

Please consider the following facts relating to the recommended bell schedule changes for Blue Ridge schools during the 2018-19 School Year:

The health, safety, and welfare of our students and staff are among our greatest considerations. The academic success of our students is also a top priority. As a result, for more than a year, Blue Ridge stakeholders have studied our schedules districtwide (with an added emphasis placed at the high school level). As a result, a number of changes are being recommended districtwide for grades K-12. Prior to reviewing these adjustments, please consider the following elements influencing the District's recommendation:

- 1) The need to initiate the implementation of a new student information system by February 1, 2018 to ensure its successful 2018-19 launch significantly compressed the final decision-making timeframe.
- 2) Our transportation (busing) capacities create some challenges, including limiting the number of routes and drivers available. Due to the size of the geographical area of our District, a minimum of one-hour is required to complete all routes safely to the respective campuses. The result means districtwide, all school start and end times are interconnected. More simply stated, the start and end times at one school influence bell and transportation schedules at all levels. We do not have the operational or budget capacity to support a single start time districtwide.
- 3) Parents and teachers of our elementary school students have routinely expressed concern regarding the current bell schedule. Reliable research consistently reveals earlier school start times better support the education of younger children. A conclusive body of research also confirms later school start times better accommodate the educational and physical needs of adolescents.
- 4) The required instructional time for the junior high students complicates the scheduling equation. For example, the State mandates these students receive a minimum of 1000 hours of instruction, compared to 720 hours required at the high school level. Given the need to transport HS/JHS students together, the bus schedules of each school must virtually coincide. Changes to one effects the other.
- 5) State funding provides for only minimal levels of educational services and operational supports. Thus, school and transportation schedules are functional, but admittedly not optimal. Therefore, students and families may face difficult choices as to participation in extracurricular activities and specialized programs (student council, fine arts, honors/AP courses, clubs, etc.).
- 6) No changes will be made to grade configurations or school facility locations. All schools will remain as presently organized.

