagues, those that deserve to be able to begin their practices and games on those same fields at a reasonable hour.

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A solution to these issues might be to schedule morning practices before the start of school, especially during district, regional and state competitions. But this will place an additional scheduling and transportation burden on athletes' families, and our athletes would be back to their previous schedule.

As another approach to manage a later school day, coaches may have no choice but to shorten practice schedules. The likely result is smaller, easier-to-manage team sizes, reducing opportunities for potential student athletes. Athletics offers opportunities for all groups of our diverse student body and it is well documented that school athletics has positive results such as:

- Improved attendance
- Increased college aspirations and enrollment
- Lower drug and alcohol use
- Decreased risk-taking behavior

Another concern: the proposal to change school hours is proceeding based on input from a special interest group instead of the community-at-large. Most parents have no idea that a decision on the proposed change is imminent, let alone a 2009-2010 school year implementation.

We are also concerned because the Transportation Task Force report included a large number of supporters for a minority report, against changing school times, as well as many abstentions. Most of the minority report supporters were FCPS and Fairfax County employees. FCPS is one of the best school systems in the country because of its dedicated employees; the School Board needs to listen to its employees as closely as it listens to special interest groups.

We know that SLEEP is a well organized group, with the best interests of our students at heart. However, has the opinion of the greater FCPS community, including FCPS staff, been effectively solicited? For example, the current plans for an on-line survey may not result in receiving input from many of the ESOL or FRL populations, and these are the populations that can truly benefit from athletic activities. FCPS spent a significant amount of time investigating transportation impacts on changing the bell schedule. Impacts on other topics, such as athletics, also deserve significant study.

Very truly yours,

Hayfield Secondary School Athletic Booster Club

Cc: Fairfax County School Board Members
Hayfield Secondary Athletic Booster Club Executive Board