



NEWTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
100 Walnut Street
Newton, MA 02460

Telephone 617.559.9000

To: School Committee
From: High School Start Time Working Group
Re: Final Update on Community and Staff Feedback
Presentation on Key Learning Synthesized
Date: January 23, 2017

Since the High School Start Time Working Group report on community feedback on December 12, 2016, analysis of the staff survey has been completed. Just over 1,100 staff members responded to the survey and represented every school in the district. When analyzed by school level (elementary, middle, and high schools), high school staff responded at the highest rate (close to 64%), followed by middle school staff (approximately 58%) and elementary school staff (approximately 50%). The overall response rate is considered good.

The December 12, 2016 report is being re-issued to incorporate the additional data. The following are main changes to highlight in the re-issued report:

- Changes from the December 12, 2016 report are included in *red italics*.
- Additional community feedback collected through the survey from December 2016 to January 2017 is included (for a total of 1,900 community responses).
- The charts on scenario advantages and disadvantages have been revised to include community, elementary, middle, and high school staff survey data (the four stakeholder groups referred to in this memo).
- The comprehensive feedback from the community, teachers, and staff documents the broad perception that there are numerous advantages and disadvantages for all six scenarios under consideration and that the weighing of options does not easily result in consensus about any one scenario.
- The strongest areas of agreement about advantages and disadvantages reported earlier are unchanged with the inclusion of the staff survey data, although there is variation in opinions based on stakeholder groups.

- Often, the major advantages or disadvantages identified by a particular stakeholder group were those that would impact that stakeholder group the most.
- As was originally reported, the two lowest cost scenarios with the least complex implementation have strongly identified disadvantages.
- For the 9:00 a.m. High School Start scenario, all listed disadvantages were selected by at least 50% of every stakeholder group. No other scenario had every disadvantage selected by at least 50% of every stakeholder group.
- In the community feedback, there is a somewhat stronger consensus for starting high school at 8:30 a.m. than the other scenarios, although this scenario was only chosen as the preferred option by 28% of community participants. This somewhat stronger consensus is not found in the staff survey data.
- The conclusion from comprehensive feedback is unchanged: that not one scenario is uniquely strong and there is no consensus among stakeholder groups about which advantages and or disadvantages are most valuable, nor is there consensus among stakeholder groups about which scenario is preferred.

Presentation on Key Learning

The High School Start Time Working Group will make a presentation at School Committee that is intended to further synthesize key learning and to be a helpful guide to continued discussion.



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To: School Committee
From: High School Start Time Working Group
Re: Report on feedback on six scenarios under consideration
Date: **REISSUED** January 23, 2017

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 and key learning that has emerged from these activities.

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 took place from October to December 2016. There were 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 remained open until January 3, 2017. Teachers and staff were asked about the advantages and disadvantages they see associated with the various scenarios for potential change. In addition, the staff survey asked 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. Just over 1,100 staff members responded to the survey and represented every school in the district. Although the survey was anonymous, participants were asked to indicate the school(s) in which they worked; based on staff counts, each school had close to a 50% response rate or higher. When analyzed by school level (elementary, middle, and high schools), high school staff responded at the highest rate (close to 64%), followed by middle school staff (approximately 58%) and elementary school staff (approximately 50%).

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. *At the close of the survey in January 2017, there were just over 1,900 responses. An analysis of the feedback data from community members and teachers and staff is provided later in this document.*

Feedback about preferred scenarios

The community and staff surveys asked about preferences among scenarios but were 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 and that preferences vary by stakeholder group.* The survey results show that opinions are split 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.

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.

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 and staff**. Potential challenges for working parents and staff 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 *among community members* that one scenario has more disadvantages than advantages (*this pattern was not observed among staff members*). 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 *community members* identified more disadvantages than advantages; *this pattern, however, was not observed for staff members*. This is notable because, for all the other scenarios in the community survey,

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 it will not be possible to implement a 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 surveys 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 *from community members and teachers at all three grade levels* 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. The main advantage of this scenario was that it increases sleep opportunities for high school students. *With the additional responses from community members, “District budget impact is low” became the second most frequently selected advantage; in the initial memo, “Equitable changes for all schools” was the second most frequently selected advantage.*

