

Newton Public Schools  
High School Start Time Working Group

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (F. A. Q.)**  
*(As of March 2016)*

**Why has a Working Group been formed?** Newton Public Schools and the Newton School Committee believe that starting high school later may have important health and wellness benefits for adolescents. The High School Start Time working group was created in September 2015 to research the changes necessary to make a later high school start time possible in Newton. The working group is composed of two School Committee members and three school administrators. The group is intended to be small enough to support needed research and analysis and to seek feedback from and collaborate with local and regional stakeholders. During the 2015-16 school year the working group will determine how meaningful progress could be made and will formulate options and action steps into a strategic 'road map'. The road map will reference cost information and other necessary resources, as well as political, policy and legal implications. Over the course of the year, the group will make bi-monthly reports to the School Committee on progress and will make a final report to School Committee at the end of the 2015-16 school year.

**How could a later start time help students get more and better sleep?** The reason Newton Public Schools is exploring later start times for the high schools is to help high school students get additional sleep at times that are developmentally appropriate. We know from the sleep scientists that high school students' sleep patterns change in adolescence and typically students are not sleepy until 11 pm and have their best and deepest sleep during the early morning hours of 4:00 to 8:00 a.m. Changing high school start time may not only help students get more sleep, but also better sleep.

**How will we know if changes are feasible?** The working group's charge is to document different potential scenarios for change. The potential scenarios may include a range of options for change which will have different degrees of difficulty, complexity, impact on students, families, communities, or regions, as well as costs associated with each option.

**When will decisions be made?** A report is expected from the working group by the end of the current school year. Information about the timing of any potential decisions will not be available until after this report is presented and discussed. With the data from that report, the School Administration and School Committee expects to be able to identify further action steps that will be necessary.

**When would changes be implemented?** No changes are expected before the 2017-18 school year due to the time required for an effective exploration of the issue, and to allow adequate lead time for implementation.

**How would future decision be authorized?** A vote of the Newton School Committee is necessary for policy changes. Some changes may require the agreement of the Newton Teachers Association (NTA) or other bargaining units, which also need to be approved by the School Committee.

**Aren't there other reasons that students don't get enough sleep (e.g. homework)?** Yes, there are numerous time demands for high school students, and our schools are working to examine our practices around homework and other time requirements that may be overtaxing students. However, there is significant evidence that changing start times can help improve the conditions for adolescents' health based on their unique needs, so we are considering a later start time as one strategy.

### **Is there scientific research on adolescent sleep?**

There is a significant body of research in the area of adolescent sleep and the impact of later school start times on sleep. Two links are provided below that include some information in this area:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics has issued a policy statement that “strongly supports the efforts of school districts to optimize sleep in students.” The link to the full journal article is here: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/134/3/642>
- The University of Minnesota, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, has conducted numerous research studies on aspects of both social emotional learning and school start time, teens and sleep: <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei/>

**What about other health and wellness issues affecting Newton students?** Addressing the health and wellness of all Newton students continues to be an important goal for our system. Our schools use a number of strategies and programs that are appropriate for each age group. At the high school level, we are well aware of the stress felt by many students. The recently released Newton Public Schools Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results show stress increases significantly from middle to high school. It is our job as a system, working in partnership with families, to address the stress and anxiety that many of our high school students are experiencing.

### **What else are high schools doing to address student stress?**

Currently, both of our high schools are engaged in multiple efforts to support the social and emotional needs of students. The work of faculty on growth mindset involves supporting students to understand the notion that effort is most significant in learning and that mistakes are a part of the learning process. The high schools are also engaged in extensive conversations regarding the purpose and scope of homework. The superintendent has also convened a community forum on the stress of college admissions and plans to continue to address this issue with students.

**Can the school start later but still end around the same time?** Massachusetts education laws and regulations (603 CMR 27.00) govern student learning time as it relates to school year requirements and structured learning time requirements. The current high school schedules conform with laws and guidelines. Any time missed in the early morning hours would need to be rescheduled.

**How can I stay informed?** Two-way communication is critical to the process. The Newton Public Schools Administration and School Committee are committed to a transparent and inclusive process. All information and materials pertaining to the exploration of high school start time are available on the Newton Public Schools web page and you can sign up to receive updates when information is added to the site. There will be opportunities for public comment at School Committee meetings and other public forums are being planned. You will also find contact information and a feedback email on the site.

To stay informed about the exploration of a later start time for high school students in Newton Public Schools, please check for updates at: [www.newton.k12.ma.us/laterstarttime](http://www.newton.k12.ma.us/laterstarttime)