

Dear GCS Employees,

Over the next few weeks, principals will be sharing and discussing with school staffs and parent leadership groups a district proposal to shift the elementary school day in GCS by 15 minutes - from 8-2:30 to 7:45-2:15. This change would take place beginning in the 2020-2021 school year.

We recognize a shift of this nature causes concerns for both employees and students, and have only brought it forward after much research and deliberation. Below is an explanation of the problem, solution, impacts, and why we have determined the need to consider this change. We would very much appreciate you reading this document in its entirety, with an open mind focused on our responsibility to provide supports and services to ALL students. Afterward, if you have any questions, concerns, or comments, please submit them to earlystart@greenville.k12.sc.us. Submitted questions and comments will be used to build a Frequently Asked Questions document to help communicate this proposal to the community.

As you read this summary, it is important to know that regular-ed buses in Greenville County run multiple routes and don't begin morning pickup for middle and high school until elementary students have been dropped at school.

Problem: Secondary bus riders, especially at the high school level, are **regularly** missing instructional time due to late morning arrivals. The late arrivals that occur on a regular basis are due primarily to heavy traffic, a lack of transportation infrastructure in our county, and a critical shortage of bus drivers. Students on a traditional schedule who are just 10-15 minutes late on a daily basis miss the equivalent of a full day of instruction every week and as much as seven weeks over the course of a year. While we know many car riders are tardy on a regular basis, we cannot continue an internal transportation system for which we are responsible that causes students to regularly miss instruction.

Proposed Change: Shifting elementary bus rider drop off to 7 a.m. and starting the school day at 7:45 a.m. instead of 8 a.m., enables us to add 15 minutes to the window of time buses have to complete secondary routes, **without extending the workday for elementary teachers**. Eight years ago, we moved the start times for middle and high schools to build in a window for bus transportation. This proposed adjustment recognizes that the existing window between elementary and secondary is no longer adequate for secondary routes to be completed.

Will this work? Yes. We are currently in year two of a pilot program testing early drop off (7 instead of 7:15). The initial pilot was at Taylors Elementary for routes serving Eastside High. In year two, the pilot was expanded to include Grove (Southside), and Lake Forest (Wade Hampton). Based on the success of the pilot programs, the percentage of secondary students who arrive late to school on a regular basis is expected to drop from about 16% to 2%, even with the current bus driver shortage.

Impact on Elementary Bus Riders: Because most elementary buses are already arriving at elementary school at or before 7 a.m. and waiting on the bus for the doors to open, elementary pickup times will not change very much. For most riders on regular education, home-based routes (non-magnets), the new pickup time will be no more than five minutes earlier than their current scheduled pickup.

Impact on Dismissal: Elementary schools dismissal will move to 2:15 p.m.

Impact on After School Childcare: Extended Day Programs at GCS elementary schools will continue to operate until 6 p.m. This will require an additional 15 minutes of paid time for extended day workers. We are currently determining if this will require us to increase tuition costs for extended day programs.

Impact on Breakfast: Free breakfast will still be available for all students. Service will begin early enough (between 7 a.m. – 7:15 a.m.) to serve all students before the start of school.

Tardies: Students who arrive at elementary school after 7:45 a.m. will be considered tardy.

Other Considered Solutions

Why not move high school start time later? Under the existing bell schedule, high schools begin the day at 8:45 a.m. and end at 3:45 p.m. Moving the day's end time any later would adversely impact high school students with jobs, athletic practices and competitions, and other extracurricular activities that take place after hours. Late starts to after-school activities is especially impactful for students with restricted licenses who cannot drive after 6 p.m. during daylight savings hours. Currently, 3:45 is the latest high school end time for surrounding districts. As a result, students who compete in after-school events that take place in other districts (such as athletic competitions) would miss additional instructional time in the afternoon in an effort to arrive on time for those competitions.

Why not flip times and have high schools start early? There are multiple reasons. One is that research has consistently determined that the adolescent brain does not function well early in the day and it is academically advantageous to start older students later in the day. Additionally, many parents in our county work in jobs with shifts that start at 7 a.m. They rely on high and middle school students to help get younger siblings ready for school and provide supervision after the parent has left for work.

Why not hire more bus drivers? We are constantly working to hire bus drivers and train them to earn a CDL (Commercial Driver's License) with appropriate passenger certifications. The current Greenville unemployment rate is under 2% and close to an all-time low. To address the driver shortage, we have increased starting bus driver pay to \$15.21 per hour, shortened the amount of time it takes to reach the top of the salary scale (\$19.06), increased training opportunities, shortened the time it takes to train, and

taken steps to improve the working conditions of our drivers. The work is challenging because drivers must have great powers of concentration, tremendous patience, a love of children, and the flexibility to work very early in the morning and late in the afternoon with time off in the middle of the day.

Why not leave bell times the same and just allow buses to drop off bus riders earlier? This is the current situation at our three elementary pilots (Grove, Taylors, and Lake Forest), but teachers in those schools are being compensated for the additional time supervising and enriching students. Expanding this to all 51 elementary schools would cost \$1.8 million per year to ensure adequate supervision for an additional 15 minutes at all 51 schools. Shifting the start and end time for the day keeps the hours of supervision the same as they are now.

Additional Questions

Do any other districts have early bus drop and/or start times? Yes.

Anderson 1: 7:45-2:40
Anderson 5: 7:45-2:30
Charleston County: 7:25-2:25
Dorchester 2: 7:15-2:15
Horry County: 7:30-2:30
Laurens County 55: 7:50-2:50
Laurens County 56: 7:45-2:45
Pickens County: 8:00-2:30 *Starting times may be earlier at some schools because of bus schedules*
Oconee County: 7:55-2:45 *Varies per school*
Spartanburg 1: 7:45-2:20
Spartanburg 2: 7:40-2:15
Spartanburg 3: 7:35-2:30
Spartanburg 4: 7:45-2:30
Spartanburg 5: 7:40-2:25

What are some positive consequences? The most important positive is the increase in secondary students arriving on time at school. The shift in start times may also help alleviate some of the congestion currently experienced across the county during all drivers' morning commutes. Additionally, parents who do afternoon pickup will be less rushed going from elementary to secondary schools and school activities at the elementary level can be shifted to end at an earlier time. Lastly, an earlier dismissal time for elementary students should allow more afternoon routes at middle and high schools to start their routes on time. As a result, there should be less after-school supervision time for bus riders at the secondary level.

Timeline

November 6, 2019: Share with Principal's Advisory Council

January 6, 2020: Share with District Leadership Team

January 8, 2020: Share with all principals and staff

January 9-February 28, 2020: Principals discuss with teachers, PTA, SIC

March 4, 2020: Feedback from all principals at Principals Meeting

March 10, 2020: Recommendation for changes, if any, presented to Board

April, 2020: Any changes will be shared with all stakeholders to include private and public daycare providers

Thank you for your time and consideration. We know a shift of this nature will require many of you to make adjustments in your routines and may impact your own children's transportation. Please talk with your supervisor about individual circumstances that we may be able to accommodate.