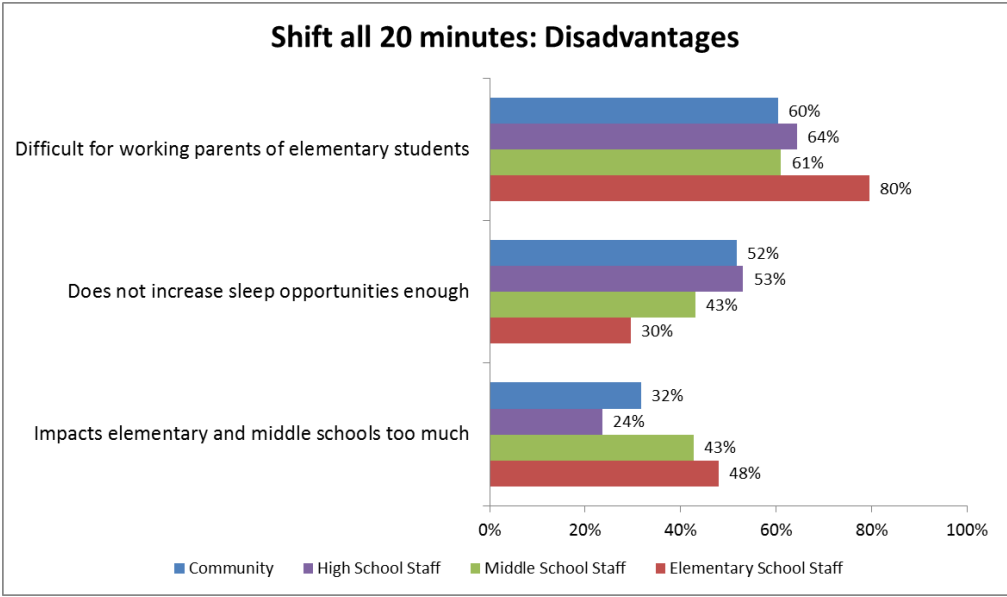
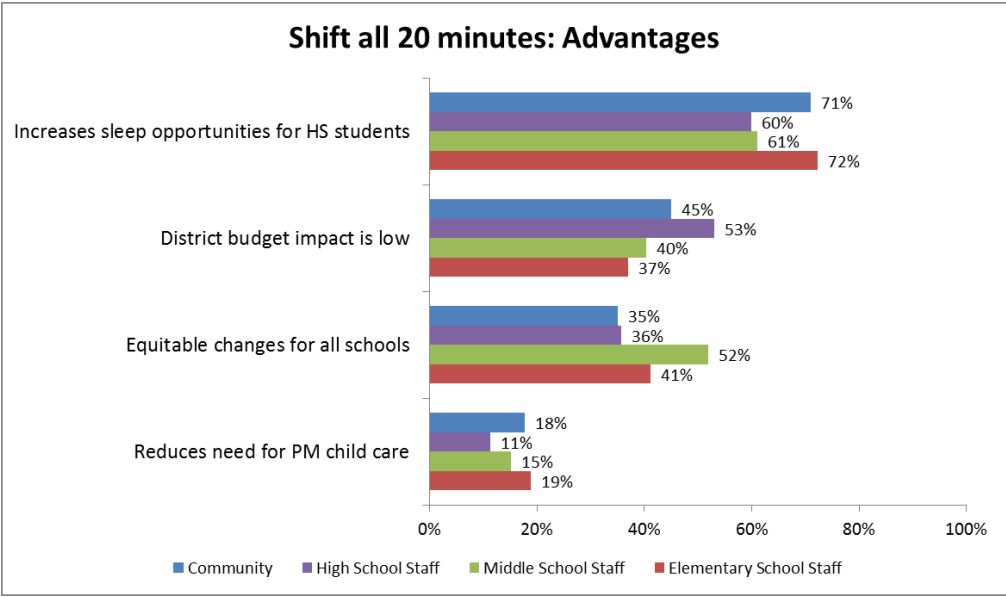
The pattern of responses for the four groups included in the charts below is similar, except for the following:

Advantages

- *Middle school and elementary school staff selected “Equitable changes for all schools” as an advantage of this scenario more frequently than “District budget impact is low”. Community members and high school staff selected “District budget impact is low” more frequently than “Equitable changes for all schools”.*

Disadvantages

- *Middle school and elementary school staff selected “Impacts elementary and middle schools too much” at the same rate (middle school staff) or more frequently (elementary school staff) than “Does not increase sleep opportunities enough”. Community member and high school staff selected “Does not increase sleep opportunities enough” more frequently than “Impacts elementary and middle schools too much”.*



8:30 a.m. High School Start

In this scenario, high school would start at 8:30 a.m. The most frequently observed disadvantage *varied by stakeholder group*. *Community members chose the potential impact on the district budget most frequently, while high school staff indicated that the end time for high school would be too late. The most frequently chosen disadvantage chosen by middle school staff was the impact on Brown Middle School’s schedule.* 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).

