



Start Times Advisory Committee Masconomet, Boxford, Middleton, Topsfield

May 8, 2017

Dear Elementary Parents and Community Stakeholders,

We received valuable feedback at the Joint Meeting of all four school committees (Boxford, Topsfield and Middleton Elementary School Committees and the Masconomet School Committee) on April 26. We thank those who participated as well as Boxford Cable TV for helping us successfully stream the meeting live to those who were unable to attend. Approximately 45 parents, teachers and school administrators attended, along with approximately 130 people who watched online. This was a great opportunity for all school committee members to hear directly from you.

After a brief update provide by STAC, the school committee members heard questions and comments from the audience and from emails received during the meeting. The concerns raised most often include:

- *Masconomet homework load:* Several parents identified the amount of time their children spend on homework as a major factor affecting how much time their children sleep.
- *After school activities:* Others were concerned about how a later end time to the Masconomet day would affect athletics and extracurricular activities. This included concern regarding competitions held against other schools, e.g. will a later arrival by Masconomet affect warmup time?
- *Effect on Elementary Schools:* While recognizing the benefit to adolescents of moving Masconomet start time later, parents of elementary children are concerned about the effect of possible changes to the elementary school schedules.
- *Survey results:* Some highlighted how the recent Start Times Options Survey showed no consensus on the alternatives for adjusting school start time and wondered how it would be possible to proceed without consensus.
- *Benefits:* Some wanted to understand what benefits we hope to see by making such a change and others wanted to know more about schools that have made the change or are considering it.
- *Education is the priority:* Some parents highlighted that they believe the education of all our children is the primary purpose of our schools, and that since medical authorities believe a later start time improves the conditions for adolescent education, a change should be made.

We appreciate these concerns and the uncertainty that making any change brings. Most of these were not new to us, but were previously identified and have been (and remain) concerns to be addressed before any change is made. That work will continue after a recommendation is made and adopted, as we shift to an implementation phase. Here are some of the solutions that are being considered:

- *Masconomet homework load:* The most common concern expressed was a perception of too much time being spent on homework by Masconomet students. The Masconomet administration is already in the midst of discussions about homework. Recent developments that have come from this process include the **Freshman Seminar** which was launched this school year to work with students on time management and study skills. In addition, a survey of students was conducted by the AP Statistics class this spring that asked students how they spend their after-school time in order to estimate the average amount of time that students are spending on homework. **Results of the homework survey will be shared with the Masconomet School Committee on May 17.** We can share that they concluded that homework loads were “normal”, between **80-120 minutes**. These initiatives demonstrate progress, but developing a more comprehensive plan will take time. For changes in homework to be made effectively, this effort will be led by the Masconomet faculty and administrators with support from the school committee. STAC applauds the efforts made to date and strongly encourages continued focus and ultimately, action on the issue. STAC does not believe in waiting for this issue to be fully resolved before addressing start time.
- *After school activities:* The new proposed options have greatly reduced the effect on after school activities. At the latest, after school activities will begin 15m later than they currently do, with exceptions as necessary.
- *Effect on Elementary Schools:* The new proposed options have reduced the effect on the elementary school schedules. We have also agreed to put forward an option that would give each district its own buses, so that the school committees can discuss the advantages (and significant cost) of such an arrangement.
- *Survey Results:* STAC created the surveys as tools to measure public reaction to the proposed Options and to specifically see how we could improve each of the Options. The survey was **NOT** a vote on which option we should choose. From it, we learned that we needed to reduce the impact on athletics and other after-school activities, and on the elementary schedules, to make the proposed options more palatable.
- *Benefits:* The most obvious success measure is that students will get more sleep and the number of students receiving at least 8h of sleep will rise. In addition, like [other districts that have made this change](#), we expect: a fall in tardiness and absenteeism; improvements in social, emotional, and mental health; fewer disciplinary problems; lower number of Ds and Fs; lower risk of athletic injury; lower risk of automobile accidents. Masconomet is already a high performing school, so we may not see as much of a rise in test scores as other schools have seen, but there may also be improvement there, especially for students who are struggling.

