

2015 Masconomet and Elementary Calendar Survey Analysis

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Abstract

There was widespread support for the concept of aligning the Elementary and Masconomet calendars, although we may need to reconsider when to hold Professional Development(PD) and Parent -Teacher Conference days: Friday afternoons appear to be a promising option, although many, especially fully working households, expressed the desire for PD to occur outside of normal school hours.

There was a nearly perfect split on whether to start school before or after Labor Day, but if it were to start before Labor Day, that Friday should be a holiday. Much of the opposition to a pre-Labor Day start centered around family vacation, rather than educational reasons, in contrast with proponents, who cited an improved transition into the school year.

There was widespread support for closing school on Christmas Eve, but no other holidays other than those required by the state, with more respondents preferring not to have any holidays (34%) than prefer to close for Good Friday (22%). In fact, many of those who reported participating in Good Friday religious services suggested that either an early release or “no penalty” option would suffice.

Changing to a March vacation week was very popular with parents, but not so much with staff, largely due to conflicts with their native school districts’ calendars. With the appropriate footwork, this could be a viable option.

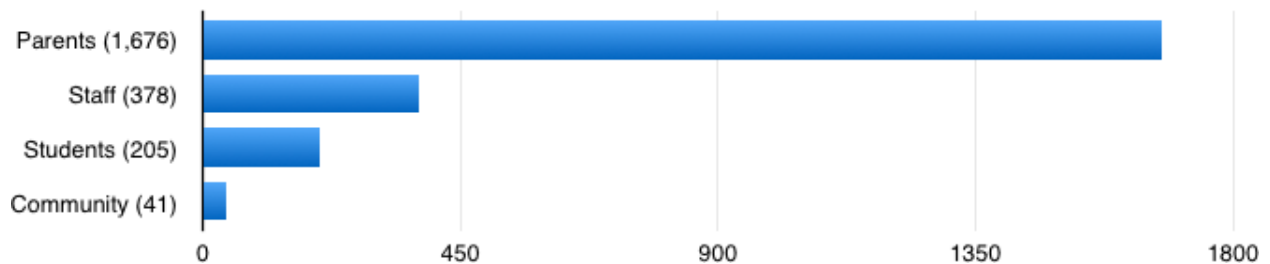
There was broad agreement that middle and high schoolers should have a later start time, but there was deep division on how to address the issue, largely due to concerns about cobusing K-12 students. If transportation and extracurricular activities can be suitably managed, later start times for middle and high school students are possible.

Some pointed out that any major changes to the school calendar should be accompanied by at least a one-year notice.

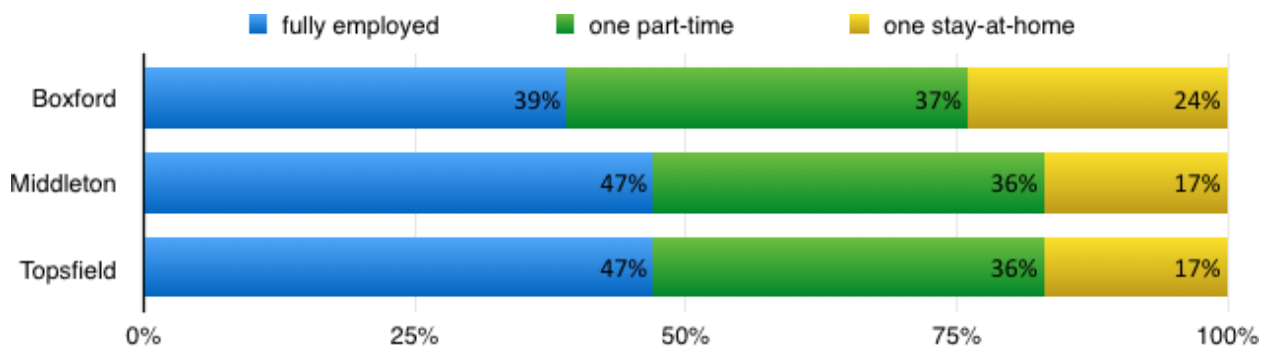
Note: Quoted comments use the following shorthand: 1P, 2P (Parent/Guardians in the household); 1FT, 2FT, 1PT, 2PT (Parent/Guardians working full-time or part-time); Parent [town] (Parent/Guardian of Elementary student(s) in that town’s district); Parent [MascoM, MascoH] (Parent/Guardian of Masconomet Middle or High School student(s))

Who Responded

2,300 responses were recorded, including 1,676 Parents, 378 Staff members, 205 Students, and 41 Community members, representing Boxford, Topsfield, and Middleton, roughly proportional to their associations with the Elementary, Middle and High Schools (there was no apparent bias toward any specific town, or Elementary vs. Masco). Only 9 people dropped out without finishing the survey. Over 120,000 words of comments were read, sorted, and organized into a 128 page narrative that details the breadth of respondents' opinions, available as a separate document.



For the statistically minded, estimating a total population of parents, staff, and students of 7700, the margin of error is 2.3% for a 99% confidence level, or 1.7% for a 95% confidence level. For the rest of us, the percentages given are accurate, plus or minus, about 1 percentage point.



In Boxford:

- 39% of households are fully employed (All parents/guardians are full-time employed)
- 24% of households have one parent/guardian not working
- 37% of households have one parent/guardian working only part-time
- Also of interest, but not broken out in the above proportions, 5.5% of households have only one parent/guardian (various employment states).

In Middleton:

- 47% of households are fully employed (All parents/guardians are full-time employed)
- 17% of households have one parent/guardian not working
- 36% of households have one parent/guardian working only part-time
- Also of interest, but not broken out in the above proportions, 10.1% of households have only one parent/guardian (various employment states).

In Topsfield:

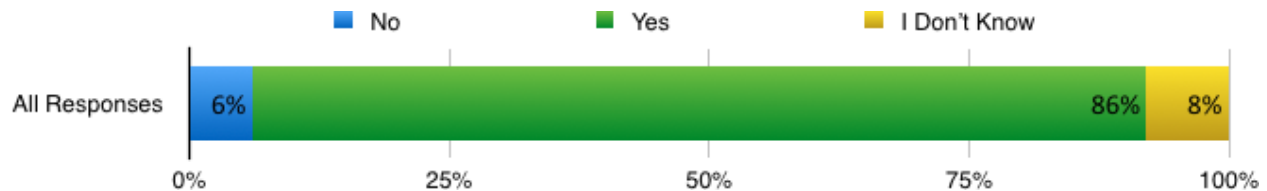
- 47% of households are fully employed (All parents/guardians are full-time employed)
- 17% of households have one parent/guardian not working
- 36% of households have one parent/guardian working only part-time

- Also of interest, but not broken out in the above proportions, 8.5% of households have only one parent/guardian (various employment states).

Aligning the K-12 Calendars

There was overwhelming support for the concept of aligning the calendars between Masconomet and the Elementary Schools. Most opposition assumed that alignment would mean sacrificing the needs of an individual school, which would not be the intent of any alignment decisions. Since Mondays were proposed as the alignment day, support for the move of Professional Development (PD) days to Mondays was also strongly supported, although not necessarily on Monday mornings. Fully working households were notably opposed to late start options as compared with early release, due mostly to childcare and work interruption issues. However, an option that was not offered was widely proposed by respondents: Friday afternoons. This option would maintain the educational benefit of an uninterrupted week of learning while also providing additional flexibility for scheduling weekend activities.

Do you support the idea of aligning the early release days in the K-12 calendars so that all schools share the same early release days to the greatest extent possible?



