

HEALTHY START COMMITTEE REPORT

MARCH 2022

University of Chicago Laboratory Schools partnered with Challenge Success to assess the interest and viability of implementing a later start to the middle and high school schedules. This executive summary outlines the recommendations of the committee.

START & END TIME RECOMMENDATION

Based on the survey and focus group data collected, the *Healthy Start Committee* recommends that the daily schedule starts **30 minutes later than the current 8:00 a.m. start time** for the middle and high schools. Among those surveyed, there was overwhelming agreement that a shift to the start of the school day of 30 minutes or more would have a positive impact. The survey and focus group participants also strongly endorsed **ending the school day no later than 3:30 p.m.** to allow for after-school activities, family time, and downtime.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

The committee's recommendation is informed by a set of priorities that emerged from the data collected. The committee believes that the introduction of a later start alone will not sufficiently address all of these priorities and **suggests considering other dimensions of schooling** – such as parent education, homework practice, and the bell schedule – that might contribute to the achievement of these priorities.

1. Opportunities for students to increase their weekday sleep
2. Consistent start time and end time within and across all divisions
3. Reduction in workload to support student well-being and balance

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University of Chicago Laboratory Schools partnered with Challenge Success to assess the interest and viability of implementing a later start to the middle and high school schedule. The **Healthy Start Committee** drew members from the administration, faculty, parent, staff and student communities, and met bi-monthly from September 2021 through March 2022. During this time, the committee collected data through surveys administered to students, parents, and faculty/staff/administrators, as well as by running focus groups with various members of the Lab School community. This document reflects and summarizes the committee's process and conclusions.

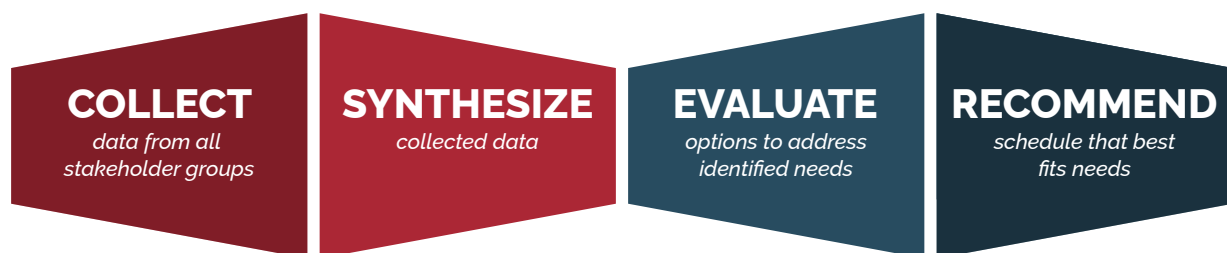
PROCESS

The *Healthy Start Committee* convened in September of 2021 to begin its work. The committee included nearly 40 administrators, parents, students, staff, and teachers, with representation from the lower, middle and high school divisions. To accommodate members' schedules, the committee decided to meet in two separate groups for its bi-monthly meeting.

The committee established a set of **design principles** during the first meeting to define its approach to the work:

1. Prioritize the needs and voices of students
2. Solicit the perspectives of all stakeholders
3. Inform decision-making with data
4. Bias towards action and experimentation

Additionally, the committee committed to a **process** composed of four discrete phases, with each building upon the insights from the previous phase.



Within each of these phases, the committee engaged in a number of **activities**, a selection of which are described below.

COLLECT *data from all stakeholder groups*

✓ Members from across the Lab School community were invited to participate in one of three Challenge Success **surveys** to capture their experiences and opinions. Among parents and students, only those in the middle and high school were included, given the Healthy Start Committee's focus on these divisions. Participation rates were as follows:

Admin/faculty/staff: 260 responses

Parents: 568 responses

Students: 852 responses

✓ The committee identified 18 groups who might be uniquely impacted by a change to the start time, for example, *Faculty with children at non-Lab schools* and *Students with a commute greater than 30 minutes*. Committee members split into 2-3 member teams and conducted **focus groups** with each of the 18 groups.

