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To: School Committee  
  
From: High School Start Time Working Group  
  
Re: Report on feedback on six scenarios under consideration  
Next steps  
  
Date: December 12, 2016

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This fall, the High School Start Time Working Group has engaged the community to both broadly distribute information about the six potential scenarios that would move high school start time later and to solicit feedback from broad and diverse constituencies. There have been numerous opportunities for sharing information about the options under consideration, some of which impact all schools in the district, and receiving input. This memo reports on these public engagement activities, as well as the steps remaining to conclude the feedback phase; key learning to-date; and planned next steps.

There have been two important strands in the community process: engagement with Newton Public Schools professional educators and staff, and engagement with parents and guardians and the broader community. For Newton’s teachers and staff, these opportunities have included written information, updates and discussion at high school faculty meetings, elementary and middle school principal meetings, meetings with NTA and NESAs, as well as a feedback survey on the six scenarios under consideration. For the community, these opportunities have included community letters, in-person gatherings (such as public forums and PTO meetings), email feedback and a similar follow-up feedback survey on the six scenarios.

Direct Engagement

Substantial dialogue about these potential changes to Newton’s school start and end times has taken place from October to December 2016. There have been numerous in-person opportunities for discussion with school administrators and teachers, parents/guardians and community members. There were school-based events for parents in most schools (some were jointly held), as well as Boston parents at a METCO program parent meeting, in addition to the robust electronic messaging and website feedback opportunities. Estimates are that at least 500 people at community meetings, and another 200 plus via email, have given these potential scenarios active consideration and have provided feedback. High school students also have remained engaged in the process.

### Feedback Survey

The planned survey of Newton Public Schools teachers and staff was released on December 6, 2016 and will remain open until January 3, 2017. Teachers and staff are being asked about the advantages and disadvantages they see associated with the various scenarios for potential change. In addition, the staff survey asks teachers and staff about their level of support for each scenario as employees, as well as the degree of impact of each potential change on their mornings and afternoons. Although many responses to this survey have already been recorded (roughly 25%), it is too early to release results. The analysis of these results will be available at the next School Committee update on January 23, 2017.

The community survey was released on November 23, 2016. The survey was sent to all district families and was also distributed through other outreach channels to the broader community. The purpose of the survey was to provide another opportunity to give feedback to those who had participated in events earlier in the fall, and a final opportunity to participate in the process for those who had not yet weighed in. The survey was anonymous and accessible through an open link on the district website. Since the survey feedback process was open and inclusive of all community members, comments and feedback are not necessarily uniquely identifiable or representative of all parents. The **goal** in analyzing and compiling feedback from the community, therefore, was **to identify the most commonly observed advantages and disadvantages** of potential scenarios. The working group does not intend to use this feedback to weight responses in favor of one scenario or another. As of December 8, 2016, there were just over 1,300 responses. An analysis of the community feedback data for all sources is provided later in this document (including a total estimate of contacts from 2,000 people).

### Feedback about preferred scenarios

The community survey asked about preferences among scenarios but was never intended as a mechanism for voting on which scenarios were felt to be ‘the best’. However, some significant information about preferences did surface: responses indicate that there does not appear to be clear consensus around any single scenario over the status quo. The survey results show that opinions are generally split fairly evenly among scenarios regarding which potential solution is the most advantageous, most balanced, beneficial for sleep, or cost effective, and that considerable support for no change is also present. The feedback does show that the scenario that starts high school at 8:30 a.m. has a higher level of support than the other options. It is also notable that this same range in opinion about preferred courses of action has been similarly visible in both the staff and community surveys, at staff and community meetings, and in emailed feedback.

As School Committee representatives to the working group, Ruth Goldman and Ellen Gibson have received extensive feedback and have had numerous conversations about this complex issue, including at meetings with school PTOs. Several PTO meetings were held in the evening and were open to the community, with notice of these meetings provided to all families. The comments at these sessions have been thoughtful and echo the observation, noted above, that preferences concerning potential scenarios are split. A key takeaway from PTO meetings, according to Ruth and Ellen, was that there seems to be a common sentiment that a change, if made, should be able to achieve significant benefits. The 8:30 a.m. high school start time seems to have somewhat stronger support than the other options because of a perceived better cost-benefit ratio, although, again, opinion was diverse.