Where do we go from here?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and another dozen or so physician groups urge middle and high school districts to start after 8:30am, in order to optimize sleep. After over a year of work evaluating options and getting input (pro and con) from stakeholders (parents, students, athletes, and teachers), STAC has decided that *we will recommend a change in start time for Masconomet to the school committees.*

STAC has spent the last few weeks **developing additional options** that directly address the concerns shared with us in the surveys and in the Joint Meeting of School Committees: namely, can we do more to preserve our after-school extracurricular programs *and* can we avoid having a negative effect on elementary start times, all while keeping costs down? Working groups have

analyzed the Masconomet school day schedule for opportunities to use time more effectively. They have also scrutinized our existing bus routes to identify changes that would redistribute bus routes to minimize the impact on elementary school start times.

A key development from the **Bell Schedule working group** was creating an **Arrow Block** that incorporates Extra Help into the school day. The Arrow block would be fixed as the last block of the school day, lasting about 30m. During the Arrow Block, students will engage in academic activities including traditional Extra Help, meeting with an Advisor, participating in guidance curriculum, attending peer leader meetings, or getting a jump start on homework. An Arrow Block will also allow student-athletes to leave earlier on a handful of days for away competitions. Homeroom would be greatly shortened and incorporated into first period. Today, students do not have equitable access to Extra Help, as some must board a bus to get home before it begins: the Arrow Block means that all students will have access to Extra Help. The exact new bell schedules for the Middle and High School will need to be developed in detail by staff during the implementation phase.

A key development from the **Bus Schedule working group** is a detailed understanding of our bus routes and the existing inefficiencies in the system. We were able to shorten turnaround time between the elementary schools and Masconomet, and to find efficiencies to improve the proposed start and end times, without changing the number of stops. However, the working group also believes that a much more thorough evaluation of the routes by a specialist (using tools that were not available when the current routes were established) will still be needed during the implementation phase.

These workgroups have merged these ideas into three options which are broadly outlined as follows:

Option X: Masconomet 8:00a-2:55p, Elementary 8:55a-3:25p (+ up to 3 buses)

Estimated cost: Boxford \$24/household, Middleton \$18/household, Topsfield \$19/household

At Masconomet: A common preparation time could be added for staff from 7:30a-8:00a. Extracurriculars and athletics would begin **two minutes later** than they currently do. A few athletes coaches could be dismissed as early as 2:22p (missing Arrow Block), as needed for competitions.

At Elementary schools: School would start and end later (Boxford 15m later, Middleton 25m later, Topsfield 10m later). Before school programs, such as Band, CLIC, and BOKS could either start later or be extended. Child care, where currently offered, would continue to be offered.

Option Y: Masconomet 8:30a-3:05p, Elementary 8:00a-2:30p (+ up to 3 buses)

Estimated cost: Boxford \$24/household, Middleton \$18/household, Topsfield \$19/household

At Masconomet: A common preparation time could be added for staff from 7:50a-8:30a. Extracurriculars and athletics would begin **15 minutes later** than they currently do. A few athletes and coaches could be dismissed as early as 2:35p (missing Arrow Block) or even earlier (missing part of 7th period), as needed for competitions.

At Elementary schools: School would start and end earlier (Boxford 40m earlier, Middleton 30m earlier, Topsfield 45m earlier). First bus would pick up at approximately 7:00a (not in the dark), and buses would drop off between 7:40a and 7:50a. Parents could drop off children up until school begins at 8:00am. Most before school programs would move to be after-school programs. Some may be discontinued. BOKS could be incorporated into a morning recess before school.

Option Z: Masconomet 8:20a-3:00p, Elementary unchanged + Independent Busing

Estimated Cost: Boxford \$225/household, Middleton \$168/household, Topsfield \$175/household. This option would necessitate having independent bus fleets for Masconomet and the elementary school districts. The costs would be significant.