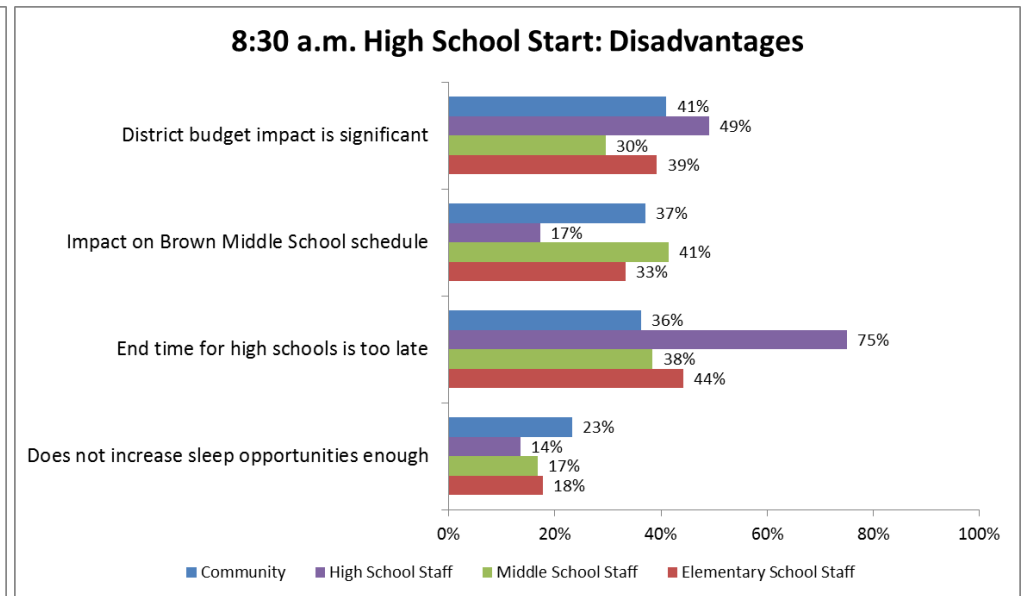
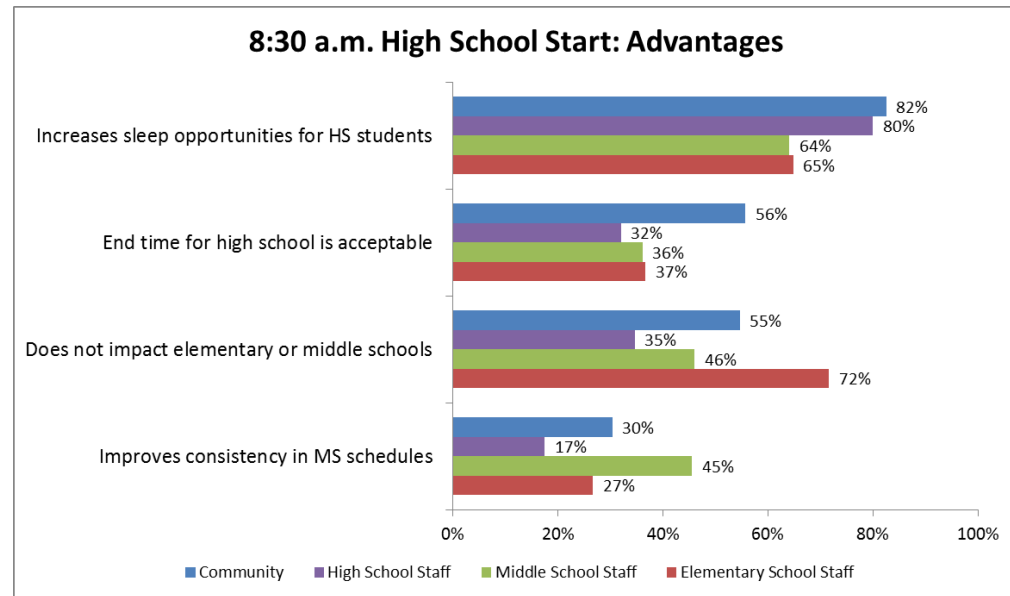
The pattern of responses for the four groups included in the charts below varies, as described below:

Advantages

- *Although over half of the community selected “End time for high school is acceptable”, a lower percentage of staff selected this option.*
- *Elementary school staff selected “Does not impact elementary or middle schools” more frequently than community members or high school staff.*

Disadvantages

- *High school staff selected “End time for high schools is too late” and “District budget impact is significant” more frequently than the other stakeholder groups.*