SYNTHESIZE *data collected*

✓ The committee analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the three surveys by using an **interactive online dashboard**, noting any consequential **observations** (e.g., "There's a discrepancy between teacher expectation of homework time and what students report spending"), **implications** (e.g., "seems like both the start time AND homework have to be addressed"), and **questions** (e.g., "Do students want a later start IF it means a later end time?").

✓ Those that hosted focus groups shared with the wider committee **insights from the conversations**. The committee then sought to draw out any salient needs they observed (e.g., "Administrative support staff were concerned about the ability to find parking with a later start").

✓ The committee consolidated the **values** (also referred to as **priorities**) that emerged from the various data sources (e.g., "Opportunities for students to get more sleep").

EVALUATE *schedule that best fits needs*

✓ The committee reviewed a selection of **research studies** that evaluated the impact of a later start time in various school districts.

✓ The committee considered an array of **sample school schedules** and sought to determine the values these schedules prioritized.

RECOMMEND *options to address identified needs*

✓ The committee originally endeavored to propose several schedules that would address the most salient priorities identified. Ultimately, this was determined to be misaligned to the interest of the committee and redundant with the work of the newly formed Scheduling Committees. The committee therefore resolved to recommend instead (1) a start and end time to the school day and (2) a set of priorities to inform the future design of a full schedule.

START AND END TIME RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Healthy Start Committee* supports what was expressed by participants in the survey and focus groups that the daily schedule **begin at least 30 minutes later at 8:30 a.m.** for middle and high school. Among those surveyed, there was overwhelming agreement that a shift to the start of the school day of 30 minutes or more would have a positive impact.

Percentage of survey respondents who say that starting at least 30 minutes later would have a positive impact

81%

Students

72%

Parents

60%

Admin/Faculty/Staff

STUDENTS: "How would you **use extra time** if school started later?"

36% Get more sleep

24% Increase playtime, downtime, and family time

20% Work on homework

PARENTS: "How would a later start change **how your child got to school?**"

66% No effect

38% 1 or more positive effects

4% 1 or more negative effects

ADMIN/FAC/STAFF: "How would you **use extra time** if school started later?"

34% Increase playtime, downtime, and family time; not be rushed

31% Prep for class and attend to administrative tasks

26% Get more sleep

**Respondents were able to share responses that fit in more than one category*

The committee also endorses the community's expressed priority that the school day **end no later than 3:30 p.m.** to allow for after-school activities, family time, and downtime. This preference was echoed by many in focus groups, and frequently emerged as a strong need in open-ended survey responses on each of the three surveys.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

The committee's recommendation is informed by a set of priorities that emerged from the data collected. The committee believes that the introduction of a late start alone will not sufficiently address all of these priorities and suggests considering **other dimensions of school policy** – such as parent education, homework policies, and the bell schedule – that might contribute to the achievement of these priorities.

1. Opportunities for students to increase their weekday sleep
2. Consistency in schedule, especially with start and end times across divisions
3. Reduction in workload to support student well-being and balance

The following pages describe each of these priorities and offer evidence for their support. Additionally, this report offers possible strategies that aim to address these priorities. Some of these strategies emerged from the data while others were suggested by Challenge Success based on its research and experience with other schools. These strategies are not intended as mandates from this committee or Challenge Success, but rather as possible areas to explore.

1.

Opportunities for students to increase their weekday sleep

Many students report having difficulty getting the sleep they require and indicate that a later start to the school day would provide an opportunity for more sleep. The committee does not believe that the introduction of a late start alone, without accompanying interventions, would be sufficient to increase sleep.

QUOTATIONS FROM SURVEYS

(Student) "I can't think at 8 in the morning after getting five hours of sleep."

(Student) "I don't get enough sleep so sorry if I fall asleep in class."

(Parent) "It becomes difficult to get the recommended 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep a night when class starts at 8:00 a.m. or earlier."

(Parent) "My child was so much happier last year when they were able to sleep in later."

