



Superintendent of Schools Greg Baker

Budget Springboard Proposal: School Start, End Times, and Elementary Program for 2011-12

A MESSAGE *from* SUPERINTENDENT *of* SCHOOLS GREG BAKER

Dear Families, Community and Staff,

This is the time of year we need to start making budget decisions that impact how we serve our children next school year. Most of our budget is spent on people: More than 72 percent pays for student learning and instructional support, a higher percentage than the state average. During the last two years of significant budget reductions of more than \$6 million, we have focused on reductions mainly in other areas, such as administration and operations.

How many staff to employ for the next school year is a decision that our district makes each year by late March. This allows us time in April and early May to communicate with staff about their job positions for next school year, and meet a legal deadline of May 15 for notifying teachers about their 2011-12 contracts.

It is always challenging to plan a budget and meet spring decision-making deadlines, without knowing the full amount of reductions that the state Legislature will make to our funding when they finish their work in April or May. Unfortunately, we cannot wait to staff our schools for next year or make many other decisions until that time.

We have already made some budget-related decisions for next school year. These include opening Whatcom Middle

School and Cordata Elementary School. We also have decided to fund full-time kindergarten at all of our elementary schools next year using about one-third of our supplemental levy, funds from energy savings and some state carryover funds. We also will use part of our supplemental levy to provide some online learning at our high schools.

Now, it's time to determine the vast majority of our budget for next school year – our class sizes or how many teaching staff we will have as well as our instructional program, which includes school start and end times. To develop this proposal, we have spent hundreds of hours researching, brainstorming and exploring the possibilities throughout this school year with students, families, staff, labor associations and community as part of my Entry Plan listening and learning.

Thank you to the thousands of individuals who have shared their voices and ideas to help shape a vision of what could be possible in future years when more financial resources are available, and a plan for next year to make the best

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“No matter how good your plan is, you will not be able to please everyone in the district. Keep in mind what is best for the students.”

“I love that you are utilizing technology to communicate with parents and the community about education issues. I am pleased that you are observing current situations and asking questions to make improvements. I am so hopeful that we, as a caring community, can help all students feel and experience success.”

“Please continue to tackle these thorny issues. They are common and many school districts around the country have tackled these with success.”

“Thank you so much for taking the time to share your views and seek ours.”

“Please keep Bellingham schools on a path to superbly educate and prepare our kids for the future — work, college and life.”



School Start and End Times

Improving school start and end times was the issue that most resonated with families and staff who responded to a recent survey. We have been meeting with students, staff and parents throughout this school year to brainstorm ways to:

- **Increase learning time for elementary students** who currently attend school 6 hours per day while middle and high school students attend 6.5 hours per day. (Grades 1-2 attended 5.5 hours per day and 3-5 attended 6.5 hours per day before budget cuts in 2010. This required the expense of an additional earlier bus run for grades 1-2 and did not allow for primary grades to receive instruction from specialists in music, physical education and health until this year.)
- **Provide an earlier elementary school start time** other than 9:30 a.m.,
- **Explore a later high school start time** other than the current 7:45 a.m., and;
- **Resolve transportation issues** of buses picking up students as late as 3:45 p.m.