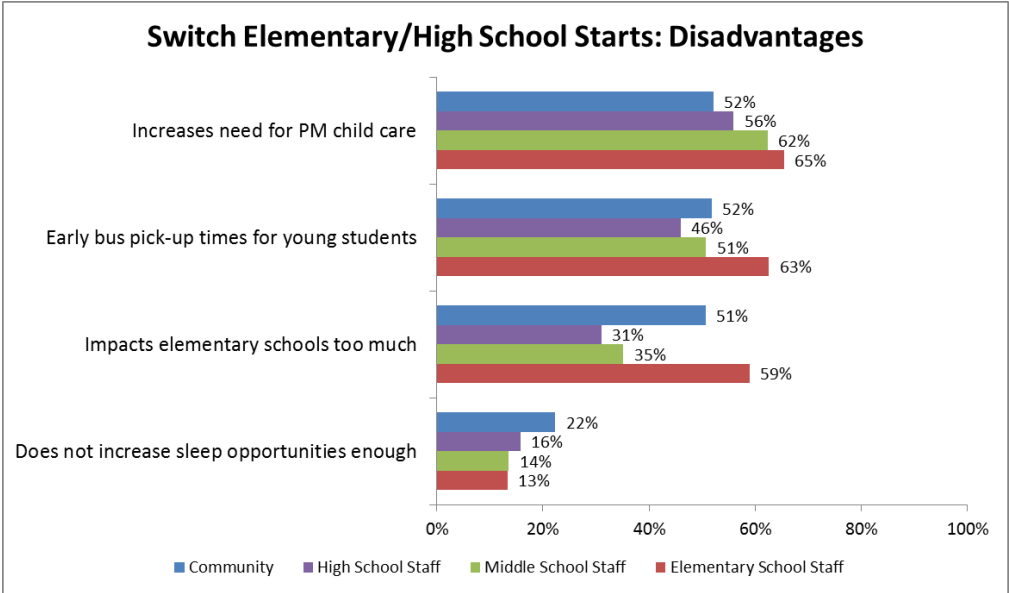
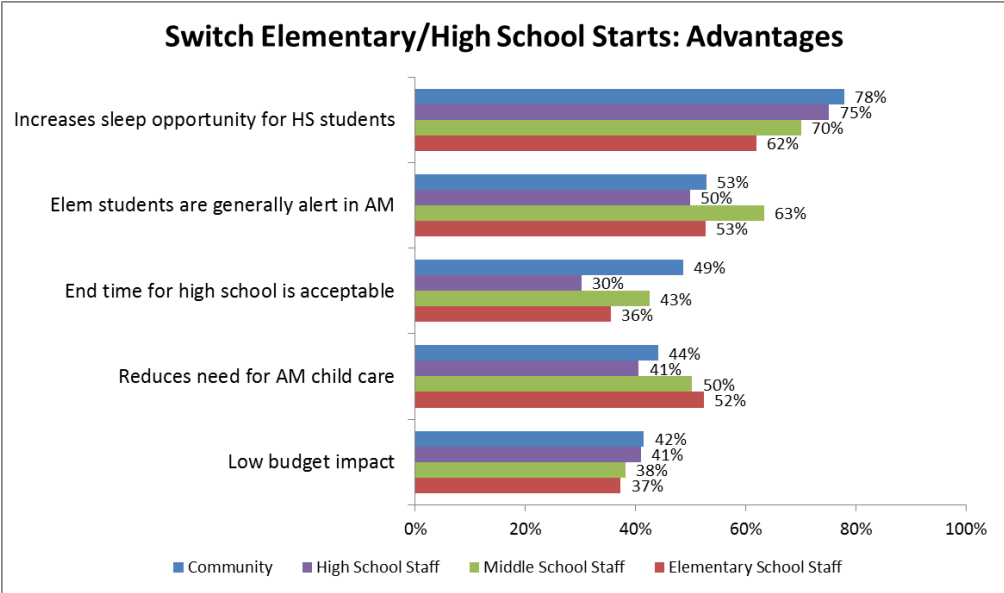


Switch Elementary/High School Starts

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 *by all four stakeholder groups*. People also felt that an advantage of this scenario was that elementary students are generally more alert in the morning; *this was more frequently selected by middle school staff than the other three stakeholder groups*. 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.

The general pattern of responses for all four stakeholder groups was similar, except for the following:

- Advantages:**
- All three staff groups selected “Reduces need for AM child care” more frequently than “End time for high school is acceptable”; the community members selected the reverse.*



