

SCHOOL START TIMES IN RURAL DISTRICTS

Introduction

A growing body of research suggests that older students benefit from starting school later in the day. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that middle and high school students who sleep less than the recommended 8.5 hours per night are at higher risk for negative effects on their health, safety, and academic performance.¹ As a result, schools across the country are shifting to later school start times for middle and high school students. California is the first state to implement a statewide mandate that requires secondary schools to implement later start times.² This 2019 law fully goes into effect in the 2022-2023 school year but offers exemptions for rural school districts.³

Carmel Unified School District (CUSD), a rural district in California, is interested in learning more about how peer districts have implemented changes to school start times. They are interested in learning trends that emerge from other districts' successes and challenges regarding effective implementation or obstacles to implementing late start times. To support CUSD, Hanover Research (Hanover) identifies four rural or semi-rural districts and one urban district that have implemented or planned to implement later start times. Hanover also identifies trends regarding obstacles and best practices for implementation, supplemented by secondary research on best practices for effective implementation of start time changes.

Methodology

Hanover identified three rural or semi-rural school communities that have implemented (or planned to implement) changes to school start times and had sufficient publicly available information regarding the planning and implementation of start time changes. Hanover also included an urban district that implemented late start times and had publicly available information related to gaining community buy-in.

Hanover conducted a robust search to identify peers, first with the Hanover Digital Peer Generator Tool, and then with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) database.⁴ Hanover used NCES's Locale Classification codes to identify rural status, along with targeted searches of district websites.⁵ This search presented limited information regarding rural districts and no information from statewide rural peers. This report includes four peer districts that meet all the criteria described above and one urban district that meets the latter two. Hanover supplements insights from

these districts with secondary research regarding considerations and best practices for effectively changing school start times.





Recommendations

- **Engage the school community throughout the decision-making process this school year to inform whether to move forward with adoption in the 2023-2024 school year.** Providing effective communication, comprehensive outreach, and consistent opportunities for open dialogue supports increased buy-in from the community. CUSD should consider administering a survey on school start times to gather feedback from parents, students, and staff, and align implementation with that feedback. Creating an infographic with proposed changes and the rationale behind it will promote transparent and candid communication that builds trust.
- **Communicate and collaborate with the local community.** Local businesses and community partners may perceive the shift in start times as having a negative impact on engagement. Similarly, families may be concerned about the potential limitations for their children if there is a lack of alignment of times. CUSD should proactively communicate with the community to address participation in sports and extracurricular activities, as well as employment and childcare.
- **Further explore transportation solutions with identified peer districts across the country.** Because transportation poses as a significant hurdle, CUSD might conduct in-depth interviews with leaders in identified peer districts across the country to learn about ways to implement late start times and how to overcome barriers with a focus on transportation.

Key Findings

- **Rural districts navigate transportation concerns through a tiered bus system with a “direct flip” approach where they may switch elementary and high school start times.** In Kanawha County, the district flipped high school and elementary start times, and the tiered system was so efficient that the district operated with fewer drivers and buses. In Columbia County, the district shifted middle school start times earlier while dividing elementary schools between early and late start times.

- **One rural district addresses challenges for scheduling extra-curricular activities by actively engaging the school community and offering flexible scheduling options.** In Teton County, a FLEX program provides flexible programming options at the end of the day and on select Fridays. District administrators also met with relevant community members to problem solve the district’s unique scheduling issues regarding extracurricular activities.
- **All districts face resistance to change and mitigate concerns through communication and outreach efforts that engage school community members early and consistently.** Administrators in Columbia Public School District called rural families to obtain feedback as part of their outreach strategy. As a result, they experienced less pushback than expected to the start time changes.
- **A strategic communication plan can help districts overcome common obstacles and effectively manage change.** Teton County administrators highlight the importance of purpose-driven communication with a focus on the “why” as the key to enacting change. In Onteora, administrators identified communication as the next step to overcome the obstacles they faced in over eight years of planning to change school start times.
- **Effective communication strategies help districts gain buy-in from the school community, but districts should not expect the support of all community members.** Before implementing changes, administrators in Saint Paul engaged the community, mitigated challenges, and provided adequate time to prepare. However, they recognized they had to move forward without universal buy-in. In such cases, leaders may choose to use a “disagree and commit” approach for change management that encourages feedback but expects commitment to implementation.


 EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES	Students may have less time for activities such as athletics, extracurriculars, tutoring, community-based activities, or employment.
 RESISTANCE TO CHANGE	Many educational partners often resist changes to the school schedule (e.g., students, families, teachers, administrators, school staff, community members, etc.)
FACILITATING FACTORS	
 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	Involving school community members in the decision-making process and providing them with education on relevant research can facilitate implementation.
 SCHEDULING SOLUTIONS	Explore potential scheduling solutions to address concerns and facilitate implementation within the bounds of legal obligations and collective bargaining agreements. Scheduling solutions could include moving elementary start times earlier or scheduling some activities before school (e.g., select meetings, athletic practices, extracurricular activities, etc.).

Source: Adapted from The Journal of School Health⁷

Considerations for Later School Start Times

Many districts acknowledge the benefits of later start times for adolescents, but logistical or financial constraints may prevent districts from making the shift. By surveying school administrators in schools and districts that had implemented later start times, a 2020 study identifies common perceived barriers and facilitators to delaying start times (Figure 1.1).⁶

Figure 1.1: Barriers and Facilitators to Delayed Start Times

PERCEIVED BARRIERS	
 TRANSPORTATION	Districts face logistical challenges such as implementing tiered bus systems, organizing after school transportation, traffic, and transportation costs.

Transportation Considerations

Transportation is often cited as the primary hurdle districts face in changing school schedules. In the 2020 survey, school administrators cite transportation challenges related to the tiered bus transportation system, early morning pick up for elementary students, and increased transportation costs within the top ten perceived barriers to implementing later start times.⁸ Districts commonly manage transportation using a tiered bus system in which the same buses transport elementary, middle, and high school students at staggered time intervals. A tiered bus system often minimizes transportation costs by saving money on the number of buses and bus drivers in the district. In such a transportation system, a change in school start times at the middle and/or high school level is likely to impact elementary school start times as well. Furthermore, districts also face transportation challenges related to the length of transit time, the number of hours worked by bus drivers, the impact that buses may have on commuter traffic, and the availability of buses for the transportation needs of after-school extracurricular activities.⁹

To address the obstacles associated with bus transportation, some districts implement a “direct flip” approach, swapping high school start times with middle school or elementary school start times.¹⁰ Most often, the flip occurs between elementary schools and high schools, because the circadian rhythms of younger children allow them to wake up earlier in the morning.¹¹ While this solution

may be the most feasible logistically, it may pose additional problems for districts. Parents of elementary school students may protest the change based on the possible negative impact that earlier start times may have on younger students. For example, if elementary students must go to bed earlier to obtain the recommended amount of sleep for their age groups, then parents may have less time to spend with their younger children after work. Another common concern relates to the safety of young elementary school students who must wait in the dark to catch a bus to school in the morning. Therefore, a significant challenge for districts when changing school schedules is to identify start times that are reasonable for all students while staying within the bounds of the district's transportation resources.¹²



Kanawha County School District

Kanawha County School District (KCSO) is a large district that serves students from the city of Charleston, West Virginia as well as the surrounding rural communities.¹³

Background

KCSO implemented later start times for the middle and high school in the 2018-2019 school year. The decision was announced in a 2018 board meeting and was a central office decision that was not voted on by the KCSO board of education.¹⁴ KCSO administrators cited sleep research as the driver for the change, as well as a few logistical benefits.¹⁵

KCSO administrators did not formally invite parent feedback before implementing the new start times. However, one board member cited that in retrospect, this would have been better to allow people to voice their concerns and prepare the public for the change.¹⁶

The new schedule accommodated later start times in middle and high school moving elementary start times earlier. Although many of the elementary schools were already starting early, the new plan moved the start time for most elementary schools earlier to allow middle and high schools to start later. Figure 1.2 demonstrates the school start times for KCSO.¹⁷

Figure 1.2: KCSO New Start Time Schedule

School Level	New Start Times
Elementary	7:30 a.m.
Middle	8:00 a.m.
High	8:30 a.m.