At Masconomet: we would be able to choose the start/end times that best balance student health and after school programs. The proposed times are 8:20a-3:00p, which would mean that Extracurriculars and athletics would begin **10 minutes later** than they currently do.

At Elementary schools: there would be no change in schedule.

STAC is sharing these option outlines with each Elementary School Committee and the Masconomet School Committee for their consideration. Each school committee will discuss the effect of the options on their schools at their individual committee meetings scheduled over the next two weeks. Following these discussions, the school committees will come together for a second joint meeting to discuss the options and potentially an appropriate course of action. The joint meeting is scheduled for May 22 at 7pm at Masconomet.

The school committees may decide to reject all these options, in which case no change in schedules will be made. If the school committees reach consensus on a new option, they will work with the school administrations and staff to make the selected option work at all of our schools with a continued priority of minimizing the negative effects on all stakeholders. The chosen option would be fleshed out in more detail over the coming school year, including: an examination of the bus routes, determination of the school start and end times for each of the schools, adjustments to before- and after-school activities and athletics, and the changes to the Masconomet bell schedule.

The implementation phase will include:

1. Utilizing a bus route optimization consultant to maximize efficiencies and drop off patterns at each of the schools.
2. Coordinating discussions with all teachers' unions about possible schedule changes
3. Calculating budget effects for each of the districts.
4. Allowing Masconomet middle and high school administrators and teachers to work out the details of new daily schedules.
5. Developing a plan for all before- and after-school activities and athletics at the elementary, middle and high schools.
6. This committee will develop a timeline with an objective to be ready to implement the changes in the **fall of 2018, at the earliest.**

How can you participate?

We encourage you to reach out to your school committee to express your opinion. The individual school committees will discuss the effects of the options on their schools at the following meetings:

- *Boxford Elementary School Committee Meeting:* May 18, 2017, 7:00pm at Cole School in the Conference Room
 - *Middleton Elementary School Committee Meeting:* May 8, 2017, 5:00pm at Fuller Meadow School in the Library
 - *Topsfield Elementary School Committee Meeting:* May 17, 2017, 7:00pm at Proctor School in the Library
 - *Masconomet School Committee Meeting-* May 17, 2017, 7:00pm, at Masconomet in the Ralph Osgood Presentation Room (above the High School Library)
 - *Joint Meeting of the 4 School Committees-* May 22, 2017 7:00pm, at Masconomet in the Ralph Osgood Presentation Room (above the High School Library)
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The Tri Town Union Superintendent, representatives from the Elementary School Principal team, and a member from each town's elementary school committee are all members of the Start Time Advisory Committee (STAC). These representatives regularly attend STAC meetings to advocate for minimal change to the elementary schools. We recognize these same children will move on to Masconomet and that we should develop schedules that provide for optimum educational learning at all phases of development.

If STAC could find a way to change the start time of Masconomet without affecting the elementary schools, we would: this is why we have created Option Z (independent busing for our school districts). When asked which option they prefer if cost was not an issue, parents indicated that they preferred the independent busing option, which is why STAC is asking the school committees to consider this as Option Z, despite the acknowledged resistance to such a large cost increase. In addition, both Options X and Y have been modified as much as possible to minimize the effect of a change on elementary school children.

We'd like to clarify the following points:

- STAC is no longer supporting K-12 busing as an option.
- If bus routes are changed, no children will be getting on or off a bus in the dark.
- Ideally, we like to try to shorten bus rides as part of this process- certain elementary school bus routes are over an hour long.
- We recognize the importance of elementary school before school programs such as band, chorus, CLIC, BOKS and foreign language instruction. Option X would not affect these programs. Option Y would move them to after school, with the exception of BOKS which is meant to be a before-school program. In the survey parents indicated that participation in these programs would not change significantly if they were moved to after school.

Regards,

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