### General feedback about scenarios

Over the course of the community engagement period, there was general feedback received that is applicable to any, or all, scenarios. Before detailing the feedback on individual scenarios, a brief summary of this general feedback follows, with some important key points.

There was an awareness of funding priorities and opportunity costs; e.g., what other district initiatives might not happen if this initiative was to move forward? In the survey, there were many comments about **costs** and tradeoffs. There was also a line of comments that understood that a significant **potential labor cost** was not yet known, and therefore not yet a factor in any cost-benefit calculation. This is the potential cost associated with extending the school year that is recommended in conjunction with the adoption of two of the six potential scenarios. There was also an appreciation of the **district priority on social and emotional learning (SEL)** and the strong impact SEL can have on overall wellness. A strong sentiment observed at PTO meetings was that there is agreement that there is a real need for students to get more sleep and there is awareness that **homework** is also a major factor. In addition, there was concern that students have the ability to continue participating in their extracurricular activities and that family time be preserved. There was acknowledgment that school and family connectedness is an important indicator of SEL and health and wellness and a desire not to compromise the health benefits of afterschool activities.

In the more defined context of advantages and disadvantages that are applicable to any scenario, some common themes were identified. These themes have been observed at PTO meetings, the community forum, in email feedback and in the surveys. Common themes include a high level of concern about **traffic impacts**, especially if time changes were to be adopted for all schools and a concern for the **impact on working parents**. Potential challenges for working parents included: changing early morning or afternoon child care needs; the limited capacity of school age child care providers; access to high quality child care; conflicts with established work schedules; and/or having to leave for work before teens have left for school. There was also concern about **optimal times for elementary student learning**, and whether changes to the elementary school hours might have potentially negative impacts on teaching and learning.

### Key learning about specific scenarios

Asking people to think about advantages and disadvantages of each scenario has helped to confirm and highlight the areas where there is the most agreement about the strengths and weaknesses of the respective scenarios. There does appear to be strong agreement about some negative impacts with two scenarios that may be difficult to overcome. There also appears to be agreement that one scenario has more disadvantages than advantages. These points also have implications for the timing of potential implementation, as explained below.

Working parents are anticipated to have a great deal of challenge with an elementary start time that approaches 9:00 a.m. This would be a result of the **shift all 20 minutes** scenario, with an elementary start time of 8:45 or 8:50 a.m. There is also strong agreement about negative impacts with the **switch** scenario, which would result in the earliest start times at 7:45 a.m. for the youngest children, and even earlier times for beginning travel to school, especially where there is high bus reliance. There was one scenario – **start high school at 8:00 a.m.** – where people identified more disadvantages than advantages. This is notable because, for all the other scenarios, more people provided examples about the advantages of each scenario than the disadvantages. The benefit-to-cost ratio is generally considered to be weak with this scenario.

It is significant that two of these three scenarios, for which particularly challenging disadvantages exist, are the more simple scenarios that would not require changes to the high schools' daily schedules or require the addition of days to the school year. These proposed revisions to the high school schedules to have consistent end times are necessary for some scenarios in order to minimize impact on afternoon schedules and to avoid high school end times later than 3:45 p.m. While modifying the daily schedule is generally thought to be a positive idea by school leaders and teaching faculty at the high schools, this has been the subject of feedback from teachers and administrators. Their feedback makes it clear that six months is not sufficient time to develop and implement an optimized schedule that minimizes the impact on latest end-times and effectively supports teaching and learning.

***Thus, another piece of key learning to-date is that there are significant barriers for implementation of any change to start times in the upcoming 2017-18 academic year.***

