



Start Times Advisory Committee

Masconomet, Boxford, Middleton, Topsfield

Dear Parents and Community Stakeholders,

We would like to sincerely thank those who have given us feedback on school start times over the past few weeks by taking the survey, attending our meetings and/or sending us emails. Our mission to assess the desirability and feasibility of changing school start times requires as much feedback as you can give us. Keep it coming.

Today's update is longer than usual, but we want to address some of the questions and feedback that we've received in the last few weeks, and we hope you'll take a few minutes to read it. This update includes:

- Information about our mission and process - why are we looking at a change in start time?
- Healthy sleep habits to support good sleep and the Tri-Town Council sleep PSA contest
- Homework, especially as it relates to sleep
- Results from the option surveys to parents, staff, and students in Grades 5-12
- Working groups studying bell schedules and buses more closely to improve our options
- An upcoming joint School Committee meeting - you are invited to participate

Key Dates

- **April 26: Joint Meeting of School Committees at 7:30 pm** in the Masconomet Auditorium- **THREE WAYS TO PARTICIPATE**-see more details at the end of this letter.
- Next STAC meeting will be: May 4 at 3:45 pm in the High School presentation room (above the library). Members of the community are always welcome to attend.
- Future Meetings will be posted ahead of time on the Masco website at <http://www.masconomet.org/domain/184>.

Our Mission and Process

Something that we took away from last week's STAC meeting is that we may have not clearly conveyed the mission of STAC. In 2014 the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) came out with the following position statement (*emphasis added*):

The American Academy of Pediatrics recognizes insufficient sleep in adolescents as an important public health issue that significantly affects the health and safety, as well as the academic success, of our nation's middle and high school students. Although a number of factors, including biological changes in sleep associated with puberty, lifestyle choices, and academic demands, negatively affect middle and high school students' ability to obtain sufficient sleep, *the evidence strongly implicates earlier school start times (ie, before 8:30 AM) as a key modifiable contributor to insufficient sleep*, as well as circadian rhythm disruption, in this population. Furthermore, a substantial body of research has now demonstrated that delaying school start times is an effective countermeasure to chronic sleep loss and has a wide range of potential benefits to students with regard to physical and mental health, safety, and academic achievement. *The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly supports the efforts of school districts to optimize sleep in students and urges high schools and middle*



schools to aim for start times that allow students the opportunity to achieve optimal levels of sleep (8.5–9.5 hours) and to improve physical (eg, reduced obesity risk) and mental (eg, lower rates of depression) health, safety (eg, drowsy driving crashes), academic performance, and quality of life.¹

Since 2014, several other well known organizations including the Center For Disease Control, the American Psychological Association, the American Medical Association, the Massachusetts Medical Association, and many other medical associations² have echoed the AAP recommendation. In addition, the Boxford Board of Health and the Middleton Board of Health have supported these recommendations, for the health of our students.

Based on this guidance, School Committee members decided it was our responsibility to look into whether we could adjust start times to address the sleep deprivation that our students are experiencing by creating healthy school hours that align with adolescent biology. The intended result is to create the best possible opportunity for academic success, social success, and emotional success for all of our students.

Our Mission statement is: In the spring of 2016, the School Start Times Advisory Committee (STAC) was formed to investigate the desirability and the feasibility of a later morning start time for Masconomet, to understand what the impacts may be for students in kindergarten through grade 12, their families, and the community, and to develop options for community discussion. The committee includes members from the Masconomet School Committee, the Tri-Town school Committees, parents, and educators.

We made a deliberate decision to involve our community in order to decide how to proceed.

Change is never easy and we have four high-functioning school districts. We decided our three towns and all of our children deserve a thorough discussion of the issue, an awareness of other factors that limit sleep and the implications of making changes. Some of the questions we have looked at include:

- Should we make changes to address the issues raised by these professional organizations?
- Can we find a way to make these changes and preserve the co- and extra-curricular activities that our students enjoy?
- Can we find a solution that will not trade the health of our adolescents for the health of our elementary aged children?
- Besides school start time, what other habits need to be changed to improve sleep?



Start time change is not inevitable. Regardless of what you may have heard, we remain open minded and we will continue to work to find a solution that we feel will work best for our community. STAC may ultimately decide to recommend no change. Or STAC may recommend a change, but the school committees may vote against it. IF a change in start time is approved by the school committees , the earliest it will happen will be the *fall of 2018* and many more details would be provided by the implementation team. We would want to give everyone plenty of time to make any necessary preparations. No doubt this is a difficult issue to tackle and we appreciate your support and open minds as we try to find a solution that works best for all of our children.