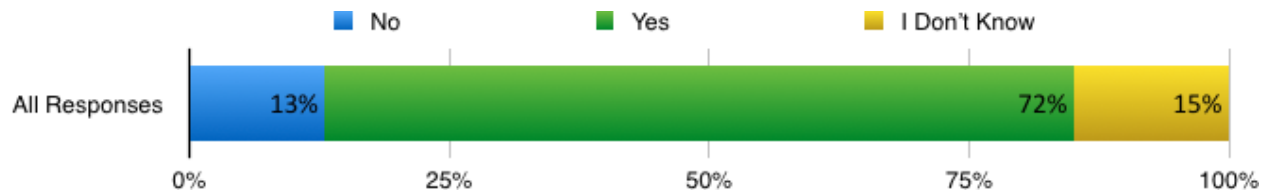
[yes] Aligning is a benefit to parents. Consider that most have to arrange for babysitting, or must be less reliable at their work and work careers. The more standardization the better. —Parent Topsfield - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

[yes] I think it would be beneficial for the try town and MASCO teachers to be able to have a professional development day together if possible. There are more possibilities for programs and presentations if all four districts are involved. I also think a delayed start would be easier on families than the delayed start. —Parent Middleton, Parent MascoM - 2P 1FT - Resident of Middleton

[no] The needs of the K-6 grades are different than the 6-8 and 9-12. This should be considered carefully and a fixed schedule just may not serve these different age groups well, especially because their daily schedules are different. —Parent Topsfield, Parent Baby - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Topsfield

Do you support moving the elementary schools' professional development days to Mondays for the K-12 calendars?

Support for Mondays and Fridays was strongest, especially notable, because Fridays were not mentioned in the survey.

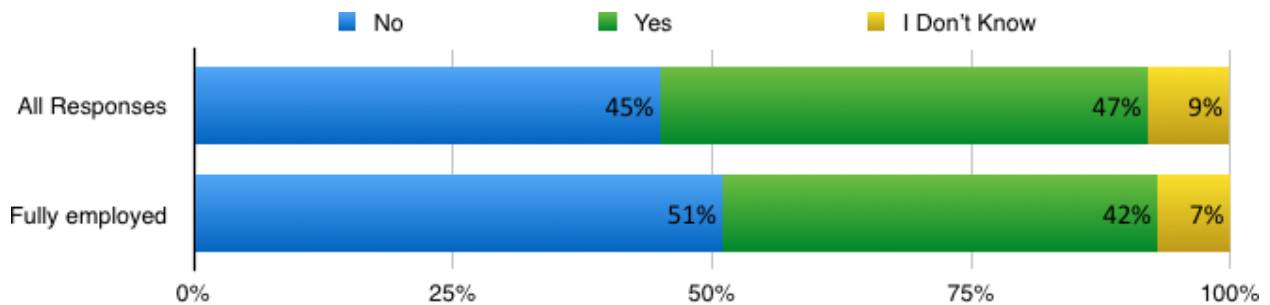


[yes] If school is delayed in the morning, the kids can still continue their after school activities seamlessly. Easier to stick to a routine without a break mid day if released early. —Parent MascoM - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Boxford

[no] If a delayed start was implemented my biggest concern is the impact it would have on households with both parents working. I myself would need to have access to a before school program or some sort of childcare services to make it work. —Parent Middleton - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

Do you support a delayed start, instead of an early release for professional development days in the K-12 calendars?

The responses were a near perfect split. Supporters appeared to like the “prolonged weekend” effect. The majority of opposition to Monday PD centered around the late start, and came from families that work full-time. But many of these fully working respondents pointed out that Friday afternoons would be much better for their schedules. Since Friday afternoon PD would have the same “prolonged weekend” effect, perhaps this is the best option.



[no] For parents who work, it is more challenging to arrange morning childcare. Early release is much more convenient because playdates can be arranged. Delayed openings are a nightmare for working parents. The kids are at their best in the mornings, and it makes no sense to waste those prime learning hours. —Parent Topsfield, Parent MascoH, Parent College, Parent Grown - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

[no] I think it's a great idea to align. It's better for families and for siblings to spend more time together when released early from school. I think all of the early release days should be on Fridays instead of Mondays however, therefore extending the weekend a bit and giving something students can look forward to throughout the week. This would also lead to not interrupting the entire week by only having a half day on Monday making Tuesday feel like a Monday and students not ready to learn. —Staff Boxford - Resident of Other

Professional Development, in general

A considerable amount of frustration with PD was expressed, particularly in terms of its impact on fully working households. A large number of respondents wanted to move PD to off-hours, either before school, after school, during vacation weeks, before or after the student school year, on weekends, or on Friday afternoons. In making such proposals, cost was not even mentioned. It appears that many

respondents did not understand that PD is intended to train staff with district-determined needs (not continuing professional education); that it is conducted during the school year and consist of half-days to save on cost and comply with state laws regarding the length of the school year. It may be helpful to provide a comparison to other districts.

Take away the professional development days entirely, and make teachers stay on board a few days after school gets out to conduct professional development. —Parent Topsfield, Staff MascoM - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

I believe there are too many PD days, honestly. I also think that parent/teacher conferences should not be early release days. I think we should return to the way things were when I was a child...Parents' night at school. Sending kids home early for two days in the fall and two more days in the spring puts a strain on working parents who have to leave work early AND find child care at the same time for children who would otherwise be in school. —Parent Middleton, Parent Grown - Single parent, unemployed - Resident of Middleton

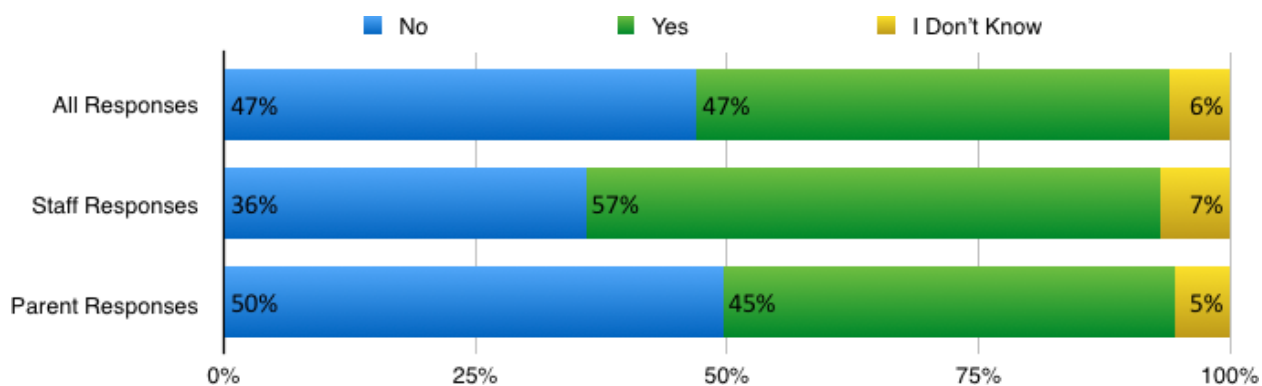
Why can't the professional development sessions be run after school hours? This would solve the negative impact on the children's education, eliminate the Double Monday effect, and simplify bus service for those days. The public education system is for the students, and the adults in the school system should be flexible around the needs of the children. —Parent Middleton - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Middleton

Aligning Full day teacher development days with other holidays to make a 4-day break for students worked very well in 2014, when Nov 10th was a teacher development day followed by Veterans day. Any possibility of something similar would be appreciated, and give families a chance to get away without missing school. One possibility would be to pair up with Columbus day for a 4 day weekend. If you took off the Friday before for a teachers workshop, it would also give the kids a day to go to the Topsfield fair away from the weekend crowds. —Parent Boxford - 2P 2FT - Resident of Boxford

Start and End of School Year

Responses on the topic of starting the school year before Labor Day were deeply divided. Staff were more supportive than parents and students. Most agreed that if school were to start before Labor Day, that Friday should be included in the holiday.

Do you feel that the school year should begin before Labor Day (as early as the last week of August) in order to end earlier in June?



