

**Speech to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors by Sandy Evans,
Co-Founder, Start Later for Excellence in Education Proposal (SLEEP)
April 1, 2008**

Good evening, Chairman Connolly and Supervisors. I'm Sandy Evans, Co-Founder of SLEEP.

I'm happy to be able to bring you some good news in this terrible budget year.

Since we were last before you a year ago, the School Board has chartered a Task Force to look at both the issue of a much-needed transportation reengineering for the school system as well as a bell schedule that better meets the health and academic needs of our students. That task force has just completed its work. In doing so, it has given FCPS a solid framework for reengineering and has recommended a new, improved bell schedule with later start times for high school and middle school students. (See the end of this speech for an outline of the proposal.)

Task Force members were very cognizant of the current financial climate. This large and varied group worked very hard to create a bell schedule that would put all age groups of students on schedules more in keeping with their biology, help adolescents get more sleep each night—but still be cost neutral. We believe we succeeded. It will still be several months, however, before FCPS staff work with the proposal to give us their appraisal.

So at this point, we're not here to ask you for money for the long-term bell schedule initiative. There are other things that need to be done to lay the right groundwork.

Many of you have shown support for this initiative, which we appreciate very much, and have asked for ways to help the effort. There's more good news here. The Board of Supervisors can advance this effort in a number of low-cost or even no-cost ways.

The first is simply to show support for the Task Force's work and to discuss with your School Board member why a later start time for our teens will help the community as a whole. Here are just a few major reasons:

- ☑ a **lower drop-out rate**, which also translates to lower poverty rates and lower crime rates
- ☑ less opportunity for **juvenile crime** during the peak periods of 2-5 pm
- ☑ less **drowsy driving** which has been shown to be a major problem among our teen drivers
- ☑ fewer **sick days** for students and days off work for their parents due to improved immune systems that come with adequate sleep
- ☑ **improved learning** for students, which is important to the full community
- ☑ Improved mental health and decreased **depression** among teens.

How does this relate to the county budget? Every one of these improvements either saves the county money or improves quality of life, or both.

Other cost-effective ways the Board can help:

Ask staff to add a question to the next Youth Risk Survey about the amount of sleep our teens are getting. Chairman Connolly and Supervisor Gross followed up on this suggestion last year, and we appreciate that very much, but we were just a little too late for the 2008 survey. But the timing is right for the 2010 survey.

Ask the Police Department to start asking drivers they pull over for traffic violations or those they see as a result of accidents—especially teen drivers—about how much sleep they have had in

the past few days. Collecting local data on the impact of drowsy driving on our roads will help us quantify the drowsy driving problem in Fairfax County. (Nationally, an estimated 55% of asleep-at-the-wheel crashes involve drivers 25 and younger. A recent study by Children's Hospital of Philadelphia found that 75% of teens said they had ridden in cars driven by overtired teens.) Call on the Parks and Recreation Department to start working on plans to reschedule high school sports that use their facilities during various seasons, such as swim and golf. Swim practice is only about 40 days a year for about two hours a day. While Parks and Rec has to balance all interests, it has a special obligation to Fairfax County youth.

Put out an educational letter to Fairfax County parents—along the lines of the one for the “Parents Who Host Lose the Most” campaign—to explain the importance of adequate sleep to their children's physical, mental and academic health. Teens on average need 9.25 hours of sleep for optimal health, according to sleep researchers, but few parents know that—and fewer Fairfax County teens get this much.

The county might save money with the new bell schedules. With an earlier elementary school bell, there may be less need for AM SACC. A later ending middle school schedule would mean either lower costs for after-school middle school programs or more “bang for the buck” in covering more of the most critical after school time for more at-risk kids each week.

While I'm glad to be able to bring in good news, it's only good if it actually happens, and we still have a long way to go. SLEEP appreciates any help the Board can give in advancing the effort.

Removing my SLEEP hat for a moment, and speaking as an individual citizen, I also want to endorse the 92 cent property tax rate and hope that a proportionate amount of the increase would go to the school system. While I at first loved opening that envelope to see a lower tax bill this year, I quickly realized that the county and the school system can't do the same job with less money. We do need the adjustment.

Thank you.