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics, [Position Statement: School Start Time for Adolescents](#), 8/24/14

² A full list of Position Statements is available here: <http://www.masconomet.org/Page/512>

Healthy Sleep Habits

got sleep? ^{zz}

Tell us why good sleep matters and how to get it.

You could win \$250!

Submit a VIDEO to promote the importance of good sleep habits among tri-town youth and motivate teens to prioritize the importance of sleep in their lives.

Sponsored by




Submit your video by February 27, 2017. More info at bitly.com/masconsleepcontest



In addition to our work on start time, we are working with the Tri Town Council to promote healthy sleep habits. We published an article in their newsletter outlining tips for teens to get better sleep. We also co-sponsored a Health Sleep Habits Public Service Announcement Contest at Masconomet. Several student groups submitted videos of their interpretation of good sleep hygiene. Winners were announced on April 3. We congratulate Lena Shahin, a freshman, for winning first place and Candra Pepper and Sam Scherback, both seniors, for winning second place! The videos were shown to all high school students and will also be shown on local cable TV. To view the videos: [click here for Lena Shahin's](#) and [here for Candra Pepper's and Sam Scherback's](#).

What about Homework?

While STAC has not been charged with studying homework, the issue of homework has come up, particularly from parents and students who say that homework is interfering with sleep. In the student survey from the spring of 2016, students were asked how they felt about their homework. 38% of Masconomet high school students said "I have so much homework that I can't give it the attention it needs", and 43% said "I have too much homework". Clearly, this is an issue that needs further examination.

How feel about homework?	5-6	%	7-8	%	9-12	%
I have so much homework that I can't give it the attention it needs	21	8%	28	19%	116	38%
I have too much homework	51	19%	64	44%	132	43%
I have the right amount of homework now	138	50%	46	32%	51	17%
I have some homework	42	15%	5	3%	4	1%
I don't have very much homework at all	22	8%	1	1%	3	1%
TOTAL children	274	100%	144	100%	306	100%

The Masconomet administration is studying homework, but developing a responsible plan will take time. Each student's homework load varies, depending on the courses he or she chooses to take. Students have their own individual study habits and each student will approach the same homework in different ways. There are different kinds of homework: a student might be asked to read in order to prepare for a class discussion, to practice math that they learned during the day, to prepare for a quiz or test, or to work on a project that synthesizes information from the classroom and demonstrates mastery. Within our parent community we do not have agreement about appropriate homework. Not all homework is the same. Not every subject is the same. Not all families are the same. Not all students are the same.

Before we consider any changes to homework at Masconomet, we must understand the homework we're giving, agree on what constitutes appropriate homework and continue to work with students on time management and study skills. These discussions will take time, as many stakeholders are involved. We ask for your patience. Unlike start time, medical associations have provided no clear

guidelines to schools regarding homework for middle and high school students. It's likely there is no one-size-fits-all solution to homework.

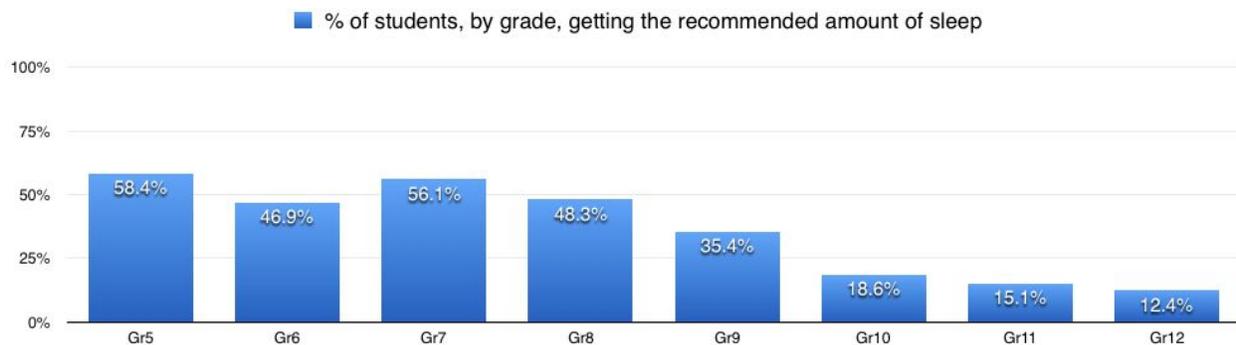
In the meantime, we encourage families to continue speaking with their children about their schedules and making room for down time if needed. This may include making modifications to academic and extracurricular schedules and encouraging utilization of after school help if appropriate.