[Before Labor Day] I worked in a district that was initially reluctant to start school before Labor Day. Once the decision was made, we found it was a much nicer way to begin school. We had the Monday as a teacher day, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday to meet the students, take care of all the beginning of school details, and then there was a nice four day weekend to enjoy without the beginning of school looming overhead, as it had already happened! Many students and families we talked to felt the same way--although some were initially displeased with the decision, most of those, particularly the teachers, wound up satisfied with the result--an easier transition into the school year, and a last day of school in mid-June.—Parent Topsfield - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Topsfield

[Before Labor Day] I think that once June hits there is a general loss of momentum in school. Kids are ready to get out and are not at their peak. Starting a little bit earlier would be okay with me as kids would be ready for school. Also, many camps etc are no longer serving the community so day care - if one works - is limited.—Parent Boxford - 2P 2FT - Resident of Boxford

[After Labor Day] My son has learning disabilities and goes to summer school. If you were to start school the last week in August he would not have a sufficient break from school since he would be going to summer school through the second week in August. It would also make it very hard to schedule a family vacation.—Parent Topsfield - 2P 1FT - Resident of Topsfield

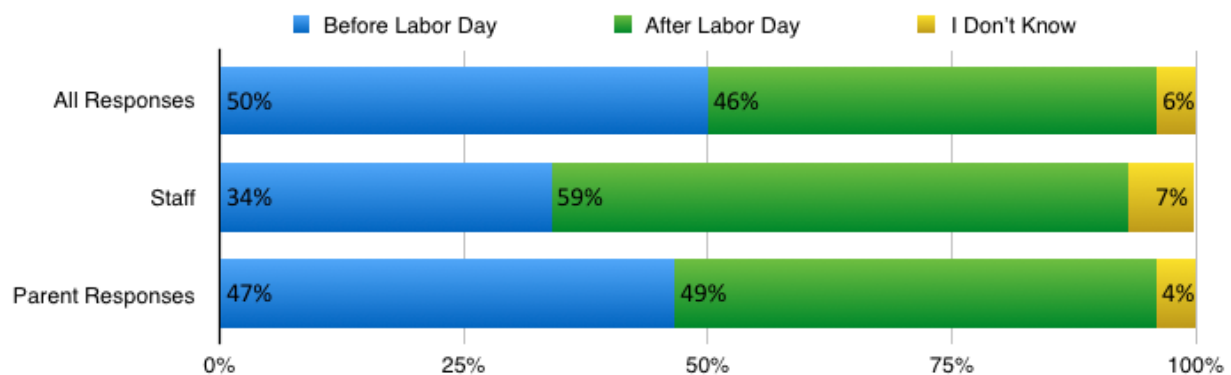
[After Labor Day] Starting after labor day tends to line up better with graduate programs for those of us who are working on continuing our own education as well. We often try to squeeze in a summer vacation the last week in August before all of the students in our household go back for the Fall. —Parent Boxford, Parent Preschool - 2P 2FT - Resident of Boxford

While the students and parents were nearly evenly divided, the staff were more decisive, preferring a pre-Labor Day start:

[Before Labor Day] The number of snow days creates a lot of challenges and more early days in the year would alleviate some of the impact. Given that an instructional day in January is not equivalent to a day in late June, it would be better for students to start earlier. Likewise, standardized test dates are fixed. More instructional time before these tests would be most beneficial.—Staff Topsfield

Which do you prefer?

There was a clear preference for a post-Labor Day start among staff, whereas parents slightly preferred to start after Labor Day. Parents cited tradition and family vacations, whereas staff cited a better start to the school year, educationally, as the rationale. Perhaps the staff have a point?



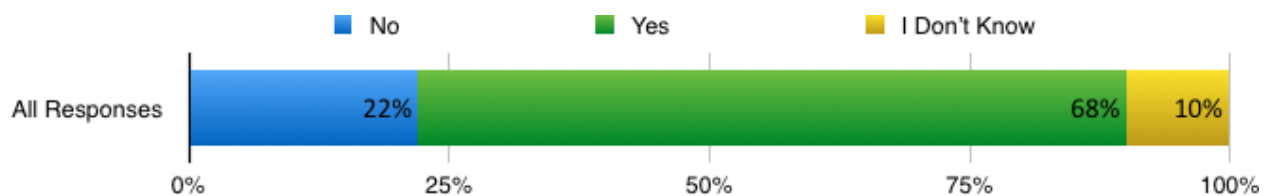
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would be ready for school. Also, many camps etc are no longer serving the community so day care - if one works - is limited.—Parent Boxford - 2P 2FT - Resident of Boxford

[After Labor Day] Please implement 'Blizzard bags' or online classrooms (for learning from home) for snow days. Burlington MA is already doing it so I assume it is possible. I don't think a few occasional days a year of learning from home is going to have a negative impact, especially since the momentum of school is going full force. I think this would be more productive than trying to teach kids at the end of June when everyone is mentally done for the year. Also, I would like to see more 2hr delays vs. snow days when possible. I think 2 snow days this year could have been 2hr delays, and also disagree with the day school was cancelled due to 'cold'.— Parent Boxford - 2P 1FT - Resident of Boxford

[After Labor Day] I find that it is still quite hot at the end of August and beginning of Sept. and would be uncomfortable for students. I THINK WE SHOULD GET RID OF FEBRUARY BREAK. — Parent Topsfield, Parent MascoM - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Topsfield

If school were to begin prior to Labor Day, would you prefer that we take off the Friday before Labor Day?



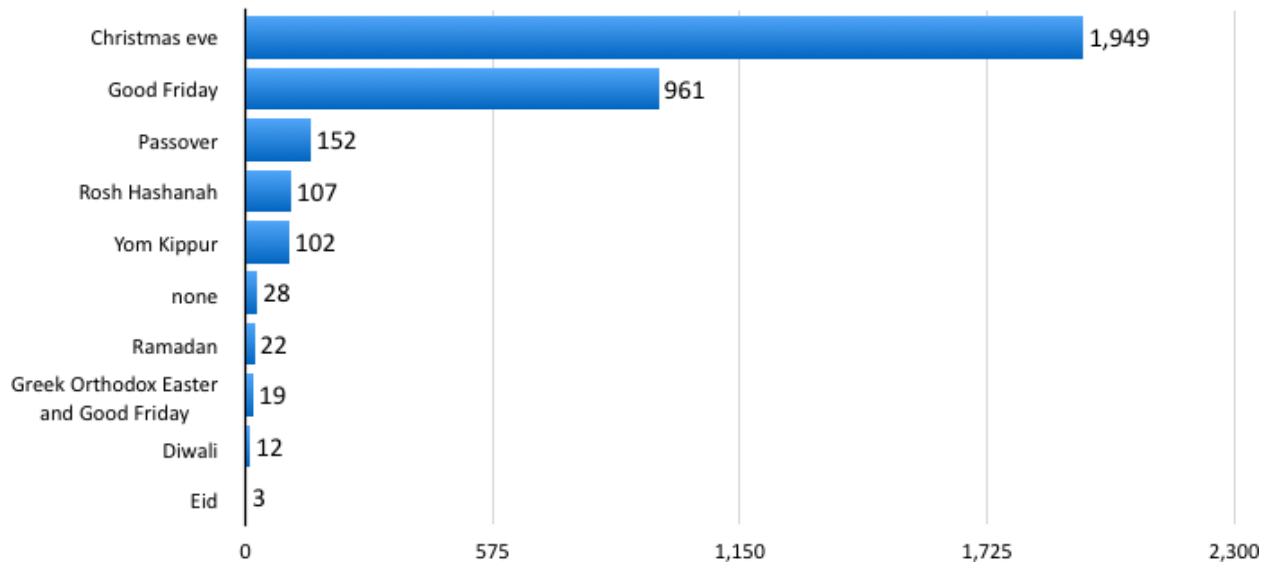
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[After Labor Day] I don't like the idea of starting school before Labor Day because it does end up resulting in a choppy start to the school year due to the labor day holiday. Adding the Friday off creates even more discontinuity in my opinion. Regardless of what is decided, there will never be a 100% consensus.—Parent MascoM - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

School Holidays

Which religious holidays does your family observe?