#### How feedback on scenarios was analyzed

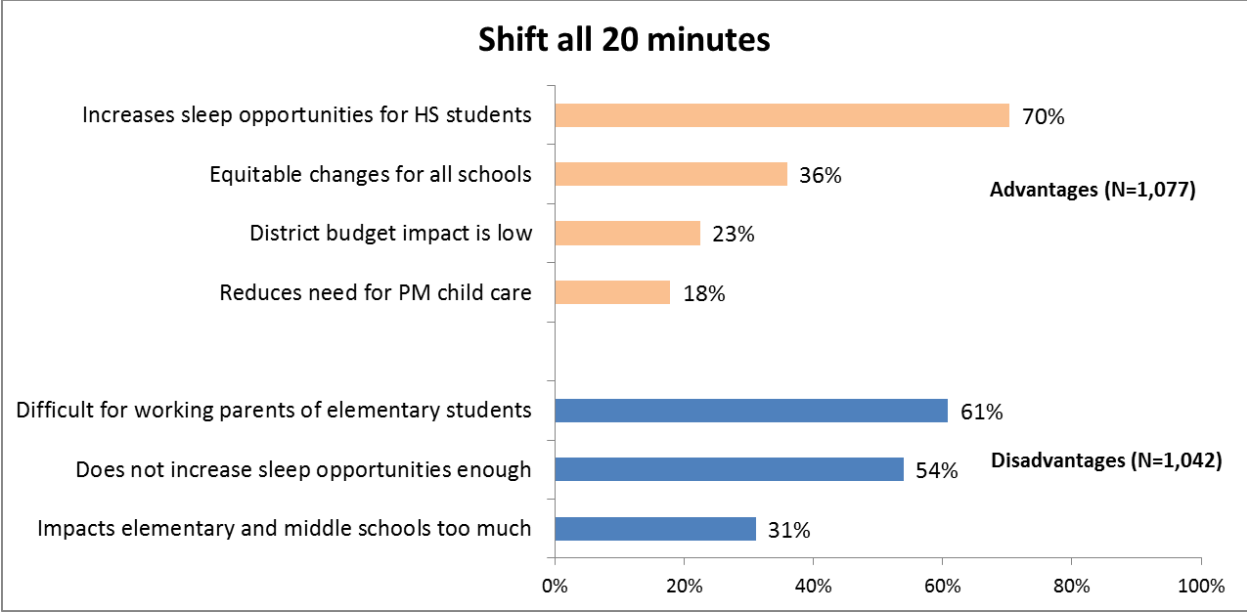
Feedback was compiled from all sources and was analyzed to identify recurrent themes on the advantages and disadvantages – or the most commonly stated pros and cons – of each potential scenario. The recurrent themes from feedback were initially analyzed after the October community forum held at Angier. These themes informed the answer choices used in the feedback survey that followed. Thus, the results of the analysis described below are reflective of feedback from the community forum, emails, and the feedback survey.

Individuals providing feedback often made multiple observations in their comments; as the analysis was focused on counting frequencies of observations, rather than number of respondents, all observations were included for analysis. Therefore, percentages may not sum to 100%, as individuals could and did provide multiple responses for each question. Summary graphs of the most frequently stated advantages and disadvantages for each the scenarios are provided below.