Start Times Options Survey Results

The results of the Options surveys are in and we thank everyone who took the time to provide feedback. The surveys have provided valuable input to consider in our deliberations.

Our student survey had an 84% response rate. Students in grades 5-12 were surveyed. Students at Masconomet, in particular, reported high levels of sleep deprivation. Our students reported the average amount of sleep they get on school nights as:

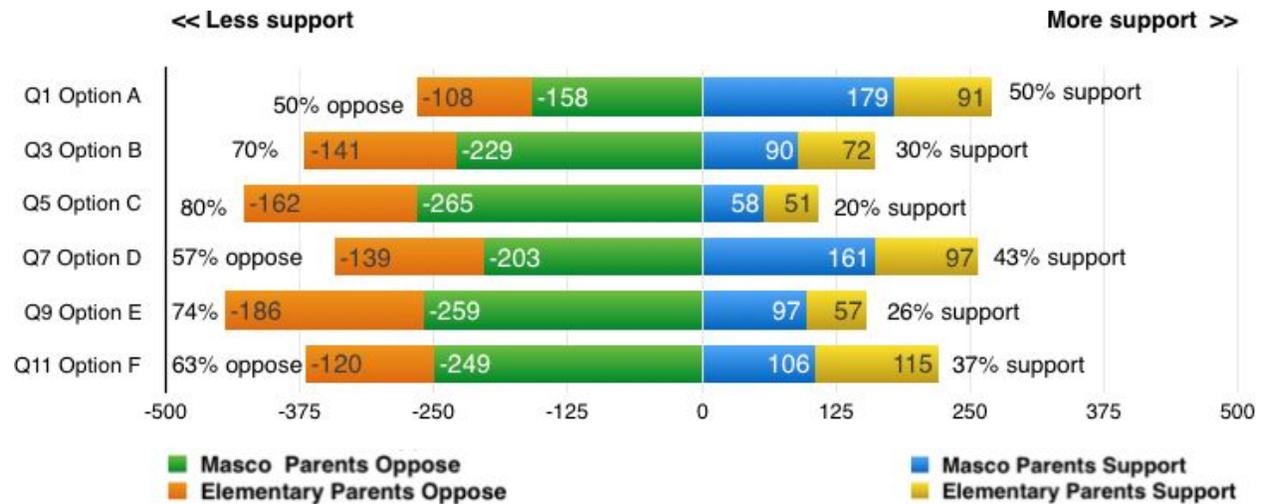
- Grades 5-6: 8.3h
- Grades 7-8: 7.3h
- Grades 9-12: 6.6h



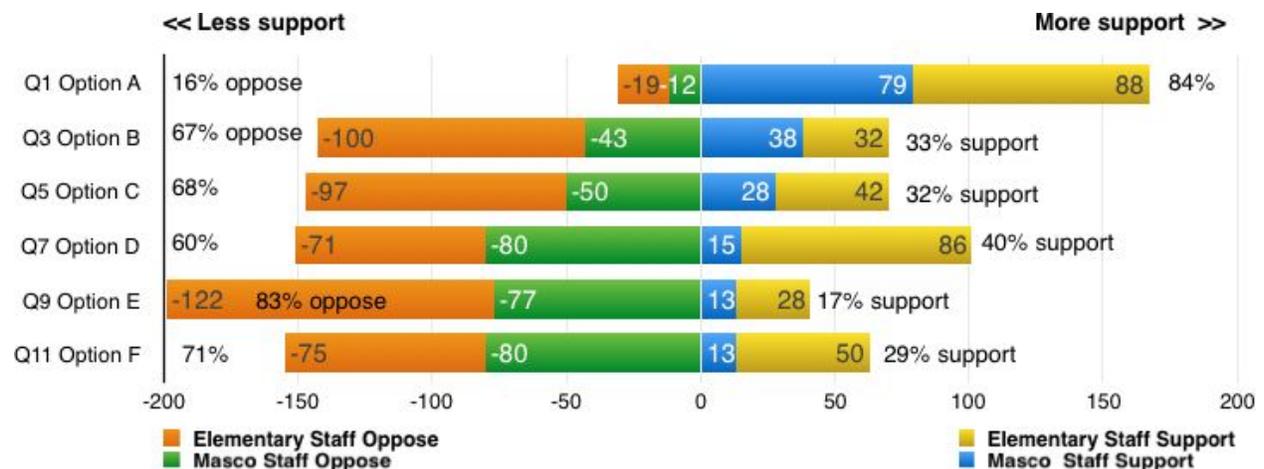
The options presented to the community were:

- Option A: No change
- Option B: Tighten schedules and add three buses
- Option C: Tighten schedules and use neighborhood stops
- Option D: Elementary first, Masconomet second
- Option E: All start at close to same time through K-12 busing
- Option F: All start at close to same time through double busing

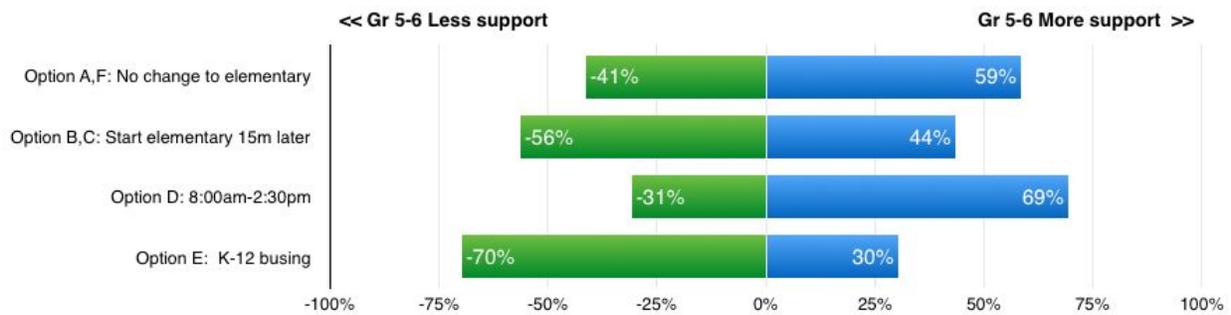
Feedback from parents: Option A came in with the most support, but notably 50% were in favor and 50% were opposed to Option A. Those parents who opposed Option A cited student health as their primary worry. No option received more than 50% support. Option D, received the second highest level of support at 43%. Parents who opposed Option D cited worries about the impact on Masconomet athletics as their primary concern. The other options received less support either because of cost, or because of the impact on afternoon schedules.



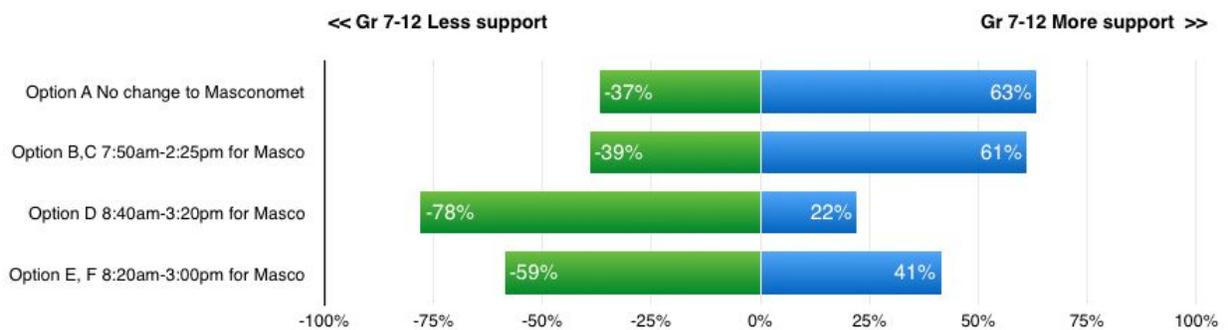
Feedback from staff: The survey of staff showed overwhelming support for Option A which received support from 84% of staff. Elementary staff showed a similar level of support for Option D, though Masconomet staff did not favor that solution.



Feedback from elementary students: The survey of students in Grades 5-6 showed that they prefer an earlier start and earlier finish to their school day, supporting Option D over Option A.