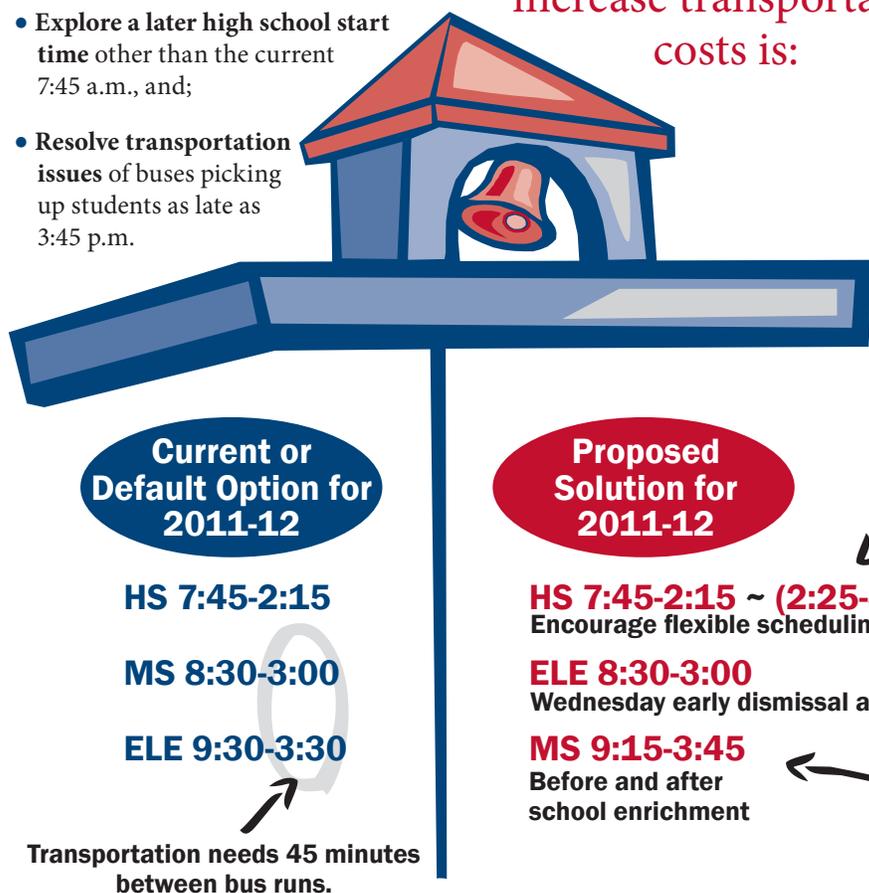
After dismissal at several elementary schools, students currently wait for buses and require supervision because buses can't arrive on time with only 30 minutes currently between middle and elementary afternoon dismissals. Transportation is a major factor for school start and end times because 45 minutes are needed between all bus runs to have students picked up and dropped off on time.

Our best proposal at this time that does not increase transportation costs is:



Watch a brief video [HERE](#) of Dr. Baker explaining the complexities of school start and end times as he gathers input from students, parents and staff to create this proposal.

Approximately 1,300 students in grades 8-11 recently responded to a survey about their preferences for start and end times. The results were mixed. A large number of students preferred starting before 9:30 a.m. because of homework, jobs, sports and not wanting to get out of school late. Another large number really liked the late start time. By starting to encourage some flexibility for high school start and end times in the fall, we allow students who prefer to start early to continue to do so while giving time to adapt toward the goal of a more flexible high school schedule. Research shows a later start time is better for many students for adolescent learning. Flexible options could help reduce the dropout rate.



Encourage Flexible Scheduling

Encourage the option for some high school students of starting and ending late through a seventh period, online learning and attendance at Northwest Career and Technical Skills Academy for vocational opportunities.

Before and After School Enrichment

Through community partnerships (PTAs, YMCA, etc.), a variety of before or after school enrichment programs, activities and clubs could be offered at our middle schools for students, as our elementary schools have been doing this year.

HS and MS Schedules

High school staff are working together to try and create a common schedule for Bellingham, Options, Sehome and Squalicum. This would potentially allow more options for balancing high school class sizes, enrichment and student support, and for students or staff to travel among the schools to take or teach courses that their schools don't offer. Staff at our middle schools are also working to create similar middle school schedules to provide students more time within the school day for extra support or enriched learning. The early dismissal schedule for middle and high students for next year will be determined in the coming months, along with staff learning/state waiver days. We are not proposing a weekly early dismissal schedule for the secondary level for next year.

The default option

The default option is to maintain our current start and end times. This does not resolve transportation issues though, unless elementary start and end times change to 9:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. It also does not increase elementary instruction or provide elementary collaboration time to improve student learning.

Share Your Thoughts by March 14

Share your additional input about our proposal [HERE](#)

For those without Internet access or who want to learn more about the proposal, Dr. Baker will hold two parent informational meetings in the north and south neighborhoods of the district:

6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 8

Shuksan Middle School
2717 Alderwood Avenue

6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 9,

Fairhaven Middle School
110 Park Ridge Road

Elementary Program

We have heard a strong desire for an earlier start time for next school year, and recognize the instructional value for both an earlier start and a longer school day. This proposal is not our ideal elementary instructional day, but one that offers some improvements over what we currently have. It is also a schedule that we can afford in these difficult economic times.

A 6.5 hour school day without a weekly early dismissal would make it unaffordable for the district to still provide the contractually required 225 minutes of weekly individual planning time for teachers and about an hour of weekly staff collaboration time, highly valuable for improving student learning. We recognize this is a trade-off because early dismissal days can create childcare challenges for parents. This proposal strives to offset those challenges with the advantages of an earlier start time and more time for instruction and collaborating to improve student learning.