### **Individual Scenario Feedback**

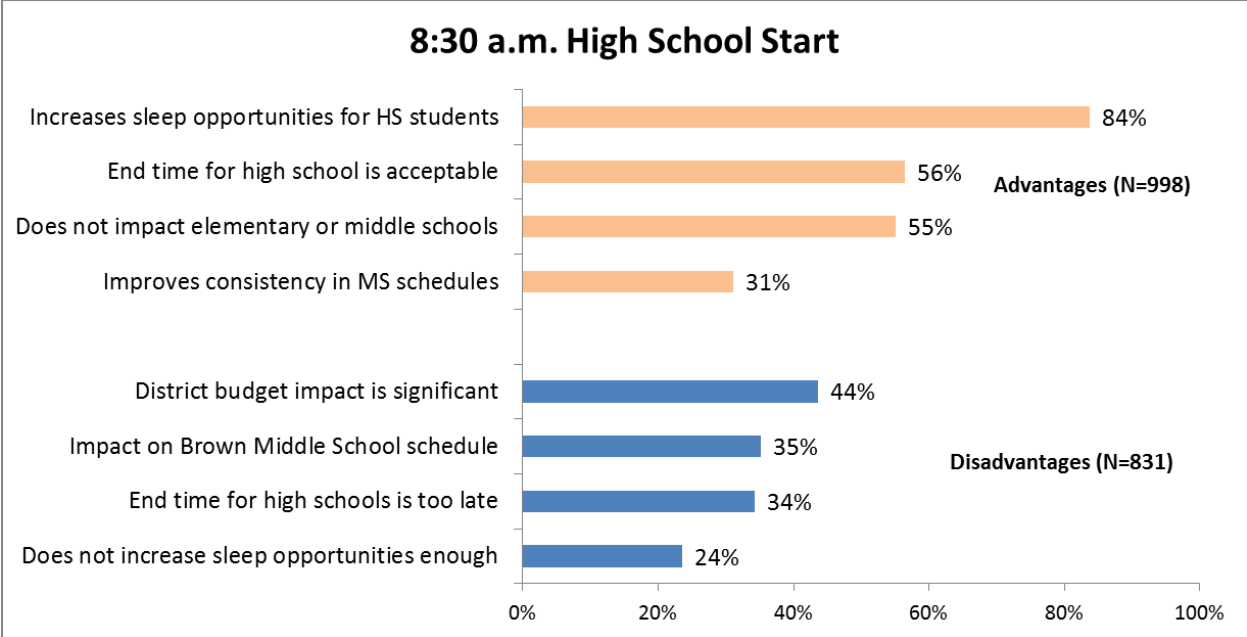
#### **Shift all 20 minutes later**

The first potential scenario affects all schools equally and shifts the start time for all schools 20 minutes later. The most frequent critique of this scenario was that a start time approaching 9:00 a.m. would be a negative for working parents of elementary students who are coordinating school drop off and work travel. Other disadvantages included the belief that this scenario does not increase sleep opportunities enough and that it impacts elementary and middle schools too much. The main advantage of this scenario was that it increases sleep opportunities for high school students.



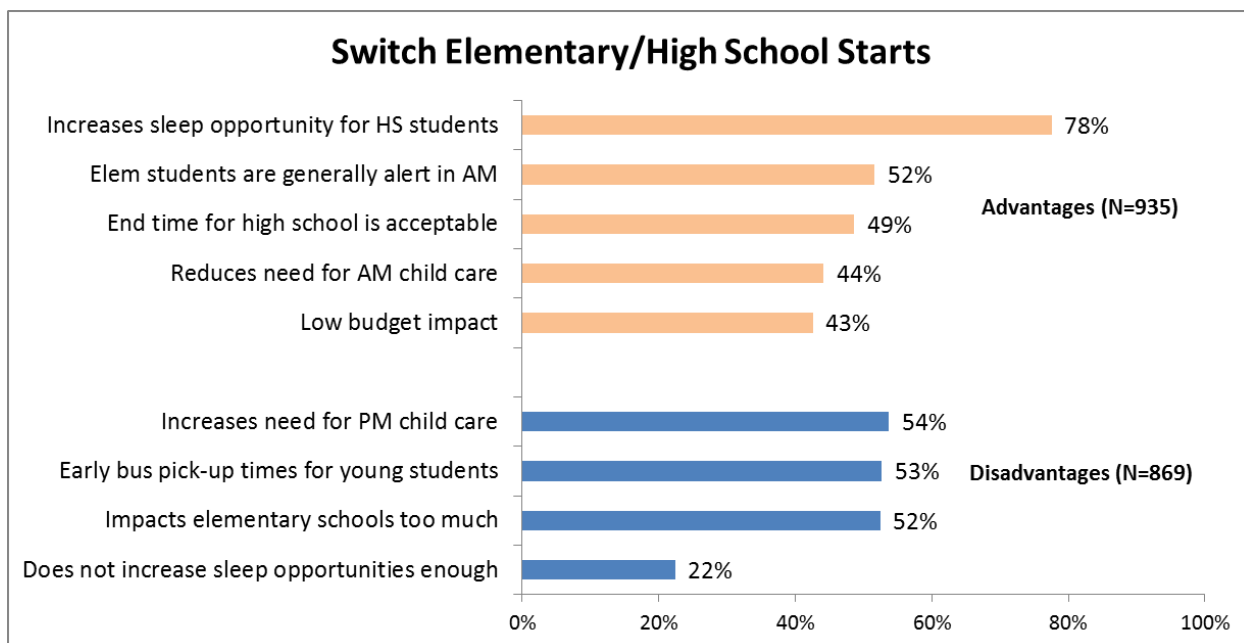
**8:30 a.m. High School Start**

In this scenario, high school would start at 8:30 a.m. The most frequently observed disadvantage was the potential impact on the district budget and a concern about how funding might be shifted to cover the associated expense. Also, there remained a concern that the end time would still be too late in this scenario. More frequently, however, people felt that the end time for high school would be acceptable. Many people felt it was an advantage that there would not be a change in the school hours for the elementary and middle school grade levels (with the exception of Brown).