INDICATED AS NEED BY FOLLOWING FOCUS GROUPS

/ Parents with kids in extracurriculars

/ Students with disability

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

Related to Schedule

LATE START

Later start to school day so students have the opportunity to wake up later

LIMIT ADDITION OF ZERO PERIOD

Set limit on the activities that can be scheduled before the official start of the school day

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

Not Related to Schedule

HOMEWORK PRACTICES

Practices limiting amount of homework that can be assigned in a class

PARENT/STUDENT EDUCATION

Programming and school-wide efforts on sleep hygiene and balanced extracurricular load

2.

Consistency in schedule, especially with start and end times across divisions

There was broad consensus that more consistency in the school schedule, especially with respect to the start and end time within and across all divisions, would have a positive impact.

QUOTATIONS FROM SURVEYS

(Student) "I like that middle school ends at the same time as lower school, so that I can coordinate with family and not have to drop any activities because of school schedule."

(Parent) "There are too many inconsistencies to keep track of - Mondays start at 8:20pm, Mondays and Thursday's dismissal are at 3:25pm...I would like more uniformity. Constantly reminding myself of days/times is annoying."

(Admin/Teacher/Staff) "Having more cohesion between the divisions. Adapting similar arrival and dismissal times."

INDICATED AS NEED BY FOLLOWING FOCUS GROUPS

/ Parents who commute

/ Academic leadership team

/ Faculty who lead afterschool activities

/ Parents with long commutes

/ Faculty with 30+ minute commute

/ Parents of kids with extracurriculars

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

Related to Schedule

CONSISTENCY WITHIN DISCIPLINES

Some subjects meet daily, others meet less frequently based on curricular needs

CONSISTENCY ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Consistent length/frequency of classes for all subject areas

3.

Reduction in workload to support student well-being and balance

The most dominant theme to emerge from the student data was the burdensome homework load, which many students perceived as a primary barrier to their well-being. The committee recommends strongly that this priority informs the design of both new schedules and new school policies. On behalf of the committee, Challenge Success shared this finding in conjunction with information on sleep with the director and other senior administrators who have committed to prioritizing these.

QUOTATIONS FROM SURVEYS

(Student) "It's so stressful!! We have so many classes and then we are forced to go home and do a ton of homework. I would maybe have less classes in a day."

(Student) "I really like this school, but I have too much homework and I dont have any free time to just be a child and have fun."

(Parents) "Classes meet everyday and give homework everyday. That's too much!"

INDICATED AS NEED BY FOLLOWING FOCUS GROUPS

/ Students with disabilities

/ Parents of kids with high homework load

/ Parents who commute

/ Academic leadership team

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

Related to Schedule

EXPLORE BLOCK SCHEDULE

Further explore the possibility of block schedule to assess impact on student well-being and workload

TIME IN DAY FOR HOMEWORK

Build in additional time to schoolday for students to attend to homework

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

Not Related to Schedule

HOMEWORK APPROACH

Design community-wide approach to HW that better supports student well-being

COURSE SELECTION EDUCATION

Encourage families to consider what constitutes a balanced load when picking class schedule

IMPACTS

Enacting a later start at the middle school and high school would impact the Lab School community in a number of ways. These impacts, described below as potential benefits and costs, were drawn from focus groups, qualitative survey data, and the research literature.

Potential **BENEFITS** of a Later Start

- / Students may be able to sleep more
- / Student mental health may improve and substance use may decrease
- / Students may experience fewer car crashes
- / Administrators, faculty and staff may feel less rushed during the day
- / Administrators, faculty and staff may have easier time with own childrens' commutes
- / Families may be able to spend more time together
- / Families may have easier time coordinating drop-off of multiple kids
- / Mornings may feel less rushed for families
- / Teachers may have more time to collaborate
- / Teachers may have more time to prepare in the morning

Potential **COSTS** of a Later Start

- / Children of faculty, staff or admin may still need to arrive early with parents
- / Fewer instructional minutes may constrain coverage of curricula
- / For some, commute times may be lengthened
- / If activities get shifted after school, could infringe on family time and add to load
- / Late start may not work for families with less flexible job schedules
- / May afford fewer opportunities during school day to meet with students
- / May result in fewer work hours for hourly staff
- / Morning parking may be exacerbated
- / Parents may wonder why tuition does not reflect shorter school day
- / Students may shift bedtime later and therefore not get more sleep