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David Fleishman  
Superintendent of Schools

November 20, 2015

Dear Newton Community,

Addressing the health and wellness of all Newton students continues to be an important goal for our system. Our schools use a number of strategies and programs that are appropriate for each age group. At the high school level, we are well aware of the stress felt by many students, which our recently released Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results show increases significantly from middle to high school. I believe it is our job as a system, working in partnership with families, to address the stress and anxiety that many of our high school students are experiencing.

Currently, both of our high schools are engaged in multiple efforts to support the social and emotional needs of students. The work of faculty on growth mindset involves supporting students to understand the notion that effort is most significant and that making mistakes is a part of the learning process. The high schools are also engaged in extensive conversations regarding the purpose and scope of homework. In a couple of weeks, I will be leading a discussion on the stress of college admissions and we plan to address this issue with students as well.

There is growing consensus that later high school start times can also contribute important health and wellness benefits for adolescents. Yet, an overwhelming majority of American high schools continue to start relatively early (before 8:00 a.m.) including Newton North (7:50 a.m.) and Newton South (7:40 a.m.). High school typically starts early for a number of reasons including transportation costs and scheduling; parent and sibling schedules; timing for sports and after school activities; student employment; and field and facilities use.

The School Committee and Administration believe it is important to assess whether we can change our high school start times to enable our high school students to benefit from additional sleep at developmentally appropriate times. As a result, we have formed a working group to explore pushing back the start times. The working group will examine the multitude of challenges associated with shifting the start times, including determining how to address many of the logistical and other factors listed above. They will also solicit input from a range of stakeholders over the course of the year, using both surveys and

public forums. Given that a change in high school start time may impact the start times at elementary and middle schools, we are sending this communication to the entire community.

Throughout the school year, the High School Start Time Working Group will report to the School Committee on their progress, and they are planning to present a final report by the end of the school year. Because this issue has the potential to impact families at all levels, we are inviting you to stay informed of the progress. You may click on the link [www.newton.k12.ma.us/laterstarttime](http://www.newton.k12.ma.us/laterstarttime) and sign-up for email updates from the working group.

We look forward to updating you on this initiative and other important work underway to support the health and wellness of our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Fleishman". The signature is cursive and fluid.

David Fleishman  
Superintendent of Schools

DF:cc