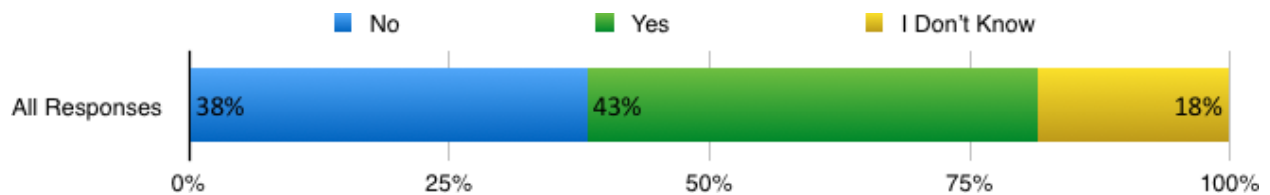
Christmas Eve was the only holiday observed by a majority of families. Good Friday, Passover, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur also had significant support. There were notable numbers for Ramadan and Diwali, and a tail of holidays from various religions.



[not appropriate to include religious holidays] For years now, we have been getting Good Friday off but not Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. In 2013-2014, we were given Rosh Hashanah off but we couldn't actually say that it was due to a religious holiday. Instead, the superintendent's office called it a "community day." However, Good Friday is prominently stated in the handbook as religious day off. All I would like is consistency. If we have off for Good Friday, then we have off for BOTH Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Or we stay secular and have neither. —Staff MascoH - Resident of unknown

Do you believe that it is appropriate for the school calendar to include religious holidays such as Good Friday and Yom Kippur and not to include other religious holidays?

Many respondents commented that the majority should determine the outcome. By this measure, the largest number voted in favor of observing, but that number did not constitute a majority. Given widespread commentary that there should be “no penalty” for family members who stay out of school for religious reasons, it may be time to consider holding school on religious holidays as a general rule.



[yes] Each family can decide for themselves if they choose to keep their children home from school on a religious holiday. In that way, the length of the school year is not affected, and children aren't forced to miss school on days that do not pertain to them. —Parent Topsfield - 2P 1FT - Resident of Topsfield

[yes] As you know, Ramadan is a month-long celebration. It includes fasting throughout the day. Ramadan is an extremely important time of year for Muslim students and they should be given special consideration during this time. Having said that, I don't believe Ramadan is not the holiday to take off - it is Eid. Eid is the celebration that follows at the end of Ramadan. BUT before the school determines whether or not this should be a holiday, I think it is important to know how many students celebrate Eid, —Parent Middleton - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

[yes] For me, the days observed have less to do with the observation and more to do with the constraints that - in the past - were put in place. When we had a full day of classes on Good Friday we were prevented from giving assessments, assigning or collecting major assignments and introducing new content. In the end, therefore, it seemed more like adolescent day care than a productive school day. When instructional time is as limited as it is I don't like counting as one of the 180 days a day when little can be done. It was also impossible to find substitutes for the number of staff who did not come to school. —Staff - Resident of Other

[no] I think it would be prudent to review the district's principle demographic groups and observe the holidays that are most likely to be practiced by the community at large. If the school observed every single religious celebration, feast day or holiday for every single representative religion we would struggle to obtain our 180 school days. Apply common sense in this matter, realize that in attempting to please everyone you will end up pleasing no-one, and note that "freedom of religion" really means religious tolerance. —Parent Boxford - 2P 1FT - Residency undeclared

[no] For those children that observe specific religious holidays, they should be allowed to take the day off w/o penalty and be given one day to make up any missing work. I also think no quizzes or tests should be scheduled on religious holidays. But, I DO NOT agree with closing school for religious holidays unless more that 50% of the student body would not be present making more work for the teachers. —Parent Topsfield, Parent MascoH, Parent College - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Topsfield

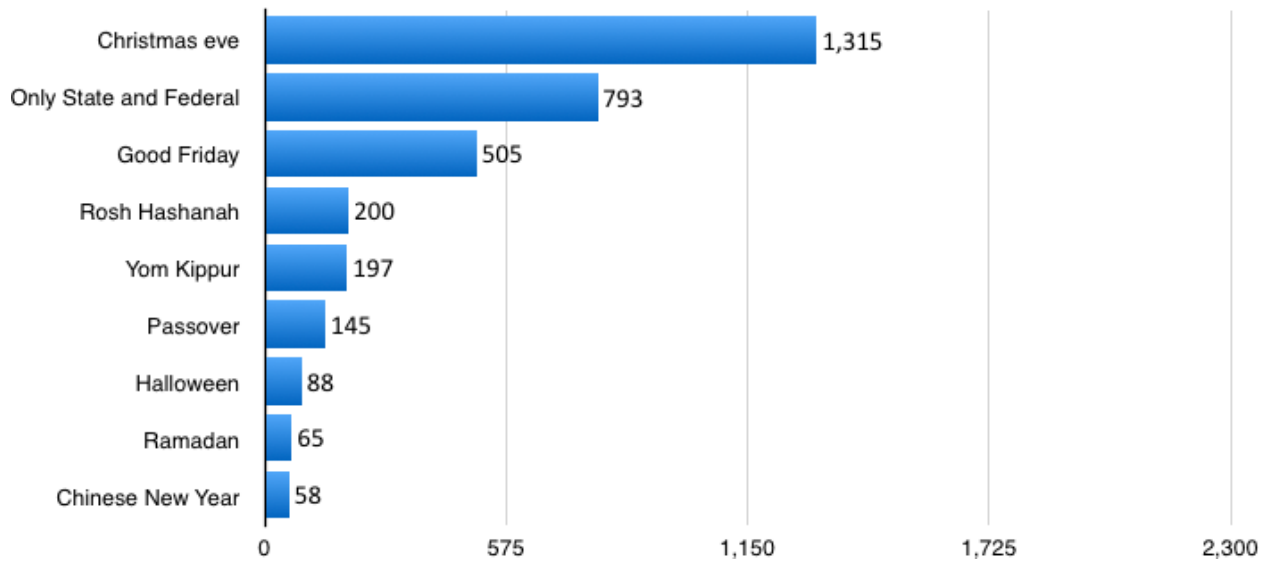
[no] It is difficult because not being of any religious faith I can certainly question the reasoning behind mandated closing for a religious holiday such as Christmas. I certainly enjoy the break, but can understand why people who belong to a different faith would want equal recognition and respect for their faith's important holidays. Just providing excused absences for these children is not equal respect, as these students miss out on (presumably) valuable classroom experiences that are scheduled on a known religious holiday. —Parent MascoM - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

[no] We are a PUBLIC school. We should not have any religious holidays off besides those that are state holidays. —Staff MascoH - Resident of Other

[no] As a person of Jewish faith, I do not feel that Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur/Passover should be school holidays with the exception that the first day of school or middle school/high school orientation days should not be scheduled on these holidays as has happened in the recent past and had to be petitioned to change. I do not feel that families should be forced to choose between observing an important holiday in their faith and having a smooth adjustment to a new school or school year. Also, I do not feel that Good Friday should be an observed school holiday either. There should be consistency in the policy. —Parent Boxford, Parent MascoM - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Boxford

In addition to the statewide legal holidays, what holidays do you believe the K-12 schools should observe?

The fundamental question is whether the districts should respond to popularity or to fairness. Given that the comments and selections of the respondents seem to indicate that Good Friday has lost its popularity compared with the past. Since Good Friday is frequently cited as the holiday that justifies the observance of other holidays, it may be time to take the fair approach, and consider treating it like other religious holidays, granting “no penalty” to observers, and settle the issue altogether.