Source: MetroNews¹⁸

Parents, teachers, and administrators had a mixed reaction to the new schedule. Some parents praised the earlier elementary start times, while many expressed anger and

frustration over the change.¹⁹ A few high school principals indicated that the extra time in the morning would likely help students to be more alert for academics and extracurricular activities. One elementary principle also suggested that earlier start times would be more effective for younger students, who tend to be more alert in the morning.²⁰

Transportation

The new schedule had logistical benefits for the district's transportation system, allowing for a more simple and more coordinated timetable. The Kanawha County transportation director stated that this new schedule built in time for safer and slower transportation. Even though drivers cover 18,500 miles of rural territory a day, after implementing the new, staggered schedule they were able to run all three routes using fewer drivers and fewer buses.²¹

KCSO made accommodations to make transportation safer in rural areas. The district installed safety lighting features on 50 buses that transport students from more rural areas. These lighting features provide greater visibility in two directions for students entering and exiting the bus. The district also added a blinking "STOP" arm on 10 buses for additional safety.²²



Transportation Insights from Rural Districts

A tiered bus schedule allowed KCSO to flip school start times for elementary and high school students. The schedule was so effective that it helped the district overcome the national bus driver shortage that left them 30 drivers short at the beginning of the school year.²³ The Kanawha County pupil transportation executive director stated, "If we had been under the old bell schedule, we would not have had enough drivers to have school."

One of the biggest challenges districts face using a tiered bus schedule is, as the Columbia Public School District (CPSD) superintendent stated, "somebody has to get up early."²⁴ Early start times mean earlier bus routes, with some CPSD students getting on the bus at 6:30 for a 7:30 start time.²⁵ The district's solution was to make middle school students and half of elementary students the early risers while offering later options for half the elementary students and all the high school students.²⁶

Extracurricular Activities

Administrators often cite the logistics of extracurricular activities as obstacles to prospective changes in high school start times. Within the top ten perceived barriers to delayed start times identified by the 2020 study, school administrators cited concerns regarding less time for athletic activities after school, athletes missing afternoon classes to attend athletic events, and fewer times for adolescents to work after school.²⁷ Community members also often name

concerns about the impact of later start times on after-school programs, athletic practices or competitions, and the use of recreational facilities.²⁸ However, research from districts who have implemented later start times demonstrates minimal adverse effects for participation in athletics and extracurricular activities. In fact, several districts found later start times resulted in increased participation in athletic programs and improved athletic performance.²⁹ Therefore, engaging and educating the school community about the impact of sleep health on performance may facilitate solutions for logistical challenges regarding extracurricular activities.³⁰

Some districts attempt to mitigate these challenges with flexible scheduling options for students. For example, some districts offer flexible start times by adding a “O Period” to the beginning of the day, which offers additional time for studying, academic support, testing, or meetings. Other districts have accommodated for later start times without delaying dismissal times by finding ways to conserve time throughout the school day.³¹



Teton County School District

Teton County School District (TCSD) is a rural district in Wyoming that serves 2,749 students across the districts two high schools, one middle school, and seven elementary schools.³² In 2006, the district considered changing school start times but shelved the idea after encountering strong resistance.³³

Background

However, TCSD’s Jackson Hole High School first implemented late start times in 2012 when they participated in a two-year University of Minnesota study on the effects of later start times for high school students.³⁴ Throughout the study, the high school began class at 8:55 a.m. The later start times produced positive results both within the school and in the study regarding attendance and academic performance.³⁵ As a result, the district maintained the later start times and both TCSD high schools offer classes from 8:50 a.m.-3:25 p.m.³⁶

Before enacting changes to the schedule, TCSD addressed issues specific to its location and community. The administrators met with relevant school community members to discuss the possibility of schedule changes and problem solve issues related to daycare, after school activities, and athletics. The district had to solve problems related to the use of facilities and managing daylight hours for sports and activities.³⁷

Scheduling

TCSD offers a Flex Program that offers more flexible programming options for students to attend academic and extracurricular activities during the school day. Figure 1.3

describes the features of the flex program and the flexible options it provides for students during the school year.³⁸ In 2022, the National School Boards Association awarded this program the Silver Magna Award, which recognizes programs across the country that address education barriers for underserved students.³⁹

Figure 1.3: TCSD’s Flex Program

THE FLEX PROGRAM

TCSD’s FLEX program includes:

FLEX Periods: 35-minute period at the end of each school day

FLEX Fridays: 12 Fridays during the school year

The FLEX program flexible programming options such as:

- Individualized academic tutoring and support
- Club meetings and activities
- School Counseling for College and Career Readiness
- Field Trips

Flex Fridays provide four additional periods for instruction or activities. Attendance is optional for students unless they are at risk of failing a course or joining a class field trip. Additionally, breakfast, lunch, and transportation are provided for students who attend the Flex Fridays.

