



Superintendent supports later start time

Added by Alyssa Sykuta on February 6, 2013.

Though the school board has not finalized the decision, Columbia Public Schools Superintendent Chris Belcher has officially taken a stance on the **start times** debate regarding what time primary and secondary schools will begin their school days next fall. In an email to CPS faculty, Belcher stated his support for high schools starting at 9 a.m. next year and ending at 4:05 p.m. Middle schools and elementary schools would take the earlier two time slots.



With the proposed 9 a.m. start time Columbia Public Schools Superintendent Chris Belcher is endorsing, high schools would release at 4:05 p.m. Photo by Asa Lory

Belcher said representatives from First Student, the bus company that transports CPS students, said they would not be able to make an 8:20 a.m. start time work for high schools, and the community poorly received the proposal of a 7:20 a.m. start time for high schools. Though Belcher said he didn't like the idea of high schools starting latest at first, he took into consideration transportation, student flexibility and community feedback and has reached the conclusion that the 9 a.m. option is the most plausible.

"This is the one I'm actually going to recommend. I've listened and I've proposed every possible combination prior, but I haven't recommended it," Belcher said. "When I saw the analysis that showed that high school last technically should work, I first thought, 'I'm not sure I like that,' because of all the things that high schools do athletics-wise and activities and band. And then I got thinking about it and I think we're thinking in too narrow a focus that a school day is 9 [a.m.] to 4 [p.m.]. The school day is really going to be 7 [a.m.] to 6 [p.m.] because of all the things that kids choose to do, and so really you're just moving the school day a little bit from what it already was."

Belcher said starting at 9 a.m. would give students the option to take zero hour classes. Though currently only show choir and marching band meet before school during certain parts of the year, Belcher said more zero hour classes could be offered to accommodate students who want or need to get out of school before 4 p.m.

RBHS principal Mark Maus said because high school students are able to drive, this allows high schools to be more flexible with their schedules, starting earlier than 9 a.m. and getting out earlier or staying later.

“Do we have classes that start before nine if that's the start time? Do we have some that are in the evening or afternoon? And even thinking of blended classes where, right now you kind of go to math every other day, or go to studies every day, does that change a little bit? And you're doing part of your learning online on your own independently, but also doing part of it in the classroom with direct contact with the teacher?" Maus said. "So those are open, and the reason that high school has an advantage of that openness and

America the Beautiful

So, I was at school the other day (when, really?)...



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that thinking about it differently is that we have more kids that drive. Because no one in elementary or middle school, we hope, drives."

Zero Hour and Online Courses

For choir director Mike Pierson, the later start time would be beneficial in terms of his zero hour show choir rehearsals. Because school would not start until later, the early morning practices would not have to begin until later as well, and his students would be more awake and ready to go. However, he recognizes that in terms of after-school activities, there may be less time to rehearse, a problem that could prove disadvantageous.

"It would mean [show choir students] were more awake at that time to have rehearsal. It would be good for that. It can negatively affect other things," Pierson said. "Our after-school rehearsals could be affected as well, like the musical; that's an extra 45 minutes or a half an hour that we're losing out of musical practice that we'd probably have to add on to the end or add onto Friday. But for our department specifically, it would probably be a little bit of a benefit."

Schedules could also incorporate more online studies as well as the zero hour option. Online personal finance teacher Susan Lidholm would love to see the joining of online and in-class courses that Maus offered as an idea. However, she said if students want to take an online course, it is important for them to know what they are getting into, and students who want to take an online course as an alternative to sitting in class until 4:00 [p.m.] would need to take that into consideration.



"You have to be a self-motivator. You really have to evaluate yourself and if you're ready to do that," Lidholm said. "I'm kind of excited to think of the possibility of a hybrid class where we would teach online and then meet in the class and talk. I think that'd be a great option because a majority of online students, like the majority, need some type of tutoring."

Sports

However, one of the biggest questions and issues raised throughout the start time debate has been one regarding athletics. When will athletics practice? If high schools start latest, will they be at school until long after dark? However, Belcher has taken athletics and extracurricular activities into consideration while deciding which proposal to endorse. By making use of the new gyms in each high school and the extra time allotted before classes officially begin at 9 a.m., Belcher said coaches could make the schedule work.