The policy should be consistent and responsive to ALL public school attendee religions. I recognize it is difficult to run school with student and staff absences, but I would ask you to be careful not to unintentionally elevate one religion over another. My children keep asking me why they get no homework on other peoples' religious holidays but this is not reciprocated on their own religious holidays. —Parent Middleton, Parent MascoM - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

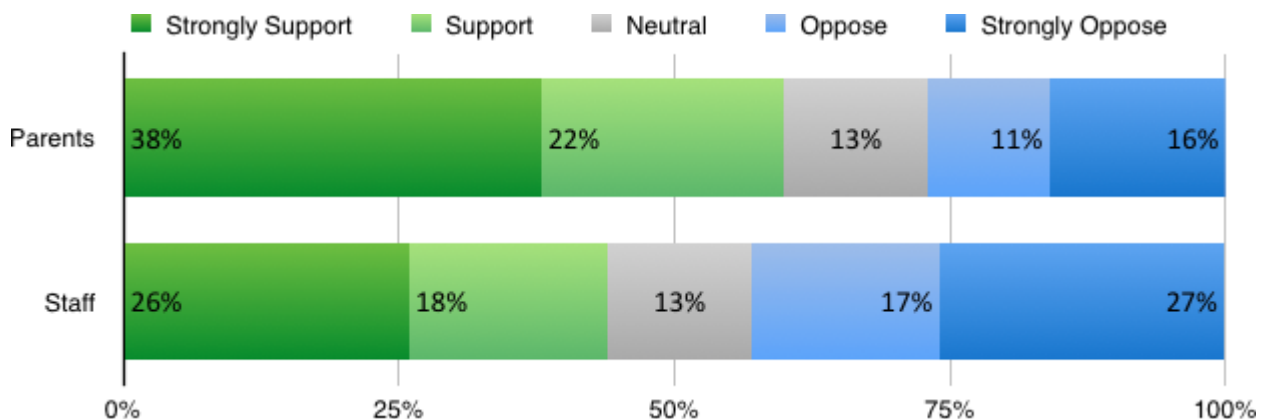
I believe religious holidays should reflect the preferences of the majority of families in the school district. Families with alternative religious beliefs should have the option of an excused absence. I think it makes it difficult for the schools when a large percentage of the students are absent. —Parent Middleton, Parent MascoM - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

School Vacations

Three options were offered; Option 1: a single week in March, Option 2: two four-day weekends in February and April, and Option 3: maintain the existing week-long vacations in February and April.

How do you feel about Option 1 (a one-week vacation in March)?

The March vacation was preferred by parents as a group, even among fully working households, where the numbers were the same. On the other hand, Staff were less supportive, with almost an even split.

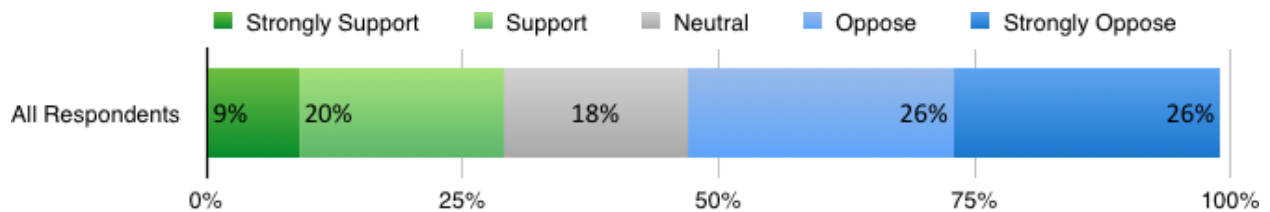


[strongly support] Give one week vacation. End school earlier in June. It is too hot for students to be in school with no air conditioning in late June. — Parent Topsfield - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

[support] February vacation comes at an inopportune time, particularly in the high school. Since winter break students have already had a three day weekend for MLK day and typically a snow day or 5. The second semester has just begun and it interrupts momentum. The 3 week period between midterms and February vacation is often too short to start and finish a unit of study and often unit tests need to be pushed off until after vacation. As the cost of traveling during this week rises families often leave 1,2 or 3 days before the start of the official vacation and students are missing valuable school time. An early March vacation would serve as a good midway point between the start and end of third quarter (in the HS) and students and teachers would welcome a break.— Staff MascoH

How do you feel about Option 2 (a four-day weekend in February and April instead of week-long)?

The four-day weekends in February and April were not well liked across the board. Many comments cited the need for a prolonged break.



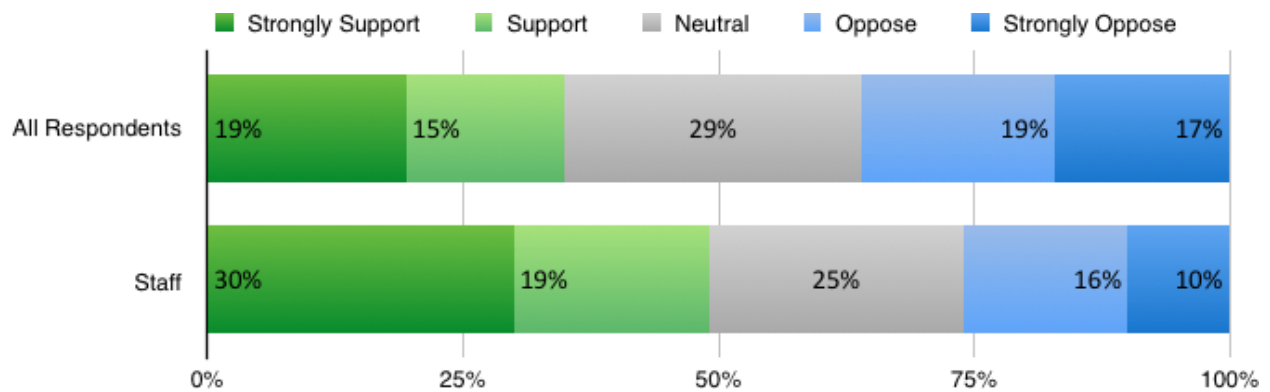
[strongly support] I think that the two short four day weekends give the kids something to look forward to, plan a quick trip but not loose the momentum leading up to or after returning from a 9 day break. --- Parent Topsfield - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

[strongly opposed] I think that 2 four day weekends (option 2) would result in a significant number of families choosing at least one of the weeks as a full week's vacation. —Staff - Resident of Other

[strongly opposed] I think if you went with Option 2 that a lot of families would still go away for the entire week and many children would skip school. I STRONGLY support the 1 week vacation in March. Travel costs would be much lower. - Resident of unknown

How do you feel about Option 3 (maintain the existing February and April vacation weeks)?

As a whole, support for maintaining the status quo would appear to be a nearly even split. Looking more closely, the staff account for more of the support for the status quo, largely because they have children in other districts that currently have the February/April vacation schedules.



[strongly support] Altering the February and April vacation schedules would jeopardize the high school's Global Education Program, as most overseas trips, music trips and exchange programs take place during these vacations. Having only one week in March would mean that all trips would have to take place during that week, which would give less opportunities for student participation. Global Education is a part of the school's mission and an important component to 21st century learning goals. — Parent OOD, Staff MascoH - 2P 2FT - Resident of Other

[strongly support] If the School Committee establishes a policy that February vacation days would never be touched, but April vacation days could be used for make-up days starting with the Friday, Thursday, etc. Staff and Families would need to plan around April vacation by having refundable airline tickets and such, but should be prepared to attend school if it is a bad weather year. — Staff Boxford - Resident of Other