Source: Multiple⁴⁰



Scheduling Insights from a Rural District

Each district will have unique considerations based on its specific location and community. Administrators from TCSD involved a variety of school community members in the planning process to gain a better understanding of the district’s unique challenges for changing start times.⁴¹

TCSD’s FLEX program offers more flexible scheduling options for students. Students can use flex periods and days to participate in extracurricular activities or receive academic support from teachers. FLEX Fridays also allow scheduling options to allow students additional time for support and activities within regular school hours.⁴²

Limiting the Effects on Teachers, Students, and Families

Administrators encounter strong resistance to change when planning to implement later start times. Students, school staff, and families have existing schedules and obligations that may be adversely impacted by any adjustments to school start times. Community members in districts considering school start time changes often express apprehensions related to work schedules, childcare, student drop off/pick up, necessary household chores, extracurricular activities, family time, and meal

preparation.⁴³ The adverse effects on teacher, student, and family schedules have the potential to derail a district's proposal for later start times. Some districts have abandoned plans to shift start times after community feedback uncovered strong opposition to the changes. In some cases, however, community involvement in the decision-making process may bolster public support for the schedule change.⁴⁴

Engaging relevant community members early and consistently can help districts identify and mitigate potential roadblocks to changing school start times. School administrators cited the involvement of various school community members within the top ten factors for facilitating start time changes, including the involvement of teachers, administrators, family members, students, and support staff in the decision-making process.⁴⁵

Research also suggests that community members can adjust more easily to school start time changes if they are informed early and given adequate time to prepare. Early in the process, engaging leadership of key community groups can build trust, identify concerns, and establish an open dialog before engaging the broader community. Additionally, smaller working groups that address specific concerns or tasks can be more effective than large groups that represent a large variety of school community members. Finally, the district should establish mechanisms for communicating and soliciting feedback from the broader community, such as hotlines, message boards, or community meetings. While a wide variety of concerns are generally raised throughout this process, many districts find that the anticipation of start time changes tends to be worse than the reality and many of the initial problems dissipate over time.⁴⁶



Columbia Public School District

Columbia Public School District (CPSD) is a large district in Columbia, Montana serves over 18,000 students from urban, suburban, and rural communities spread out over 300 square miles.⁴⁷

Background

When the district opened a new high school in the fall of 2013, they decided to implement a start time of 8:50 a.m. To accommodate a later start time, elementary school start time was moved one hour earlier to 7:50 a.m.⁴⁸

Community Engagement

CPSD led effective communication and outreach prior to the change, according to the district superintendent. As a result, the district experienced less pushback than expected. As part of the communication and outreach efforts, CPSD:⁴⁹

- ✓ Established an exploratory committee with school board and transportation leaders, principals, teachers, and parents
- ✓ Elementary principals called families in rural communities to solicit feedback
- ✓ Board members listened to student testimony to learn about student perceptions

CPSD made accommodations for after school activities, but still faced challenges after implementation. CPSD faced some challenges with sports because other districts were not on the same schedule. However, they equipped the buses with internet so the students could do homework if they had to leave their classes early. To accommodate the earlier elementary times, CPSD added clubs at the end of the day to provide longer childcare for elementary students.⁵⁰

Since the plan was approved in 2013, CPSD has implemented late start times in all high schools and made changes to middle and elementary schedules. All CPSD high schools currently start after 8:55 a.m., while all middle schools start at 7:30 a.m. and elementary schools are split between early and late start times. Figure 1.4 presents all start times for the 2021-2022 school year.⁵¹

Figure 1.4: CPSD School Start Times 2021-2022

School Level	Start Time	Dismissal Time
Elementary (21)	7:40 a.m. (8)	2:40 p.m. (8)
	8:20 a.m. (13)	3:20 p.m. (13)
Middle (7)	7:30 a.m.	2:35 p.m.
High (4)	8:55 a.m. (3)	3:45 p.m. (3)
	9:08 a.m. (1)	4:05 p.m. (1)

Source: Columbia Public School District⁵²



Community Engagement Insights from Rural Districts

Effective communication and outreach strategies that involved a variety of school community members allowed CPSD to mitigate resistance to change.

Administrators called families in rural communities to better understand their concerns and how schedule changes might affect them. After implementing changes to school start times, CPSD continued to make changes in accordance with the needs and concerns of the community.

