



**The Baltimore County PTA Council supports House Bill 189.**

The Baltimore County PTA Council assists our approximately 150 district PTAs and PTSAs in their efforts to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

We support House Bill 189, requiring districts in Maryland to implement safe and healthy school start times for middle and high schools, meaning not before 8am for middle schools and not before 8:30am for high schools. This aligns with recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control, the U.S. Surgeon General, National PTA, and many other professional organizations. It also aligns with the resolution passed by the of the Baltimore County PTA Council in 2016.

In Baltimore County, our adolescent students are in crisis. According to the latest youth risk behavior survey, about 41% of Baltimore County adolescents felt sad or hopeless enough that they stopped doing some usual activities. More concerning, about 20% seriously considered attempting suicide, and about 16% actually tried to do so at least once during the 12-month survey period.

But even though the district has implemented many supports for student mental health, the PTA Council feels like the school district is ignoring the elephant in the room contributing to the poor mental health of our students: early school start times.

Under the current schedule, *our regular high school bus pickups start around 6am*. Magnet schools' buses start even earlier.

Biology makes it hard for adolescents to go to sleep before about 11:00, yet they still need about 9 hours of sleep. Doing the math, we're asking them to be ready for the bus 2 hours before their bodies are ready to be awake. And if you ask any high school teacher if they have a class of fully awake and alert kids for first period, you'll get a flat-out "no."

When kids are fully rested, they achieve higher academically and in sports, and are more physically and mentally healthy. So why isn't this part of the catalogue of supports for our students? For one thing, change is hard, and changing district school start times requires strong leadership. A state mandate would help districts make the change sooner than later

– we’ve seen decades of discussion in area districts before making this change to support student health, and it’s been ten years since the 2014 joint report from Maryland's Departments of Health and Education, which recommended districts in Maryland change school start times to 8am or later. As it eloquently stated:

“in preserving the status quo ... the state risks letting local resistance trump a strong body of scientific evidence that sleep is critical to health and academic achievement.”

Maryland school districts are charged with providing students with the supports necessary to learn, achieve, and find success in college and careers. None of that is possible if they’re too tired to learn.

The Baltimore County PTA Council urges the members of the House Ways and Means Committee to use your leadership to prevent what the report predicted: letting local resistance trump the scientific evidence. Please pass this bill to start school later.