Switch Elementary/High School Starts & Shift

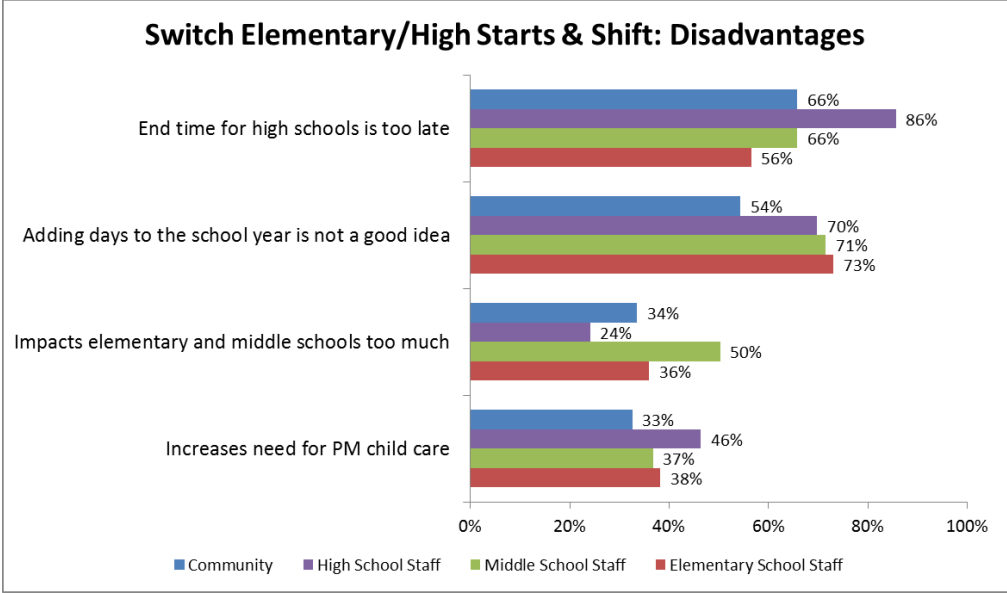
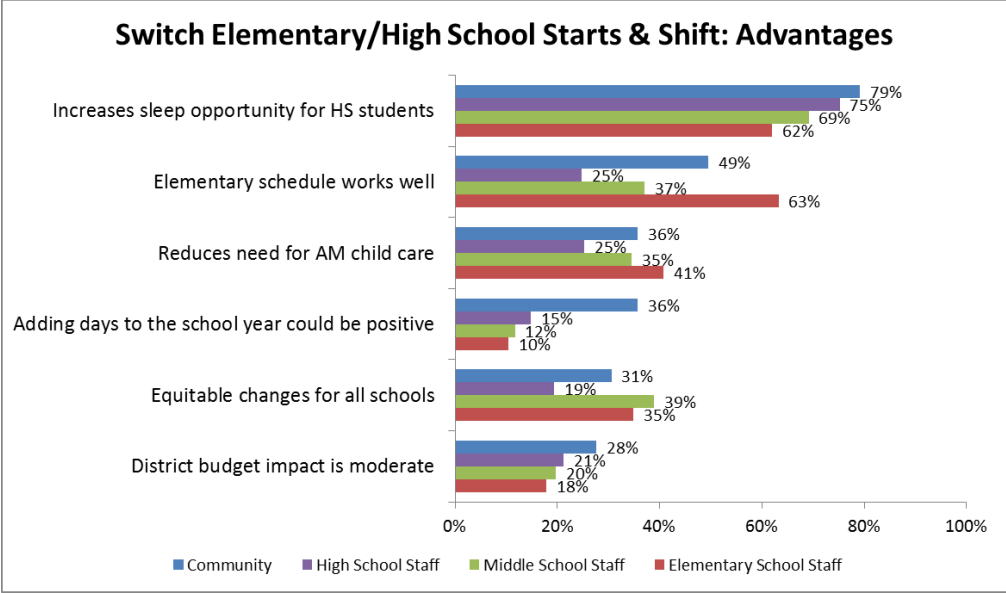
In this scenario, elementary schools and high schools would switch start times, and then all schools in the district would shift 20 minutes later. This results in potential start times of 8:05 a.m. for elementary schools, 8:20 – 8:50 a.m. for middle schools, and 8:50 a.m. for high schools. The late high 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 *for most stakeholder groups* 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. *Elementary school staff chose “Elementary schedule works well” as an advantage at a similar rate to “Increases sleep opportunity for High School students.*

The most frequently selected disadvantage of this scenario *by community members and high school staff* was 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.

The pattern of responses for the four groups included in the charts below varies, as described below:

Disadvantages

- *Elementary and middle school staff chose “Adding days to the school year is not a good idea” more frequently than “End time for high schools is too late”, while community members and high school staff chose the reverse.*
- *High school staff also indicated that this scenario increases the need for afternoon child care more frequently than the other stakeholder groups.*



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. *All of the listed disadvantages of this scenario were selected by 50% or more of the participants in every stakeholder group. None of the other scenarios had every disadvantage chosen by over half of the participants; some of the disadvantages in the other scenarios were chosen by much smaller percentages of respondents.*

The pattern of responses for the four groups included in the charts below varies, as described below:

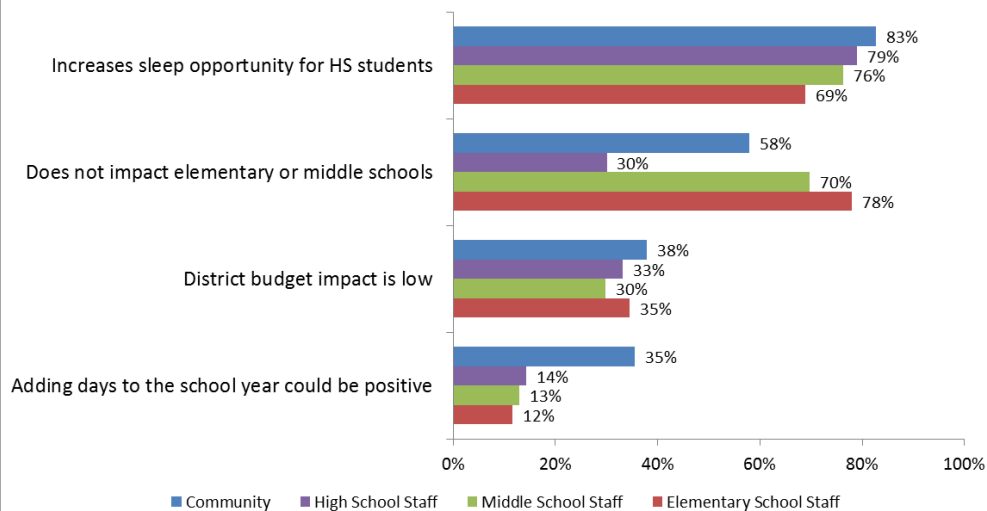
Advantages

- *Elementary school staff chose “Does not impact elementary or middle schools” most frequently, while the other three stakeholder groups chose “Increases sleep opportunity for High School students” most frequently.*

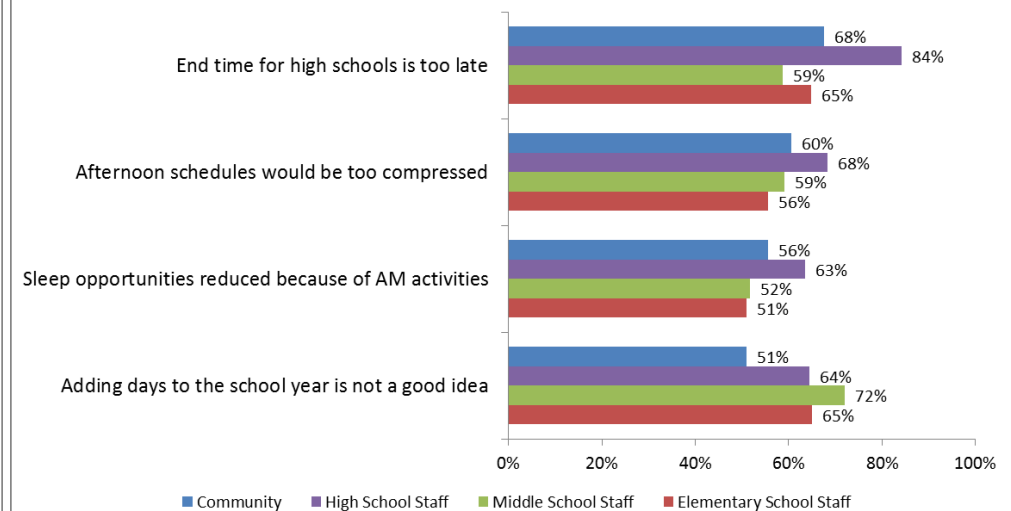
Disadvantages

- *Community members and high school staff chose “End time for high schools is too late” most frequently as a disadvantage, while middle school and elementary school staff chose “Adding days to the school year is not a good idea” most frequently.*