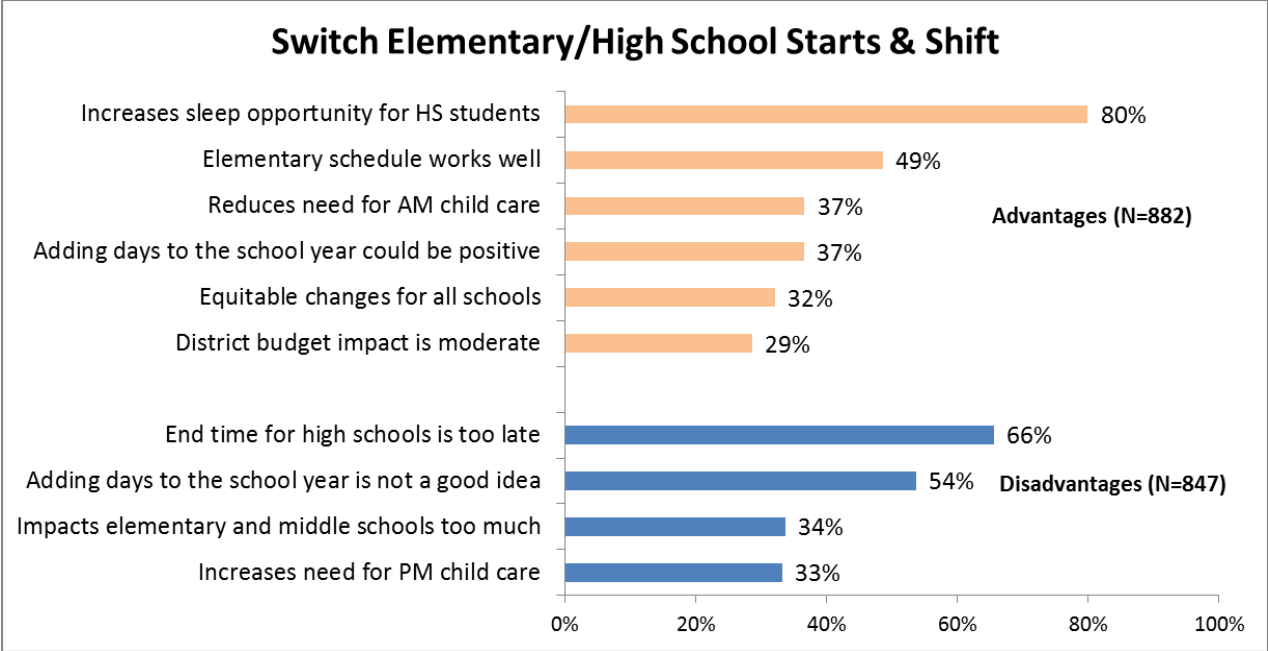
### Switch Elementary/High School Starts

This scenario has elementary schools and high school switch start times, so elementary schools start at 7:45 a.m. and high schools start at 8:30 a.m. In general, the increase in sleep opportunity for high school students was selected as the biggest advantage. People also felt that an advantage of this scenario was that elementary students are generally more alert in the morning. Similar percentages of people indicated that other advantages of this scenario included an acceptable end time for high schools, the reduction in need for morning child care, and the low budget impact. The most frequent disadvantages of this scenario included the increase in need for afternoon child care, the early bus pick-up times for young students, and the fact that this scenario impacts elementary schools too much. A smaller number of people felt that this scenario does not increase sleep opportunities for high school students enough.