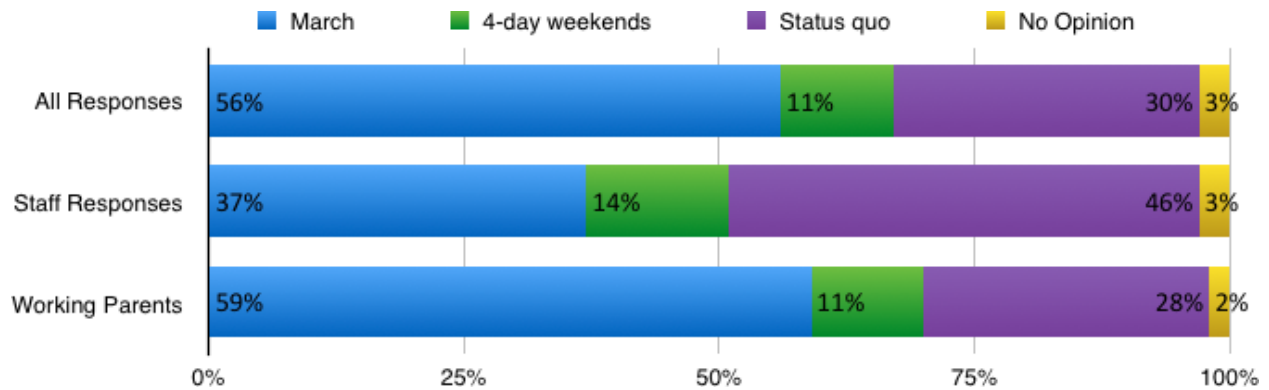
[strongly support] Teachers who work in the district will not have the same vacation time as their own children and/or family. It will be difficult for teachers to find daycare for their own children during those TWO weeks. —Staff Middleton - 2P 2FT - Resident of Other

[strongly support] Children need those breaks to avoid burn out. Although I feel February vacation comes too soon after winter break, shortening the two weeks or turning the two vacations into one would not be a healthy option for our children. The standards are getting higher, way more is being expected of them, and my fear is that many children would get burnt out and develop anxiety. —Parent Middleton - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

[strongly support] Families schedule vacations during those breaks and if they entail extensive travel that would affect those plans to spend quality time with familyespecially during such a fast paced time when you children grow up much too quickly! —Parent MascoH - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

Which vacation option do you prefer?

March was the clear winner among all respondents. However, among staff, there was a stronger preference for the status quo. Among fully working households, a March vacation was even more popular. If the survey responses were the only factor in making a decision, the districts should all move toward a March vacation.



Continuity for the students is most important and allowing for a one week vacation between winter and spring sessions seems to make the most sense and minimizes the disruptive impact a winter like this one has on the educational momentum — Parent Topsfield - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

Strongly support a March vacation. Better educational momentum, continuity. Better coordination with sports schedules. April vacation is a waste because of spring sports schedules. March is Better for vacation travel, cheaper fares, fewer crowds. ---Parent MascoM, Parent MascoH, Parent College - 2P 2FT - Resident of Boxford

It seems that trying this system out for a 4-or-5-year commitment would be a worthy experiment. If, after year 3 it is apparent that the shortcomings exceed the benefits, then after another year or two the old system could be reinstated. Momentum is key, and a longer summer vacation as well as more flexibility for snow day make-ups would seem well worth the experiment. ---Parent MascoH, Parent College - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Topsfield

I like Option 1 except for the challenge out of state staff would have aligning their vacation with their children's. Option 2 has potential and might be worth a try. ---Parent MascoH, Parent College - 2P 1PT - Resident of Boxford

I would only support a 1 week vacation in March if it were mandated state-wide. ---Parent Boxford - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Boxford

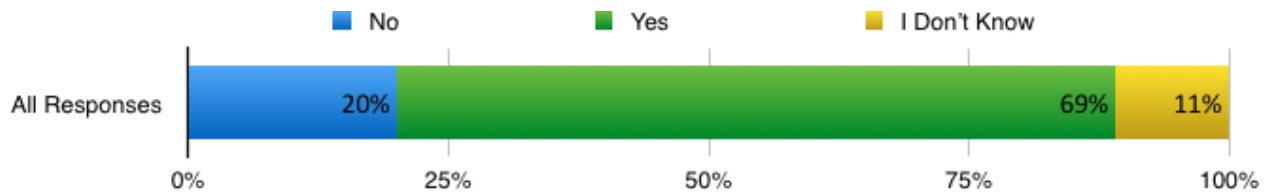
Having our vacation in line with the rest of our family (who are spread through the country) would best suit us. ---Parent Middleton - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

I am a school teacher in another district, so unless those schools change too then I will love March vacation but if other districts keep February and April then I would want the same.. This should be a state wise decision ---Parent Middleton, Parent MascoM, Parent MascoH, Parent College - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Middleton

Start Time

Do you feel that a later start time for middle and high school students would be beneficial for our students?

A clear majority felt that a later start would be beneficial. Detractors, either denying or unaware of the science and APA recommendation, posited that texting, over scheduling, and lack of discipline, rather than sleep, were the problem.



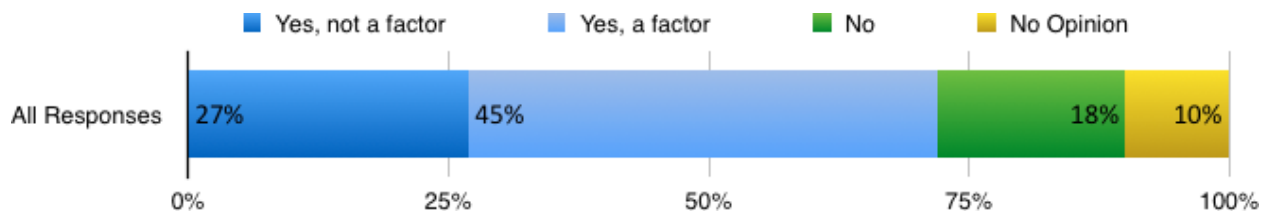
[yes] All children need adequate rest. The younger the child, the more hours of sleep required. Does not make sense to push younger children earlier. Middle and High school aged children need to learn time management, which includes maintaining a regular healthy sleep schedule. This is in preparation for entering adult work schedule environment as they move on to college and employment. Getting up early enough to meet responsibilities, and putting away the electronics and TV watching early enough to get to bed at a reasonable hour is part of adult management of ones time. Keep the schedule as is and let the older kids learn to function within it. ---Parent Topsfield - 1P 1FT - Resident of Topsfield

[yes] If the prevailing science shows that a later start is better for the child, then I don't understand why you're considering anything else. I thought your primary goal was to provide the best education possible? If you ignore the science for the sake of convenience, then you're not providing the best education. — Parent Middleton, Parent MascoH - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

[no] Tell the teenagers to UNPLUG and put away the distracting phone so they can get their homework done and get to bed at a reasonable time. We start everyday at 5:30 AM and end it pretty much every night at 9:30. Plan around responsibilities and don't get distracted with devices and too many extracurricular activities. ---Parent Middleton, Parent MascoM - 2P 1FT - Resident of Middleton

Assuming we are able to rearrange extracurricular activities to accommodate a later school start, would you support a later start time for middle and high school students?

The staff responses were nearly identical to the entire pool, as was the case with fully working households.

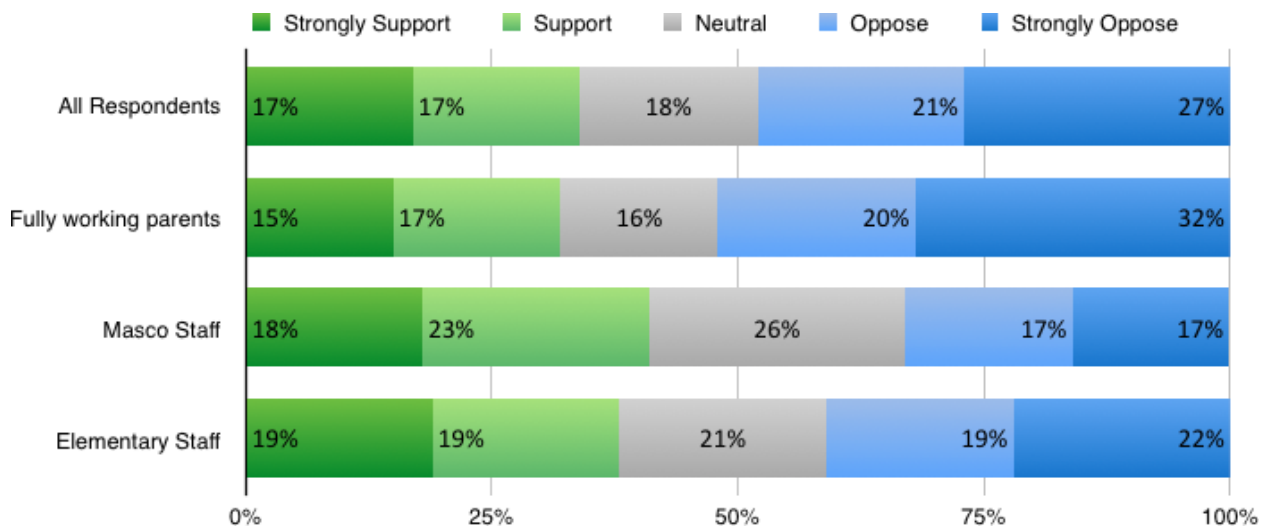


[strongly support] I strongly support a later start time (perhaps even later than 8:40). The science shows students would be more productive and healthier. My anecdotal evidence--witnessing the shift in attitude and alertness on two-hour delay days--also supports this. I firmly believe extracurricular schedules could be worked out. —Staff MascoH - 2P 2FT - Resident of Other

