



## **2008-09 Bell Schedule Frequently Asked Questions**

### GENERAL FAQ

#### **Why is it necessary to change school bell times?**

The existing school bell time schedule is not working and is adversely impacting instruction.

- Throughout the 2008-09 school year, we have experienced challenges in transporting students to and from school in a timely manner due to our current bell schedule and a shortage of bus drivers.
  - Our buses have been three to 20 minutes late for departures and arrivals at 13 schools every day during the current school year. This has impacted instructional contact time at the following schools: Altura, Century, Dalton, Elkhart, Iowa, Peoria, Side Creek, Sixth Avenue, Vassar, Virginia Court, Wheeling, Yale and Hinkley.
  - When buses cannot arrive 5 minutes early for pickups after school, there is a tendency for students to rush the buses, which may create potential safety concerns.
  - In addition, like many districts in the metro area, our transportation department has been short five to eight bus drivers since the beginning of the year, which impacts timeliness. Because of the shortage of bus drivers, secretaries, clerks, dispatchers, mechanics and supervisors have had to drive buses nearly every day. This has been a Band-Aid fix and the Superintendent has concerns because these staff members, while qualified to drive, do not know the routes as well as full time drivers and they are not able to do the jobs we are paying them to do.

Additional instruction considerations are:

- In some of our schools, we are not meeting the number of student contact hours required by the Colorado Department of Education. As a result, we must add 10 minutes to the daily middle school and adopt a common bell schedule at all APS high schools. Because our bus routes serve a number of schools throughout the day, we must revamp overall school bell times and bus schedules to provide appropriate instructional time for our students.
- Finally, we have adjusted the HS bell schedules to be alike so we can get PACESetter students to Pickens and CCA so they can get dual credit. This has also adjusted the bus schedules

#### **How will the proposed changes benefit students and increase achievement?**

The new bell schedules will ensure that students get to school safely and on time to enhance their learning in the classroom. In addition, the new schedules will support the state requirement to add 10 minutes to the middle school schedule and the adoption of a common schedule at all APS high schools. APS will continue to provide bus service for school field trips and special programs such as the International Baccalaureate, ROTC and Pickens Technical College.

#### **Why can't APS add 10 minutes for middle schools and align high school bell times without changing elementary school schedules?**

The transportation department serves more than 11,000 students and operates at least 80 bus routes each day. Because bus routes serve multiple schools, it is simply not possible to change middle and high school bell times without affecting elementary bell times, also. Transportation staff must work within a set budget using a limited number of buses and bus drivers to cover these routes. To complicate the situation, rising fuel costs have and will continue to impact the entire district. Current resources are not nearly enough to support the current bell schedule.

### **Why is APS adopting a common high school schedule?**

The common high school schedule has many academic benefits for students and staff. The proposed schedule would maximize instructional time and provide flexibility for students to participate in the PACESetter program and earn dual credit at the Community College of Aurora and other institutions of higher education. Staff would benefit by having increased opportunities for professional development and the ability to share best practices and teacher resources with other district high schools. Additionally, a common bell schedule allows for an easier transition for students who may transfer from one A.P.S. high school to another during the course of a year.

### **How will this change affect morning and afternoon start times for kindergarten?**

Each school will determine kindergarten hours based on the new bell schedule. APS will mail this information to families after the bell schedule is finalized in May.

### **Will the change impact bus service offered for after-school sports and activities?**

No, APS will continue to offer the same bus services to students who participate in APS sports programs. In addition, the district will provide shuttle buses for after-school activities as requested by individual schools. There are large districts in the Metro area that do not provide any bus service for MS sports or after school activities—we in APS will continue to support these great activities.

### **How will the new schedules affect the before-school breakfast program?**

Breakfast programs will be scheduled to fit the new bell schedule s at each school.

### **How did APS collect feedback from parents and staff members on proposed bell time changes?**

APS sent letters to all parents in March that explained why a change was being considered and how parents could provide feedback. Parents were given the option to share their opinions via an online survey or by attending one of four open houses where surveys were also distributed. Nearly 550 parents provided feedback on the scenarios at the open houses or by completing the online survey. In addition, 1,153 staff members completed an e-mail survey. APS continued to collect parent and staff feedback (emails, letters, personal inputs, etc.) to share with the Board of Education prior to their meeting on May 6.

### **How were the earliest and latest elementary bell times determined for the scenarios?**

District staff researched the start times of elementary schools in the Denver Metro area. Elementary schools that begin as early as 7:30 a.m. or dismiss as late as 4 p.m. are currently successful in several surrounding districts. APS conducted interviews with the administration, staff, parents and transportation directors of these districts regarding best practices. Using a wide “window” of start and end times allows the district to provide service to more school sites with the limited resources available.

### **Can I choose to send my child to another school in the district if their bell schedule is more convenient for my family?**

APS has an open enrollment policy that allows parents and guardians to enroll their children in any district school if space is available. If you wish to enroll your students in a school other than their assigned neighborhood school, please contact the school's principal and request an open enrollment application.

### **Can APS offer before-school activities at middle schools if parents need to drop off their middle school student prior to the start of school?**

The district is currently exploring ways to provide middle school supervised activities. More information will be forthcoming.

### **How early in the morning will buses pick up students?**

In general, buses arrive at school bus stops approximately 45 minutes ahead of the school's bell time to allow time for the school's breakfast program.

**When and how will parents receive the new bus schedules?**

Bus schedules will be developed and posted on the APS transportation Web site in early July. Additionally, schools will receive information that they may publish in their back-to-school letters and on their individual Web sites.

**Will APS offer before and after-school childcare to match the new school schedule? Will the district have these programs at schools where they are currently not offered?**

After the new school bell times are set, the district will work with schools on changes needed for before and after-school childcare. The district will make every effort to provide before and after school childcare based on the demand at each school.

**My child attends a neighborhood school where nearly every student walks to school. Why was it necessary to change our school schedule?**

If a school uses bus service for any instructional programs, its bell times must be “tiered”, or scheduled along with other schools that also use bus service. To ensure efficiency, each bus services more than one school, and in most cases, three or four schools. Additionally, the district has limited specialized vehicles to serve disabled students. Special education buses serve multiple school sites to maximize their use. The district will make every attempt not to change the bell times of schools that use minimal transportation services. The final bell schedules will be determined within a week or so after the BOE makes their decision for what some call “walk-in” schools.

**If the bell times don't work well for a school, can start times be changed?**

Once a decision is made on bell schedules, those times would be in place for the entire school year. Before school starts in August, Transportation will be looking at incremental changes if necessary. Additionally, School principals can submit a written request for a bell time change to the Chief Operating Officer before the winter break in December. Support Services, in partnership with the APS Leadership Team, would review the request during the months of January and February and make a decision in March.

**Many APS Resource Specialists serve multiple schools. Was the bell schedule set up to accommodate their work at shared school sites?**

To accommodate new bell times, the district may need to adjust the schedules of those staff members who serve multiple sites. The Division of Instruction will collaborate with individual sites to develop schedules that meet student needs.

**The later bell time at some schools does not leave time for professional development after the school day. When will opportunities for professional development be scheduled at these schools?**

Schools may choose to offer professional development in the mornings before school starts. Opportunities for professional development will also be available after school. The professional development time will not increase or decrease because of the bell schedule change.