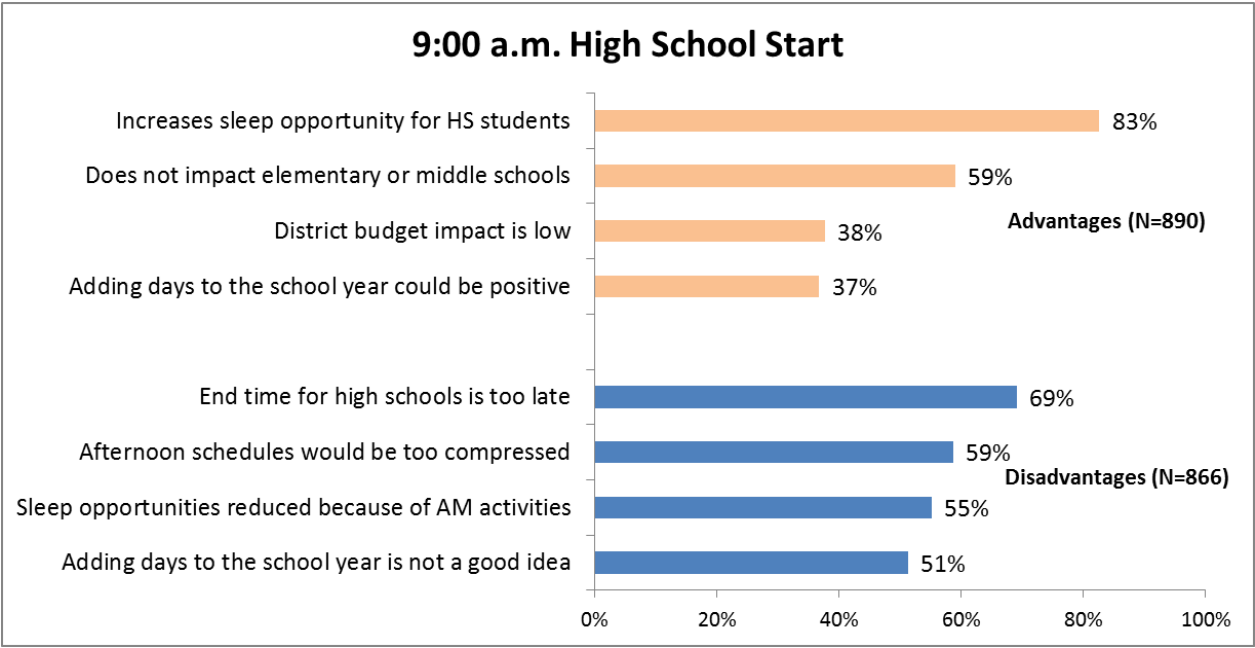
### Switch Elementary/High School Starts & Shift

In this scenario, elementary schools and high schools would switch start times, and then all schools in the district would shift 20 minutes later. This results in potential start times of 8:05 a.m. for elementary schools, 8:20 – 8:50 a.m. for middle schools, and 8:50 a.m. for high schools. The late high school end time in this scenario would require the addition of days to the school year to allow for an earlier end time. The most frequently selected advantage for this scenario was the increase in sleep opportunity for high school students, followed by the sentiment that the elementary schedule in this scenario works well, and that this scenario reduces the need for morning child care. Other advantages selected were that the addition of days to the school year that this scenario would necessitate could be positive for education, the fact that this scenario includes equitable changes for all schools, and the moderate impact on the district budget. The most frequently selected disadvantage of this scenario is that the end time for high schools is too late and that the proposed solution for making the end time earlier (adding days to the school year) is not a good idea. Other disadvantages were that this scenario impacts elementary and middle schools too much and that it increases the need for afternoon child care.



