

Connect-ed Message Sent 4-15-2014 Start Times

Good morning! Providing a safe environment for all of our children and employees is the #1 priority of the Quakertown Community School District. We take this priority very seriously! With that in mind, the purpose of the email is to inform you that the Board of School Directors is considering flipping the start times between the two middle schools with the high school. The primary reasons for flipping the times are student safety for the younger students and better academics in the form of less instructional time lost for our High School students. This means that QCHS will start school first at 7:10 am and the two middle schools will start afterwards at 8:00 am. All six elementary schools will begin at 9:15 am, as they do now. At the next regularly scheduled School Board meeting, on April 24, 2013, the Board will formally consider whether to change from the current start times to these new times. We are interested in your feedback regarding this decision.

Some of you may be scratching your head because of the debate a few years ago, when the middle school and high school flipped start times. You were told that it would save approximately \$300,000 by having middle schools start first. In fact, changing the start time in the fall of 2011 saved more than that! It saved approximately \$400,000 that first year. Further analysis recently shows that we can make our transportation operation even more efficient starting the high school first.

With the severe weather conditions this past February, the Board and I mutually shared a concern about the safety of having 11, 12, and 13 year olds out on the street corner waiting for a school bus. The first pickup time for them is 6:18 am. As I am sure you remember, the roads throughout the school district were treacherous most mornings. Snow piles along the road were higher than some of our students were tall, and black ice was everywhere - given the unusually cold temperatures. Because of these conditions and putting student safety first, I made a decision to delay the start of the school several mornings. After sharing with the Board what I was learning, they asked me to review the possibility of changing school start times.

This was all in the midst of the re-districting discussion for the elementary and middle schools and the annual budget development discussion. We decided to delay the re-districting discussion one year. Additionally, the Board was informed by the Business Administrator for QCSD, Robert Riegel, that he projected a budget shortfall for next year of \$2.3 million. With this all going on, we learned several things about start times and transportation finances because of the current system. First, our high school schedule is not aligned to Upper Bucks County Technical Schools. Therefore, our 220 students who attend the UBCTS receive thirty minutes less instruction per day than our partner districts – Palisades and Pennridge. Second, because of the later start time, most of our 450 high school athletes lose several class periods worth of afternoon instruction due to competition and travel time to events. With high stakes testing, like the Keystone exams becoming a graduation requirement and these scores being a part of teacher evaluations, every minute of instruction has an even greater significance. Third, if we change start times, along with the way we transport nonpublic and

charter school students, we could save several hundred thousand dollars in addition to the savings we realized from making the change in 2011-12.

State law requires districts to transport these students if their school is within 10 miles of the QSCD boundary. The approximate annual cost to the district is \$1 million, almost 1% of the entire district budget. With all the belt tightening over the past six years, it was a good time to explore how to provide transportation services even more efficiently.—With an earlier high school start time, we can transport most of charter and nonpublic school students in on our normal public school student runs, transfer them onto other buses, and then send them directly to their schools and get them to their destination in time for school to begin. The vast majority of our nonpublic bus riders this impacts attend private school within the school district's boundary. Therefore, the additional travel time is negligible, they is a significant cost savings, and we are more mindful regarding children safety. The projected savings is a result of the reduction of vans and mini-buses. This method of transportation for charter and nonpublic school students is commonly found in other districts.

There is one looming negative with flipping start times, besides the inconvenience of change. Research says that if we flip start times we are going in the opposite direction of when high school students should begin school each day. I have read the research and lived through my two children going to high school. However, we also know that an actively engaged high school student is busy in the afternoon, or it is preferred to have them home first in the afternoon for when their siblings come home from elementary and middle schools. We wanted you to know that this was considered.

Thank you for reading this email. It is important to us that you know what the Board and Administration is thinking about doing next year, so that you have the opportunity to share your views before a decision is made. You may find more information for this decision on the QCS D website under Reports/School Operations/Transportation or <http://www.qcsd.org/Page/9775>.

Have a really good week and special Holiday weekend.

Very respectfully,

Bill Harner

Substitute Superintendent