Feedback from Masconomet students: The survey of students in Grades 7-12 showed that they prefer Option A. Those who did not support Option A said that they were worried about their sleep and their own health. These students also supported Option B and C. The later the end time, the more quickly support for other options disappeared, with students worrying about the impact on athletics, Extra Help, and other after school activities.



On one option, all agreed: students, parents, *and* staff did not support K-12 busing. Based on the overwhelming lack of support, we are no longer supporting K-12 busing as an option.

Please see the results of the parent, staff and student surveys at <http://www.masconomet.org/Page/463>

This feedback has been very helpful to us in evaluating the options and has provided critical insight for our next steps.

What’s Next? Our Ongoing Search for Possible Creative Solutions

The status quo received significant support in the options surveys, with notable support for some type of change in start times. While we hoped for a clear preference to emerge from the survey options, we recognized that this may not happen, with so many stakeholders and so many competing interests.

We took note of a considerable amount of acceptance for *some* type of change and of the community’s awareness of the importance of sleep and the effect it has on our student’s health. STAC has decided to spend a few weeks developing additional options that address the concerns shared with us in the surveys: namely, can we do more to preserve our after school extracurricular programs *and* can we avoid having a significant effect on elementary start times, all while keeping

costs down? It's a tall order. We have created two working groups to dedicate significant time to modifying the options that were presented in the survey, to look for an acceptable solution.

The first working group is looking at the Bell Schedule. During the STAC parent panel in April, Jose Libano, Principal of Sharon High School, shared some changes that they made to the school bell schedule that supported a later start time. They incorporated an "Eagle" block into their school day - similar to our Extra Help block. The Eagle block is widely used in many other towns and enables schools to incorporate time into the school day for important student support. We felt this was an important insight and want to see if there is a way to do the same at Masconomet.



The second working group is looking more closely at bus routes. In order to minimize the effect on elementary schools, we need to find every possible improvement to our busing times. This working group is tasked with shortening the turnaround time for our buses between schools while controlling costs.

We anticipate that when the working groups are complete, we may have additional options on the table that were not included in the surveys. These new options will be presented to STAC and the committee will review them.

STAC will then decide which option (or options) to recommend to the school committees. Once STAC has made a recommendation, it will be up to the *school committees* to take a vote on whether to adopt the recommendation. If the recommendation has no effect on elementary school times, then only the Masconomet school committee will need to vote.

Upcoming Joint Meeting of School Committees

THREE WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

Come to the Masconomet Middle School Auditorium on **Wednesday, April 26** at 7:30 pm when all 4 school committees (Boxford, Topsfield and Middleton Elementary School Committees and the Masco School Committee) will have a joint meeting to address school start time.



The meeting will begin with STAC providing a brief summary of their findings to date, followed by an open public comment period.

1. Come and ask questions, share your opinion and listen to your neighbors' opinions and concerns.
2. Can't make it? We are LIVE STREAMING this meeting and providing for questions and comments to be sent via email to StartTime@masconomet.org and addressed during the meeting. To stream the meeting live go to <http://www.masconomet.org> at the time of the meeting.
3. If you would prefer, you can also submit questions and comments ahead of time via email to be asked at the meeting if time permits. Send those to StartTime@masconomet.org.

At any time, feel free to reach out to the members of STAC listed below. The committee can also be reached at: StartTime@masconomet.org. This is an open process and your feedback is always welcome.

- William Hodges, Masconomet School Committee, Topsfield, Chair of STAC
- Teresa Buono, Masconomet School Committee, Middleton
- Carolyn Miller, Masconomet School Committee, Boxford
- Hagan Rivers, Masconomet School Committee, Boxford
- David Rivers, Boxford School Committee
- Tasha Cooper, Middleton School Committee
- Katrina Frere, Topsfield School Committee
- Scott Morrison, Tri-Town Union Superintendent
- Kevin Lyons, Masconomet Superintendent
- Adjunct Members
 - Kim Bitto, Masco Parent
 - Diane Carreiro, Elementary Principal
 - Kathryn Castonguay, Elementary Principal
 - John Daileanes, Masco AD
 - Pete Delani, Acting MRHS Principal
 - Kristen DeMarco, SEPAC
 - Dorothy Flaherty, MRMS Principal
 - Susan Givens, Masco Asst. Supet.
 - Steve Greenberg, TTU Asst. Supt.
 - Sarah O'Leary, Elementary Principal