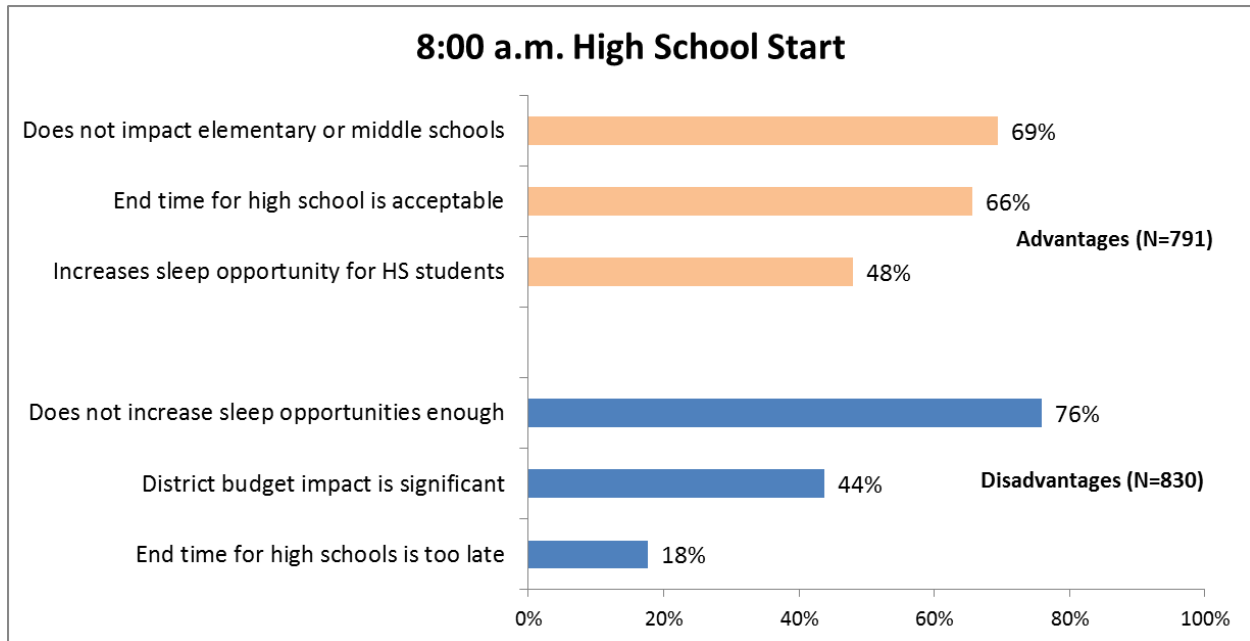
**9:00 a.m. High School Start**

This scenario proposes a 9:00 a.m. start time for high schools. Like the previous scenario, the late end time for high schools in this scenario would be remedied by adding days to the school year. In general, people felt the major advantages of this scenario were the increase in sleep opportunity for high school students and the fact that it does not impact elementary or middle schools. Other advantages included the low budget impact and the fact that adding days to the school year could be positive for education. The major disadvantages of this scenario were the late end time for high schools and the compression of afternoon schedules. Other identified disadvantages were the possibility that sleep opportunities from this scenario could be undermined because activities would get scheduled in the morning instead of the afternoon and that adding days to the school year was not a good idea.



### 8:00 a.m. High School Start

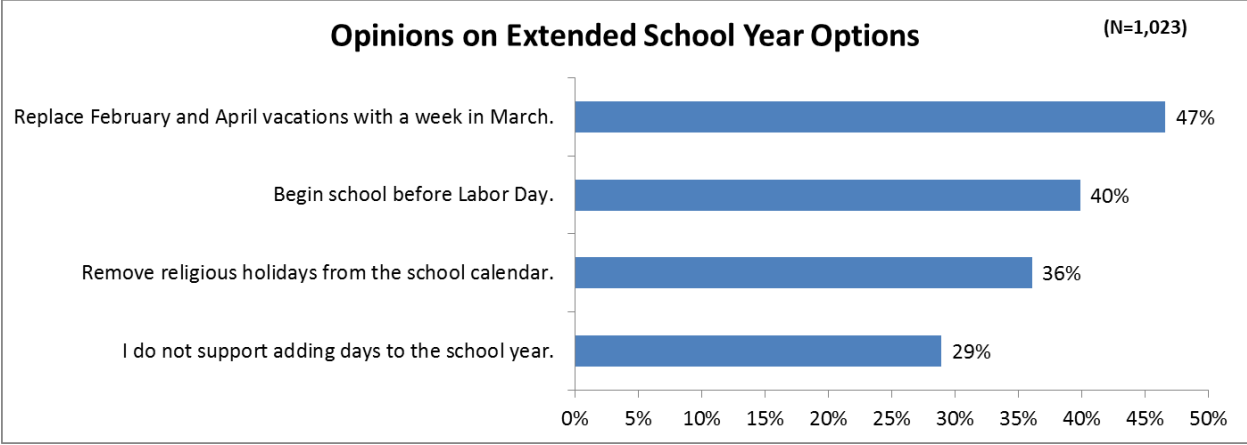
The final scenario results in high school start times of 8:00 a.m. Although some people did feel that the increase in sleep opportunity for high school students in this scenario was an advantage, a larger percentage identified the disadvantage that this scenario does not provide enough opportunity for more sleep. The major advantages of this scenario were that it does not impact elementary or middle schools and the acceptable end time for high schools, although a small percentage of people felt that the end time for high schools was too late. The other identified disadvantage was the significant impact on the budget.