Although TCSD administrators experienced resistance, purpose-driven communication and engagement with the community were the keys to enacting change.⁵³

*"We have learned that when you enact change, you need to have a powerful 'why' first.... It has to be very purposeful and address a need. You have to engage communities. People want to know and be involved."*⁵⁴ -Pamela Shea, TCSD Superintendent

Communicating for Change Management

When considering decisions to move forward, prioritizing communication strategies is essential for effective change management.⁵⁵ Because communication is necessary when planning a new vision or major change, district leaders should prioritize communicating their vision for the change throughout the entire process, not just when the initiative commences.⁵⁶ Early, organized, and comprehensive communication and outreach efforts are essential for helping community members prepare for changes, managing misinformation and misconceptions about changes, and gaining support from school community members before implementing start time changes.⁵⁷

Establishing a Strategic Communication Plan

Districts should establish a strategic communication plan that details the approach to communicating the change to both internal and external educational partners.⁵⁸ To develop a communication strategy, districts must first identify their school community members with whom it is necessary to communicate the change. Districts should identify who the educational partners are affected by the change or that have an impact on the change, both internally and externally. Identifying key members of the school community includes understanding how those impacted by the change will react to the change.⁵⁹ Once the district identifies these groups, it can develop a communication strategy. The communication strategy should "ensure that the organization and its customers are aware of and understand the organizational rationale for the change."⁶⁰ Successful communications focus on the "why" of the change: in addition to communicating about what is happening,





leaders should also be transparent and actively increase community understanding of why and how it is happening.⁶¹

Additionally, effective messages are concrete, specific, simple, repetitive, and targeted to different groups. Personalizing messages based on the group helps to increase relevance and understanding.⁶² Essential features of a communication strategy for change management include:⁶³

- ✓ Appropriate messaging for specific audiences.
- ✓ Consistency in messaging reflecting the shared language of the community.
- ✓ Connections to broader district strategies, priorities, and expectations for outcomes.
- ✓ Communication that serves as a feedback loop, with avenues for both pushing information out and hearing back from key constituencies.

District communication plans should specify the following aspects of the change, including detailing the planning, people, process, and performance.⁶⁴

Figure 1.5: Communication Plan Components

 <p>PLANNING</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain why the change will be implemented. ▪ Explain the purpose of the change. ▪ Describe the strategic objectives the change will help to meet. ▪ Create measurable objectives to determine whether or not the strategic objectives have been met.
 <p>PEOPLE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ List the relevant individuals working on the project. ▪ List any other relevant individuals or organizations (refer to list of internal and external educational partners). ▪ List the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the change management project, from most influential to least influential.
 <p>PROCESS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe the project's scope, any changes occurring to the scope, and how the change management plan applies. ▪ List all of the steps necessary. ▪ Describe the process by which the change will be managed. ▪ Explain how internal process changes will affect an organization's external educational partners.
 <p>PERFORMANCE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe any tools needed to implement the desired change. ▪ Document the new budget for implementing the project change.

- Perform a risk analysis for implementing any change in the project management plan.
- Create the change management schedule.

Source: Brighter Strategies⁶⁵



Onteora Central School District

Onteora Central School District (OCSD) is a rural district in Boiesville, New York with 1,243 students enrolled across the district’s high school, middle school, and three elementary schools.⁶⁶

Background

Since before 2014, OCSD has engaged in ongoing planning and communications about implementing later start times in middle and high school.⁶⁷ In the 2014-2015 school year, the district shared relevant research, conducted surveys, and set up a District Wide Planning Committee to identify the parameters, hurdles, and solutions for implementing later start times in secondary schools. However, each year the district has delayed its plans to implement later start times.⁶⁸

After delaying the implementation of start time changes again in 2022, the OCSD board president said that they would come back with a new plan that involves more communication. They also plan to set up ad hoc committee of administrators, teachers, parents, and students that would meet monthly during the school year to determine how to prepare for implementing later start time changes throughout the district.⁶⁹

Gaining School Community Buy-In

When trying to gain buy-in from educational partners, districts should strategically address undecided groups efficiently and effectively to increase support for an initiative.⁷⁰ Because undecided members of the school community have not yet made up their mind about whether or not they support the change, they are easier and more realistic to persuade than those who firmly oppose the change and are less likely to change their mind. Undecided partners are worth the resources to persuade more than those who have already decided to support the change and do not need to be persuaded.⁷¹ To persuade undecided members to support a change, districts must first identify who their undecided members are.⁷²

Districts looking to reach undecided school community members should also establish an identification and outreach strategy. Overall, the strategy should communicate to undecided members how the district is changing school start times, and the reasons for the change.⁷³ The strategy should also include the following components,

for while these components are intended to sway undecided voters, they can also apply to undecided members:⁷⁴

- ✓ **A plan** to approach the undecided members of the school community. What are the issues that affect these groups?
- ✓ **Combine communication channels** and drive awareness of your issue by using social media, print, and even going door-to-door, all of which reinforce your message.
- ✓ **Listen to their position** and re-iterate that the initiative is the best option by tailoring the messages to align with their preferred outcomes.
- ✓ **Provide a personalized message** and present it with the specific member’s perspective in mind.