How do you feel about Option 1 (swap the schedules for elementary and Masconomet students)

Swapping the schedules did not fare well as an option. There was concern about elementary students' safety, childcare concerns if elementary students were to arrive home before Masconomet students, and concerns that younger students need even more sleep than their older counterparts. Supporters often pointed out that younger children are already awake early in the morning. The proportions for parents were nearly identical to the response pool. However, more Fully Working families opposed the

swap. Masconomet staff only marginally supported the swap. Elementary staff were almost perfectly split, with a slight opposition to the swap.



[strongly oppose] A later academic day would be detrimental to any non-school activity as well, be it sports, drama, music, or work. — Parent Topsfield, Parent MascoH, Parent College - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

[strongly support] Extra curricular sports are just that - they are EXTRA. And since most sports are “cut” teams there is no reason not to cater to the majority of kids who would benefit from moving the start time and can’t be part of a team sport anyway. — Parent Middleton, Parent MascoM - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

[strongly oppose] Again I am answering this question from the perspective of a working parent. Having the kids get out earlier would pose a major problem for my family. The after school program is perfect and affordable. Changing the time would make for even longer day of my poor son. Please consider keeping it the way it is. — Parent Middleton, Parent Baby - 2P 2FT - Resident of Middleton

[strongly support] I think if you swapped the bus schedules as in Option 1. The older students can get themselves on the bus and parents could leave for work earlier. Perhaps an after school pay program such as Steward Station could extend its hours. —Parent Topsfield, Parent MascoM, Parent MascoH - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

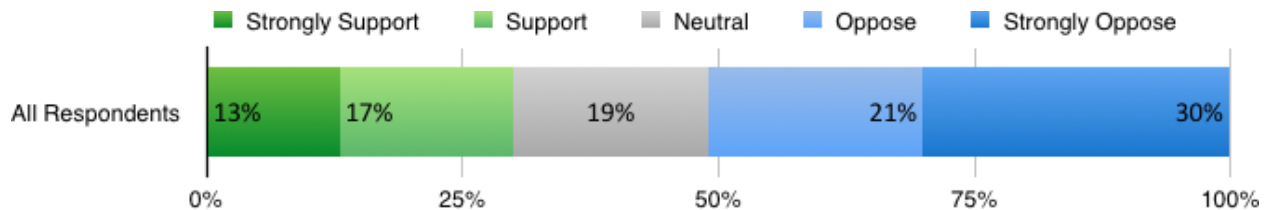
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[support] Elementary students are definitely ready to start the day early. We have many kids who are in by 8:00 for band, CLIC, extra help, or sometimes just to hang out in the classroom with friends. 7:35 is pretty early, but I'd love to see school start at 8:00 and be over about 2:30. The kids start to fade by that time. —Staff Topsfield - 2P 2FT - Resident of Other

[strongly oppose] An earlier start time for grades K-6 would make mornings more difficult for parents. These younger children require more parental assistance in the morning (dressing, packing backpacks, eating breakfast) whereas the older kids are more independent. Having older siblings home early allows for younger kids to be cared for before a parent arrives home. — Staff Boxford - Resident of Other

How do you feel about Option 2 (start all schools at the same time and bus K-12 students together)?

The vast majority of opposition to starting at the same time centered around concerns about busing K-12 students together. In order for this option to be viable, there would need to be appropriate research and a significant parental education effort. Variations among the parents and staff were minimal, and not worth reporting separately.



[strongly support] Biggest concern would be the younger kids interacting with the older kids on the bus. The bus has historically been a behavioral problem. A huge recommendation would be to strictly separate age groups... and add bus monitors (especially to buses with issues). — Parent Middleton - 2P 1FT - Resident of Middleton

[support] I think having all children starting at the same time would HELP families with their work schedules and child care. If you do have all the children start at the same time I do think having another adult on the bus would be helpful to monitor the mix of ages. —Parent Topsfield, Parent MascoM - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Topsfield

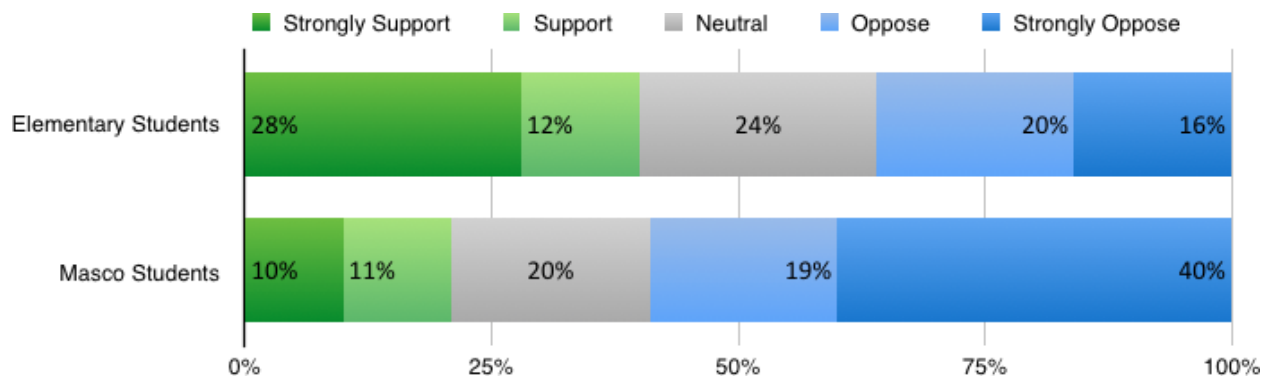
[neutral] I have driven by high school students waiting for their buses in the dark at 6:45 am during winter and don't feel that is appropriate - too early, but also a safety concern. I like the idea of a later school start for the older children, but I must admit a strong concern for having a 12th grader on the bus with my 1st grader. I'm quite sure that we could entirely curb foul language and inappropriate conversation and gestures that could affect the little kids. — Parent Boxford - 2P 2FT - Resident of Boxford

[neutral] It would be very good to have volunteer bus monitors on K-12 buses since there is a HUGE difference (on various levels) between early grade school students and high school students, with the latter needing to be very sensitive to the former in terms of overall personal language/discussion topics/attitude. High school students will need to be expected to "lead by example" and be held to that high standard by school personnel. —Parent Middleton - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Middleton

[oppose] In my opinion there are many concerns with putting any of the younger students with older students. I am particularly concerned about bullying. —Parent Topsfield, Parent Preschool - 2P 2FT - Resident of Topsfield

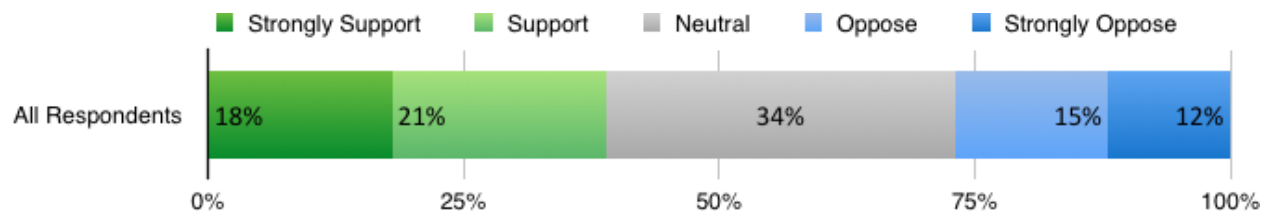
[strongly oppose] For NO reason ever, should high schoolers be on the same bus as the younger children. My elementary children have learned swears, been teased and witnessed many inappropriate things being on the bus with older Howe Manning students. Elementary students should not be on a bus with immature 6-8 graders. The high schoolers, at an older age, may be mature but not the 12-15 year olds. Terrible idea. Please, no.— Parent Middleton, Staff MascoH - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Middleton

Variations among the students were amusing, however. More elementary students apparently want to join their siblings (25 respondents), with 40% supporting co-busing, compared with 21% at Masconomet, where students apparently did not want to associate with the younger kids (178 respondents).