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



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

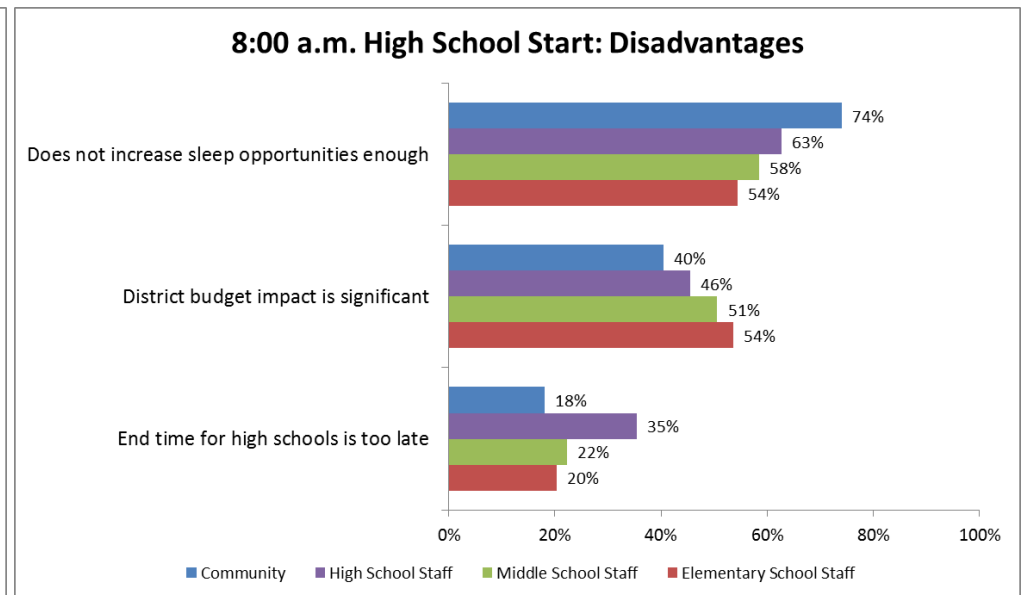
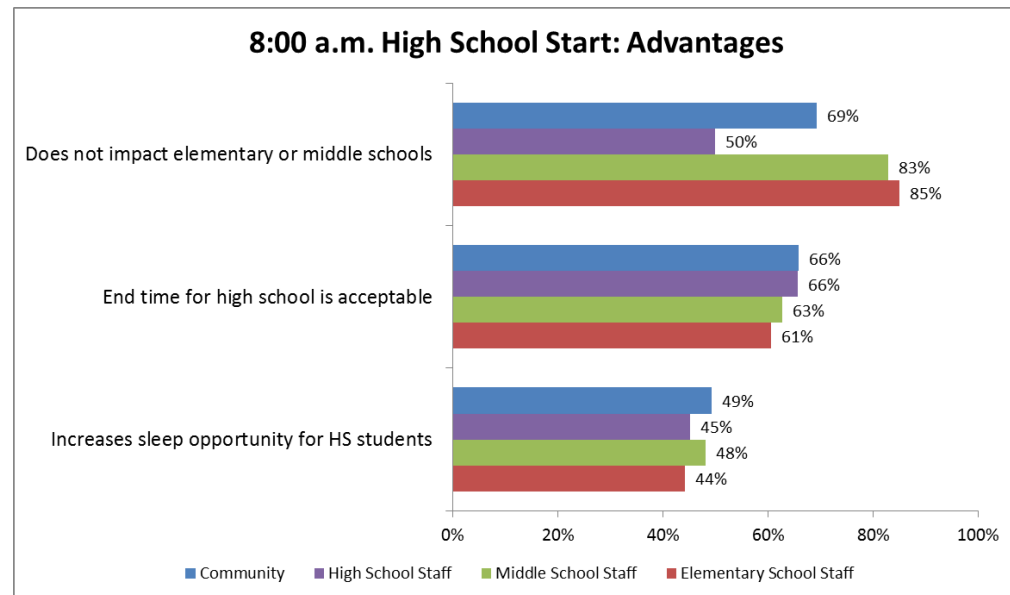


8:00 a.m. High School Start

The final scenario results in high school start times of 8:00 a.m. Although some people *in all four stakeholder groups* 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.

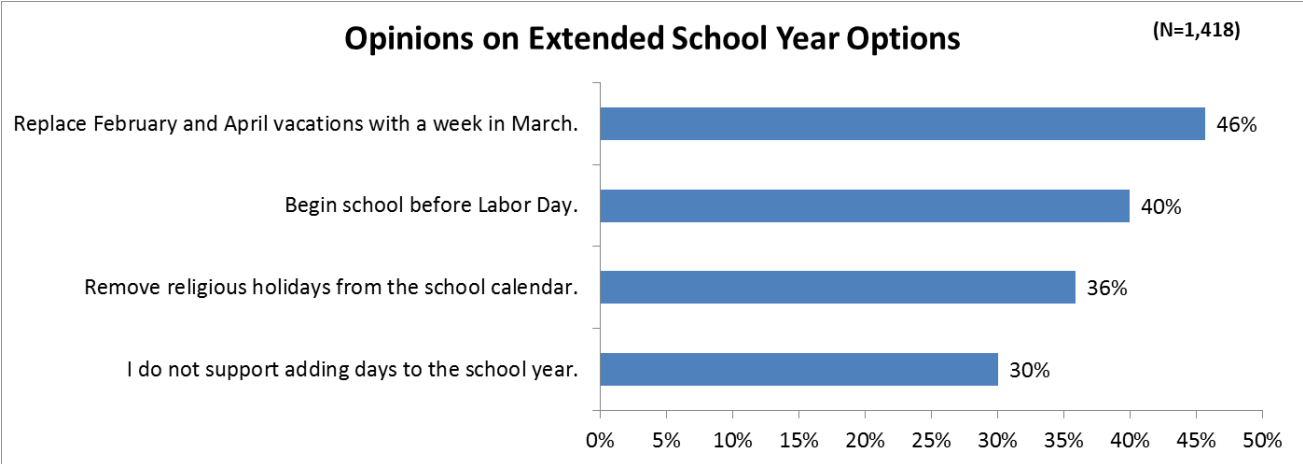
The pattern of responses for the four groups included in the charts below is similar, except for the following:

