

# SLEEPinFairfax Candidate Questionnaire 2011

Pat Hynes -- Hunter Mill District

(Please mark an X in the appropriate space and fill in as necessary)

1) Are you in favor of later start times for high school students?

- Yes  
 No

1a) What is your definition of "later"? What do you believe is the optimal time for high schools to start?

I think high school students probably need two or three more hours of sleep a night than most of them get. We can not provide that much time, absent a complete overhaul of the school day, so we should make their school day start as late as practical, factoring in their other needs for after-school sports, clubs and jobs. Homework expectations are an important related issue that we should address. Students' wellness depends on rest, for sure, but on many other factors as well. Good diet, time for regular exercise and a manageable work load are all part of a healthy balance. I would like to get a measure of how many hours students spend doing homework every night and make sure that reasonable guidelines are being followed in all our schools.

2) Are you in favor of later start times for middle school students?

- Yes  
 No

3) I believe later secondary school start times would benefit adolescent:

- Physical Health and Well-being  
 Safety (injury and drowsy driving reduction)  
 Emotional and Mental Health  
 Academic achievement  
 All of the above

4) Would you vote in favor of a new FCPS policy to require that high schools start after 8:00 a.m. in the morning?

- Yes  
 No

5) Would you put forth a motion to vote on such a policy?

- Yes  
 No

6) Which non-transportation alternatives would you support to help students get healthy amounts of sleep? (X all you support)

- Adding information about child and teen sleep needs to the FCPS health curriculum, including the negative impact of inadequate sleep on physical, mental and academic health.  
 Providing parents with a sample schedule to show how students can achieve adequate sleep (8 ½ to 9 ¼ hours a night) within the constraints of the current bell schedule.  
 Changing policy to allow an opt-out of first block(s) for students who present a plan to earn enough credits for graduation; with no transportation provided.  
 Offering an alternative schedule to allow students to replace first period with a late class, an "eighth-period," with no transportation provided.  
 Allowing high school students to take online courses in place of one or more first block classes.  
 Identifying and evaluating best practices, i.e., successful approaches used to change bell schedules in other school systems.

**Please respond with more detail below:**

7) How would you proceed on the issue of school start times?

The next school board will definitely take another look at high school and middle school start times and it should. I was glad to see so much interest on the survey that FCPS just posted. I'm very hopeful that we can improve start times for our teens and also address legitimate concerns about how after-school activities may be affected.

I have met with SLEEP leaders and am impressed with the amount and quality of work they've done, researching not only the importance of sleep but also transportation options and costs. Transportation changes are the biggest practical hurdle and we will have to be creative to find a solution that gets all of our students to school safely at no increased cost.

As I'm out talking to voters, I do hear concerns from students who worry about having to travel in rush-hour traffic to jobs and other after-school activities. For example, Madison's crew team travels all the way to Occoquan for practice. Some of our older schools in the eastern part of the county do not have enough physical space to accommodate all their sports teams, so some of their teams are commuting every afternoon. They worry that later start times will push them into rush hour. I don't believe these are insurmountable worries, but they are some of the challenges we must address.

With a process that respects and includes everyone from the outset, I'm sure we can come up with creative solutions that promote the well-being of our teenagers.

8) Have you seen the documentary *Race to Nowhere*?

Yes

No

This film explores the anxiety of students competing in a pressure-packed culture. Tell us your thoughts on the film's message as it relates to FCPS.

Well-meaning parents and educators everywhere, intending to give students every advantage in a competitive world, can unwittingly create very stressful school climates. *Race to Nowhere* shows us how much pressure we put on students, believing we are doing right by them. As a teacher and the parent of two recent FCPS graduates, I see disturbing parallels between the stories in the movie and student life for many in Fairfax County.

Parents and educators have to have the courage to step back, see the whole child and remember that developing wellness of body and spirit in our children is also our responsibility. In the course of my campaign, I have spoken to parents, teachers and students who are approaching this challenge in different ways, advocating for healthier school food, more effective health education, a better balance between school work and personal time, less punitive discipline policies, greater respect for students' creativity and individuality, and more reasonable school hours. The current flowing through all of these conversations is a recognition that the well-being of the whole child is our top priority.

Later start times are a part of this effort, but only a part. If our teenagers are arriving an hour later to school, only to have an hour more of homework, we will have gained nothing. I want the next school board to take a holistic look at empowering students, families and educators to find healthy paths to success.