Meeting Date: September 14, 2017

Agenda Item Subject: School Start Time, Transportation

Submitted by: Dr. Jill Gildea, Superintendent

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We began the 2017/18 school year with the implementation of a significant and complex change to school start/dismissal times at our secondary schools. Greenwich High School now begins and ends an hour later and each of the three middle schools begins and ends 15 minutes later than in previous years.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>High</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start</strong></td>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
<td>8:15 a.m. (HAS)</td>
<td>8:00 a.m.</td>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(NSS, PKW, OGS)</td>
<td>8:15 a.m. (HAS)</td>
<td>8:00 a.m.</td>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8:15 a.m. (HAS)</td>
<td>8:45 a.m. (CCS, GLV, ISD, NMS, NSS, OGS, PKW, RIV)</td>
<td>8:00 a.m.</td>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dismissal</strong></td>
<td>1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>2:45 p.m. (HAS, JCS, NLS)</td>
<td>2:50 p.m.</td>
<td>3:15 p.m.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(NSS, PKW, OGS)</td>
<td>3:15 p.m. (CCS, GLV, ISD, NMS, NSS, OGS, PKW, RIV)</td>
<td>2:50 p.m.</td>
<td>3:15 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Change from</strong></td>
<td><strong>current times</strong></td>
<td><strong>No Change</strong></td>
<td><strong>15 minutes later</strong></td>
<td><strong>60 minutes later</strong></td>
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**Background**

The decision to change school start/dismissal times was made in order to improve the health and well-being of our students. After significant dialogue with the Board of Education and the Greenwich community and based on research and recommendations made by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Medical Association (AMA), and the Center for Disease Control (CDC), among others, the Board approved the time change in June 2016.

**Planning for Change**

In September 2016, the Board of Education established a committee to work with the administration to develop the plan for the 2017-2018 school year implementation and to address potential impacts that might result from the changing schedule. Understanding that a change of this significance would inevitably bring ‘bumps in the road,’ the Committee and the administration initiated a comprehensive work plan to address a myriad of potential challenges. They worked in collaboration with School Bus Consultants (SBC), hired to develop new bus schedules and routes, as well as the Town’s Public Works, Police, and Traffic departments in planning for this change. See Board of Education Report – June 2017.

**Current Status and Observations**

There are many factors that have contributed to the challenges faced at the start of the school year with regard to bus schedules and traffic congestion – some were anticipated and some were not.

- We have a multi-department town-wide approach for transportation to ensure students will get to school and home on time. The Police Department, Traffic
Department, Department of Public Works (DPW), The Board of Education (BOE), Department of Transportation, Communications Department, Director of School Safety, Student Transportation of America (STA), the school bus company, and SBC are working closely together to ensure safe arrivals and dismissals.

- In anticipation of a higher volume of calls and concerns due to the change in start times and new bus routes and schedules, the transportation office was staffed with additional personnel to answer and address callers and bus/traffic issues reported online and through email. Each report is documented as part of our ongoing data collection to inform and then implement improvements.

- Approximately 1,350 reports have been received through the phone, email or online and logged by the transportation office.

- Approximately 50% of the reports are categorized as general inquiry (i.e. bus stop, pick up time, eligibility). 100% of these inquiries have been addressed by answering the questions.
  Note: It is typical to receive large numbers of inquiries to confirm bus stops, times and eligibility. We believe there was an increased number this year, but do not have the data from last year to confirm.

- Approximately 50% of the reports are categorized as Start/Dismissal Time or Bus Route/Schedule change-related issues. Many of these inquiries have been addressed by the new bus schedules issued on Friday, September 8.

The remaining inquiries will be addressed as we review the incoming ridership and route-timing data.

The majority of the issues noted have been largely due to:

- **New Practices, Systems and Personnel** Many of the issues encountered are a result of adjusting to new start/dismissal times, bus routes and schedules, transportation administration and processes.

- **Increased Ridership/Overcrowding** Past practice indicates that approximately 50% of those students eligible for transportation services actually ride the bus. In planning for the change in school start times, it was estimated that eligible ridership would increase to approximately 60%. Early analysis suggests that some ineligible students are riding the bus, more students eligible for bus service than anticipated are no longer being driven to school, and there has been some increase in student enrollment at the high school.

- **Traffic & Construction** Traffic and drop off/pick up procedures at both the public and independent schools are causing unanticipated delays. In addition, construction projects that had been scheduled for completion prior to the start of school, are not yet complete, requiring detours and re-routing.

Our guiding principle in resolving these issues is to get students to school and home safely and on time. We have already adjusted and issued new bus routes/schedules for
four schools, implemented on Monday, September 11. As we allow this week for adjustment to the new schedules, we are collecting data on delays and on ridership. If delays continue, we will adjust the plan again with a short-term solution so that we ensure students are arriving at school and at home on time. We will continue to collect data over the next two months to determine if and what longer-term solutions are required.

We have resolved many of the initial issues causing delays, and we are in the process of resolving the remaining issues causing delays as noted. We are beginning to see a decline in reports, for example, last week, the transportation department was fielding an average of 200 calls a day. As of Monday, September 11, 2017 the transportation department fielded 35 calls.