- Advantages**
- *High school staff chose “End time for high school is acceptable” more frequently than “Does not impact elementary or middle schools”, while community members, middle school staff, and elementary school staff chose the reverse.*



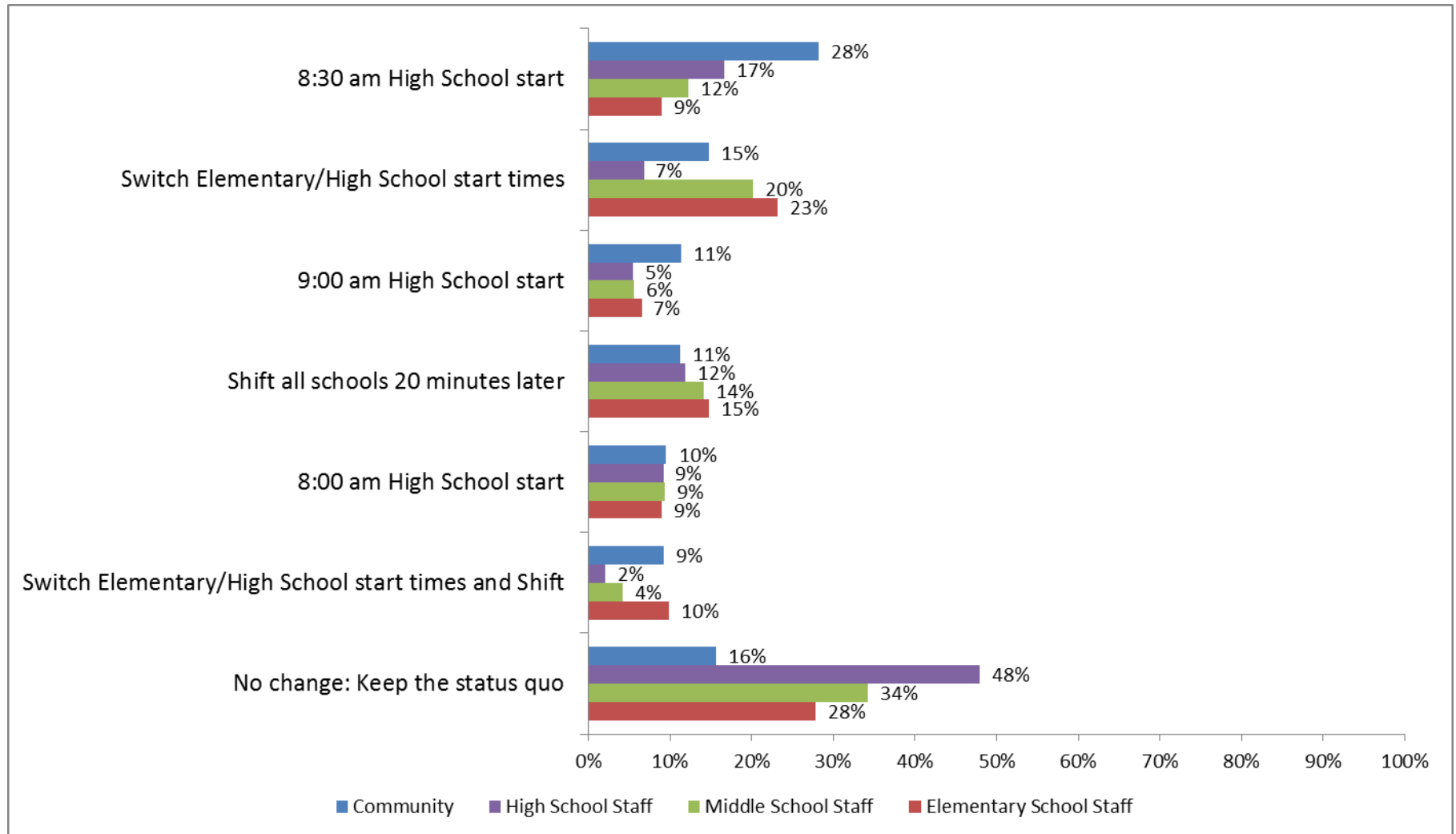
Opinions on an extended school year

As described previously, two of the scenarios shift 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. (the **switch and shift** and the **9:00 a.m. high school start**). *This question was only asked in the community member survey; the chart below reflects only responses from the community survey. This chart reflects updated data from the community survey; the pattern of responses is the same as in the December memo.* 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. The chart below captures the ranked preferences of those who, in their feedback to the district, expressed a preference for one scenario. *As displayed in the chart below, preferences vary by stakeholder group and there is no consensus among stakeholder groups.* 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.



Conclusion

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.

When considering all of the feedback of the stakeholder groups, there is no consensus among stakeholder groups about which advantages or disadvantages are most valuable, nor is there consensus among stakeholder groups about which scenario is preferred.