The proposed 6.5 school day from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. four days per week with a Wednesday early dismissal at 1:15 p.m. aims to:

- Provide an earlier start time for younger children who rise earlier, need the most supervision before and after school and comprise 6 of the district's 12 grade levels.

- Increase instructional time – even with a weekly early dismissal – by about 27 hours per year.
- Create a consistent early dismissal on Wednesdays for parents that allows for high quality, maximum instruction and for teachers to collaborate with colleagues to develop and align curriculum, and improve student learning.
- Decrease the amount of time children have substitute teachers by reducing the days teachers are pulled from the classroom for curriculum meetings and time to improve student learning.
- Minimize other early dismissal days and refine the elementary parent-teacher conference schedule in November to reduce the number of consecutive early dismissal days by using part of the regular weekly early dismissal instead.
- Nurture opportunities for PTAs and community partners to coordinate and provide enrichment activities and programs on weekly early dismissal days.

“Coming from a school which had early releases Wednesdays, I appreciated the consistency of the schedule for children as well as a day which allowed more time for playdates and afterschool activities.”

Core Elementary Program: Instructional Time with Specialists

	Previously	Current	2011-12	Future Vision
Health/Fitness				As the economy and our resources improve for the future, our ideal program results in increased time for visual and performing arts, library, health and fitness, full-time counseling and world language at every elementary school.
K-2	0	Varies	2 x 40 min.	
3-5	3 x 45 min.	Varies	2 x 40 min.	
Library/Technology				
K-2	0	0	1 x 40 min.	
3-5	1 x 30 min.	0	1 x 40 min.	
Music				
K-2	0	Varies	1 x 40 min.	
3-5	2 x 30 min.	2 x 30 min.	1 x 40 min.	
Total Minutes K-2	0 min.	105 min.	160 min.	
Total Minutes 3-5	225 min.	105 min.	160 min.	
Schools will continue to receive additional flexible staffing. Principals will work to meet the greatest needs of their school community to determine offerings such as counseling, world language, music/arts, International Baccalaureate, Response to Intervention, math/literacy support or more library.				

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student-centered use of the funds that we have. I plan to spend the week of March 7-11 further discussing this proposal out in our schools and gathering additional input by March 14 before making a decision later this month.

Class Size and Teaching Staff

We plan to use approximately half of our temporary supplemental levy – \$1.2 of the \$2.5 million – to reduce some of the impact of state budget cuts on our class sizes for next year. We are anticipating a loss of more than \$2 million in state funds that we currently use to reduce class size. After cutting more than \$6 million from our budget in the last two years in other areas, this latest reduction is too large of an impact to offset entirely.

Without our supplemental levy, we could expect average class size increases for next school year of an average of three to four students per class, equating to a loss of approximately 30 FTE teaching positions. This is the scenario that most school districts in our state and country have been or are currently facing.

Thanks to your support of our supplemental levy, we anticipate being able to reduce this impact by about half with a K-12 reduction of only approximately 15 FTE teaching positions and average class size increases of approximately two or three students per class. With the addition of full-time kindergarten teaching positions, we anticipate minimal lay-offs of basic education staff this spring. Some staff may change job positions next year, depending

on qualifications and openings at grade levels and schools. This will be accomplished through working closely with our labor associations, principals and staff to match staffs qualifications and experience with the best fit for student learning.



Increasing Student Learning through Improved School Schedules

Improving school start and end times has been a favorite topic of conversations with parents, students and staff this year. It has become clear that the latest start time of 9:30 is not the top choice of any group – elementary, middle or high school.

The most common question: Can middle and high schools have the same start and end times? Currently, the answer is no. To provide transportation at current levels, it would cost more than \$1 million for additional buses.

We've been processing all of the ideas submitted for how to reduce high school transportation, including using WTA more, and combining middle and high bus runs. Our current data shows we don't have enough space on the available buses to accommodate this and are concerned about some students who live in the outskirts of the district and might have difficulty getting

to school. We received strong support for reducing high school transportation, but require more time to figure out how to do it and feel confident that all of our students have a reasonable way to get and from school. We will continue to pursue this goal and work on this complex puzzle. However, at the current time, we have to plan for three bus runs of elementary, middle and high.

Thank you for all of the feedback throughout this school year that you have provided to us regarding start and end times. Inside, you will find our best proposal for 2011-12 and I welcome your additional input as we close in on a decision.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dr. Greg Baker".

Dr. Greg Baker