"Probably some of the coaches won't like it because they like the schedule they have. ... Some coaches may embrace it and like that they can do something before school and then something after school as well. ... There could be activities that [sports] could do in the morning on a certain type of skill development and then something they could do after school. It wouldn't have to be done all at the same time," Belcher said. "And then the other thing that I think might be an opportunity is that the usage of our gyms in the winter would be a little more reasonable. We use them all the time now anyways; we just practice until later, 9:00, already in the winter because of limited space. We were trying to take care of that with adding a gym for some sports, but it may be that the morning practice for somebody from 7 to 8:30 [a.m.] is easier."

Boys' golf coach Doug Daniels can see negative effects for his team with a later start time, which would mean later practice. Though he wishes the high schools would start earlier than 9 a.m., he does acknowledge the ability to adjust practice schedules and the way practice is run to accommodate less daylight practice time.



"It's going to be more difficult to have good enough daylight. Especially early, in early tryouts through late February and early March, that's going to be the most difficult [because it's not light out]," Daniels said. "We will have a hard time having a full practice, but if that's the way it is, we will have to make do and adjust. I'll just have to have some

other way of doing it.”

A Student-Driven Schedule

Though there are many facets of high school life that must be considered in this decision, Belcher’s main goal is to design the proposal around students. This, he said, could mean having some teachers in the building from 7:30 a.m. until 2:30, while having others teach from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00. It could also mean, according to Maus, having a “shuttle system” of buses that would provide transportation for students with zero hour as well as those ending at 4 p.m. Overall though, Belcher believes creating a student-driven system is the most important thing.

“My whole position on this, and I hope people get this, is we should design our high schools around our students. We shouldn’t make our students come in and do their schedule around adults,” Belcher said. “Now that breaks into routines the way we’ve always done things at high schools but in every other business, the consumer drives the employment. In other words, if people want to buy gas at 6:30 in the morning, the gas stations open at 6:30 in the morning. They respond to the needs of the customer, so I think that’s what I’m thinking this is. It’s an opportunity for us to say, ‘Let’s let the kids sign up for what they want and then let’s design a schedule around what they signed up for.’ And that way, the adults have to change probably more so than the students.”

Belcher plans to present this proposal to the Board of Education formally on Monday night. According to his email sent to CPS faculty, “This will be an information item on Monday’s agenda with no action to be taken.” Though he does not expect everyone to receive the proposal well, Belcher fully backs the decision and recognizes that no matter the decision, someone is always going to be unhappy, and that is a consequence he has to accept

“This is a big stretch. I get it. But the only alternative I think was to do a very traditional schedule and start high school super early and have elementary end really late and that was not something that I perceived that the community would really rally behind,” Belcher said. “This one I will have a certain number of people that will tell me they hate it, they don’t want to do it, and I get that. But at least I can say that they have the option to change it to better suit what you want. I couldn’t say that with any other option.”

By Alyssa Sykuta

Additional reporting by Trisha Chaudhary, Jacqueline LeBlanc, Lauren Puckett and Kaitlyn Marsh



This is part of the [Preparing for Battle ongoing special report](#). For more information on the changes occurring as the district opens a new high school in the fall of 2013, check [Bearing News biweekly](#) for a transition update.



About Alyssa Sykuta

Alyssa Sykuta is the News editor of [The Rock](#) and [Bearing News](#). The senior lives most of her life in the journalism room or the band hallway, writing/editing stories or playing her clarinet and hanging out with fellow band nerds. She enjoys curling up with her panda pillowpet named Vincentino, impersonating internet sensation Jenna Marbles and drinking coffee. Contact her at asykuta@bearingnews.org

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Adolescent Health and Academic Performance



Alyssa Sykuta

February 7, 2013 at 9:21 pm

Thanks, Morgan! I'm glad the layout was helpful. It was really fun to play with, and we as a staff definitely hope to incorporate more fun design-y stuff like this in the future 😊

Morgan

February 6, 2013 at 9:54 pm

Wow, great story! The lay-out really helped me to see things from multiple perspectives. I'm really thankful to you guys for putting this pertinent information out there so that we as students can stay informed 😊

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