Challenges Encountered & Addressed

The list of challenges encountered and our steps to resolve them are summarized below:

• **Overall scheduling/delay issues**  
  o Resolved by changing bus routes at 4 schools:  
    ▪ Greenwich High School  
    ▪ Eastern Middle School  
    ▪ Western Middle School  
    ▪ North Street School

• **New Buses and Drivers** Nine additional buses were required to address the new state/dismissal times, requiring at least nine new drivers and two additional depots/launch sites for the increased fleet.  
  o Resolved by adjusting drivers’ schedules to arrive earlier to work and through time and experience. According to SBA, Greenwich has been fortunate in being able to hire and retain drivers, while much of the rest of the country is suffering from a shortage of bus drivers.

• **New Routes & Schedules** Bus schedules and bus routes established to support the new start/dismissal times were new for all bus drivers.  
  o Resolved through time and experience with new routes; and new procedure to provide at least one business day’s notice to drivers of new schedules

• **New Transportation Administration** The retirement of long-standing Transportation Director last year with intimate knowledge of bus routes and Town roads.  
  o Resolved by hiring new Transportation Manager and providing intensive training and additional support/consultants.

• **New Senior Operations Administration** The Managing Director of Operations with oversight responsibility for the Transportation Office and the School Start Time Change project resigned in June 2017.  
  o Resolved – hired Chief Operation Officer; began August 21.
• **New Routing Process** The transportation department is using a new algorithm to assign stops that occur across the 3 different start and dismissal times for 16 public schools and 9 private schools.
  o Resolved through experience with use of process and routes

• **Unanticipated construction delays** Construction on a major East/West road "Dingletown" was supposed to be concluded June 2017 and required re-routing.
  o Resolved to be completed by the end of September 2017

• **Overcrowded buses/increase in ridership** We have seen a tremendous increase in ridership. Early analysis suggests that some ineligible students are riding the bus, more students eligible for bus service than anticipated are no longer being driven to school (possibly due to the change in start time,) and we continue to see growth in student enrollment (as of last Friday, 23 new students enrolled since opening day).
  o Resolving through checking student identification cards to be sure they are eligible; tracking bus ridership for a full week of service (9/11 – 9/15); ongoing tracking 2x monthly in September and October (generally conducted only once a month), and, in the short term, using overload buses.

• **Increased Traffic Congestion** Increased congestion has been experienced, due to new start times for public secondary during rush hour and start times for area public and independent schools.
  o Resolving by working in collaboration with relevant Town departments to monitor traffic patterns around the High School and North Street areas. Police and DPW are working on traffic flow.

• **Bus Exiting Slowed** New, larger 82 passenger buses are grounding out on the exit to Hillside Road due to the steepness of the drop between the road and sidewalk. It is taking between 5 and 10 additional minutes for buses to exit.
  o Resolved by DPW is determining a way to mediate the clearance space at the exit.

• **Special Education bus delays**
  o Resolved by: transportation office has been authorized to add an additional Special Education bus. This week, the transportation department will be reworking all of the special education bus routes to include the additional vehicle. The transportation department expects all of the new Special Education bus routes will be in in place by September 18.

**Next Steps**

• Until such time as the buses are running consistently on time, schools will not mark students tardy because of late buses.
• The STA Transportation Company and the SBC Logistics Consultant are on-site and will continue their analysis and re-deployment of buses and schedules.

• The transportation team will continue collecting data to formulate their observations and “lessons learned”.

• Long-term solutions will be implemented once data has been collected, and riders and drivers have had a chance to adjust to the new schedules.

• The School Start Time Ad Hoc Committee will re-convene to monitor the implementation of the change in school start/dismissal times.

• Evaluation data will be collected in order to understand the effect of the change in start times, and on traffic and transportation issues, including:
  - Academic Performance
  - Student Sleep Study Survey
  - Attendance and Tardy Data
  - Athletic and Extra-curricular participation data
  - Transportation/Bus Ridership Data
  - Traffic and Studies

Questions received from BOE members:

1. **What time did SBC plan for the buses to be at each school?**
   15 minutes before bell time

2. **How many students are assigned per seat?**
   High school students: 2 per seat, Middle school students: 2 per seat, Elementary school students: 3 per seat

3. **Did SBC conduct a traffic study?**
   SBC reviewed and studied the traffic reports from the Traffic Department done in 2014/15 and 2015/16. They are currently working with the Police Department, Traffic Department, Department of Public Works, The Board of Education, and Director of School Safety to review traffic flow and congestion.

4. **What actions are you taking to communicate and mitigate the situations?**
   The transportation team has 5 people answering phone calls and emails. They respond quickly and when the issue/inquiry is resolved, they either call the parent back or send an email. Administration is sending Parentlink messages to families and staff to keep them informed of status and progress (recent communications sent on August 30, September 6 and 8.) They were sent in English and Spanish and shared with the local media. The new routes were posted on the secondary schools’ websites.

5. **What is the data through 9/12 including number of calls, complaints, feedback, re-routing, etc.?**
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There were many Special Education transportation complaints. Those will be resolved by September 18, 2017.