### Opinions on an extended school year

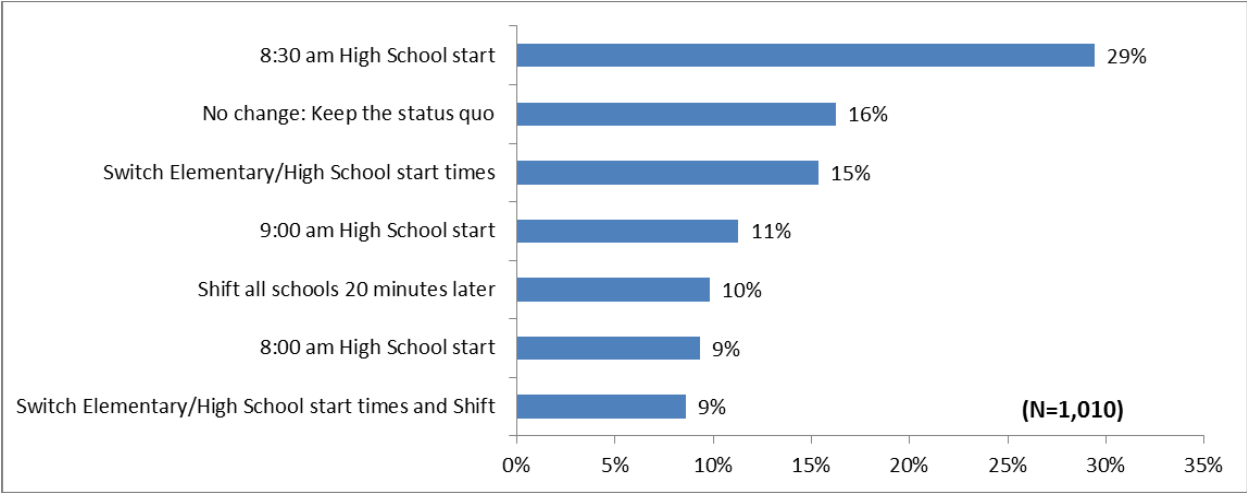
As described previously, two of the scenarios shift – the **switch and shift** and the **9:00 a.m. high school start** – high school start times late enough that adding days to the school year is recommended in order to avoid high school end times later than 3:45 p.m. Again, since survey respondents were not uniquely identified, and there is no way to determine whether responses were representative of the full community, the opinions about how the school year might be extended can only be considered preliminary. Further feedback would need to be gathered should either of these scenarios become preferred options.





**Preferences or support for individual scenarios**

As stated earlier, information was solicited about which scenarios were preferred; as previously mentioned, the focus of this analysis has been to identify the strongest advantages and disadvantages of each scenario. However, one start time scenario – **starting high school at 8:30 a.m.** - was the most favored by people who provided feedback. Close to one third of the people who used the feedback opportunity to vote on a single preferred scenario expressed a preference for an 8:30 a.m. start time. Among that same group of people, the next highest preference was to **keep the status quo** and make no changes (16%), closely followed by switch elementary and high school start times (15%). A large number of people who provided feedback about which scenario would be ‘the best’ also listed their second or third choices in later comments, or in email feedback – providing additional evidence that opinions did not coalesce around a single scenario. The graph below captures the ranked preferences of those who, in their feedback to the district, expressed a preference for one scenario.



Conclusion and next steps

In sum, there is good understanding that has emerged about the advantages and disadvantages of all six scenarios under consideration – and it is clear that not one scenario is uniquely strong. The challenge will be in evaluating, for each, the relative tradeoffs relating to sleep, overall health and wellness, impact and costs. Also, the continuing and overarching challenge remains the Newton Public Schools district’s goal to increase health and wellness supports in all schools for all students in addition to the potential implementation of a later start time.

Already mentioned as work still in-process, feedback from Newton Public Schools teachers and staff is still being collected through an additional survey and results will be available for review at the January 23<sup>rd</sup> School Committee meeting. At that time, our community engagement process will be complete and the School Committee is scheduled to continue to discuss the results and potentially narrow preferable options and consider additional action.