How do you feel about Option 3 (keep the current schedules)?

The status quo was the favorite option, although it also had a poor showing. More than a third of respondents were neutral, which implies a resigned acceptance of the current schedules.



[support] Kindergarten and Elementary students need adequate sleep as well. They probably need more sleep than High schoolers. You would end up with very cranky children since they would have to wake up so early in order to get ready on time. Busing all grades would be an acceptable option ONLY if there is a chaperone on every single bus at all times to make sure everything runs smoothly, and avoid any potential bullying or any other issues towards the younger kids. A single bus driver cannot oversee everyone while driving. 3 different drop offs is also an issue, and must be handled with care. —Parent Middleton - 2P 1FT - Resident of Middleton

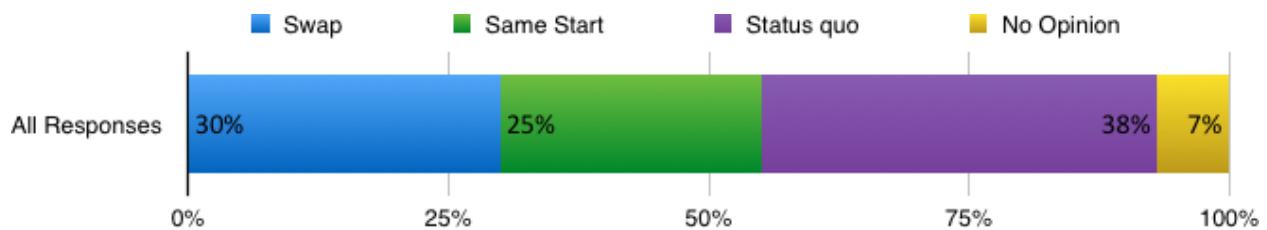
[strongly support] For a large portion of the school year, the earlier buses pick up children in the dark. It's not great for the middle and high school students to be standing on corners in the dark, but they have greater road sense than elementary children. Having the younger children walking to school in the dark is unconscionable. Cars could not see them. Also, the crossing guards have enough trouble getting cars to stop when there's light. I imagine it would only be more dangerous in the dark. So for that reason I see the switch as untenable. Research does show that older children have some differences, but teaching and learning has been successful up to now. As long as educational objectives are being achieved (and they are, even under the current arrangement) we must also be mindful of practical and safety matters. As far as common start times, the shared busing concept is absolutely ludicrous. It should be fine for young children to be in the company of older ones, but as a pragmatic, experienced parent I can say that it would be very harmful to place a Kindergartener on the same bus as a senior in high school. My child has shared stories of what occurs on Masco buses. I think it's awful enough that we put the middle schoolers with the high schoolers. Putting elementary students into that environment is akin to child abuse, or admitting them to a rated "R" movie. I'd like to think that the presence of the young children would incent the older ones to improve their language and comportment but have seen that the world has changed since I was young and many high school students I know make no effort at all to clean up their language regardless of the company. It's not the norm any longer that an "f-bomb" is something to drop only in carefully considered company. They truly do not seem to understand that it's inappropriate and

offensive. No way. I'd pull my child out before I'd ever consider shared riding.— Parent school - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Topsfield

[strongly opposed] Our social atmosphere on buses should reflect that 'all students ride the same bus, K-12.' Our kids need to learn to be respectful among all ages. It's shameful to think that age would determine the bus population. We are currently reinforcing the differences between age, when we should bolster the difference with mentoring younger by their older peers. Bus culture should be energized with conversation, laughter and healthy bantering. Bus drivers should be required to take a workshop to assist in making their job easier and more pleasant, by engaging in community on the bus. —Parent MascoM - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Boxford

Which of these options do you prefer?

The split is a veritable “Goldilocks” scenario, with an edge to keeping the current schedule. Based on the comments, a large number of votes in favor of the status quo appeared to be votes against cobusing. We should investigate other options for achieving a later start time for Masconomet students, like separating the busing for Masconomet and elementary so that Masconomet can have the flexibility it would need to accommodate a later start, or beginning an effort to educate the communities about the viability of K-12 busing.



Other Comments

There were a large number of comments from the final, unstructured prompt, many of which praised the survey and the Calendar Committee for undertaking this project. Many more reiterated points made earlier in the survey, and some proposed interesting ideas to solve some of the problems. Here are some notable ones:

High school students barely have enough time after school to do homework and go to sports practice as it is. Ending the school day later than 2:15/2:30 will cause students to stay up later than they already are. I don't think it is a good idea for the high school to be getting out any later than it is right now. Like I mentioned above, eliminating homeroom is a better solution than any of the options you listed. --- Student MascoH - Resident of Topsfield

I work part time just to accommodate my daughter's school schedule. I could not hold a full time job with all their time away from school. ---Parent Middleton - 1P 1PT - Resident of Middleton

Educational objectives must be the mission. Any decision must offer weight to those objectives, and then temper that with pragmatic considerations. For example, there have been requests to make changes that will ease the strain on families with only working parents (in other words, no non-working parent, though in truth there is no such thing, just a different division of labor). If there is no financial impact (as choosing to combine professional development times so that days off are shared among calendars) we should absolutely make the very best effort to achieve it. However, under no circumstances can we ask taxpayers to make accommodation for family choices, and make no mistake that there are always

choices to be made. Our schools have the mission of education, not child-care services. If an educational objective offers better arrangements for families, that's fortuitous. We cannot start down the slippery slope of committing resources solely to ease the strain on families. It is my own personal responsibility to make accommodations for my family's needs, not the community's. ---Parent school - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Topsfield

Can extended day programs being looked at as part of this review? What about summer programs? As a household where both parents work we are always looking for options to keep our kids learning in a safe environment. We moved to Boxford for the school system and it seems like an ideal option to deliver additional services (they could obviously be fee based). ---Parent Boxford, Parent Preschool - 2P 2FT - Resident of Boxford

Factor in that daycare/childcare is ALWAYS going to be a challenge, because we live in a country that espouses family values, yet does not accomodate working families. ---Parent Baby - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Topsfield

I think this survey was great. All the questions asked are actually things that I often grumble about so I am glad that I had the opportunity to share my thoughts. Thank you!! ---Parent Middleton, Parent Preschool - 2P 1FT 1PT - Resident of Middleton

I am delighted to see that there is a K-12 initiative on the calendars, start times, etc.! This is long over due and I believe that the proposed changes would have an extremely positive impact on students and learning. Change is hard, but often for the better and current families will survive these changes. Future families will never know the difference! If some/all of these changes are formally proposed, I urge the school committees to stand strong, implement them and "weather the storm." Do not cave to the inevitable public pressure if these become a reality. The survey was extremely well written, great supporting information, easy to access, use, etc. I look forward to hearing the results and where this discussion will go next. ---Parent Grown, Staff Boxford - 2P 2FT - Resident of Boxford