When implementing change, district leaders must find the balance between building support for the change and determining the right moment to move forward. While a consensus-building phase is crucial for building up the resources and acceptance to move forward with change, staying too long in this phase can become a risk of losing momentum.⁷⁵ District leaders may benefit from a “disagree and commit” approach to change management that values constructive critique and continues to move forward without universal agreement. This approach, described in figure 1.6, attempts to use skepticism to fuel improvement while limiting resistance that impedes implementation.⁷⁶

Figure 1.6: “Disagree and Commit” for School Change

A “DISAGREE AND COMMIT” APPROACH

- **Establish the protocol of school change.** Establish a “disagree and commit” model that invites open disagreement and communication but also involves full commitment to implementation.
- **Involve external educational partners early on.** Early involvement can avoid people feeling blind-sided by change and allow input in the decision-making.
- **Be clear on what is fixed and what is flexible.** Define the areas that are non-negotiables and the areas that are open to input.
- **Be prepared to shift from discussion to commitment to implementation.** Leaders should be prepared to close the discussion, make a decision based on the input, and call for commitment.
- **Collect data and make adjustments as you go.** Gather and share formative data on the impact of the change, revisiting decisions and making changes as needed.

Source: ASCD⁷⁷

Saint Paul Public Schools



Although Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) is an urban district, similarly to Onteora they delayed schedule changes multiple times due to the negative reaction from school community members around earlier elementary start times. The plan was eventually approved in 2019 even though half of families reported opposition in district-administered surveys.⁷⁹

Background

SPPS's extensive and ongoing discussion around this topic supported effective implementation, as community members had sufficient time to prepare for the change. Changing start times was first discussed in 2010 and then studied by the administration in 2014. In 2015, the district piloted an 8:30 a.m. start time in one high school and provided free transit passes for students to take the city buses to school. The pilot program had positive outcomes for students, and many families found that the change was not as disruptive as anticipated, so the district approved additional changes in 2016 with a two-year transition period.⁸⁰

Additional Strategies

To mitigate the negative reactions, SPPS anticipated and addressed potential problems and concerns related to safety, athletics, and childcare, including:⁸¹

- ✓ City government installed lighting in municipal fields and increased street lighting on sidewalks
- ✓ District altered routes for elementary students and provided reflectors for shorter and safer walks to the bus stop
- ✓ District implemented a fee-based after school program for childcare and considered partnering with the Boys & Girls Club

SPPS committed to parent engagement during the implementation process for new school start times; however, district leaders were aware that complete buy-in was not a realistic goal. SPPS implemented strategies and programs to support families through the transition and gathered feedback but did not expect to gain majority approval before moving forward with the change. The district's long transition period helped families adjust and prepare for the logistics of different start times or select schools based on what aligned best with their routines.⁸²



Change Management Insights from a Rural District

OCSD's experience highlights the obstacles that often arise during change management process for shifting school start times. Implementing late start times at OCSD was delayed by several obstacles that arose during the planning phase, such as:⁷⁸

- 👉 **What is the ideal start time?** During the multi-year planning process, OCSD proposals for high school start times changed from 9am to 8am.
- 👉 **Who is responsible for planning and implementation?** At OCSD, the responsibility for planning late start times went through several different teams and committees over the years. Changes in leadership, such as the superintendent and athletic director, further delayed the process.
- 👉 **How will start time changes affect elementary students?** At OCSD, many elementary parents felt the later start times in high school had negative effects on elementary students.
- 👉 **How will the district include the school community in planning and effectively communicate plans to them?** At a forum, OCSD board members recognized that elementary school parents had not been effectively included in the planning and communication process.



Insights for Gaining School Community Buy-In

SPPS administrators understood that the district would not get buy-in from all educational partners, but they had to decide to act regardless.⁸³

"If we were making this decision based on popularity, we wouldn't have done it... We didn't approach our engagement with the understanding that we were going to try to get a 90 percent or an 80 percent [agreement] rate."⁸⁴ Jackie Turner, SPPS Chief Operations Officer

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