

Employees, union, square off with district over staggered bell times

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(Tiffany Goodwein/Beach Radio News)

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A proposal by the district to implement staggered bell times got heated with employee's and union members fearing about what the changes could mean for their jobs.

The district's Transportation Review Committee made the recommendation after research showed that high school students saw improvements in learning if they started their day later.

The district states that staggered bell times would save \$165,000 a year, but critics argue the savings would come at the expense of employees.

“Research shows, that’s a smoke screen to save money at the backs on CUPE bus drivers, to save money on the backs of noon hour supervisors,” said one high school teacher at Wednesday’s school board meeting.

CUPE President Gray Boisvert confirms there are real fears among CUPE staff members about what proposed changes may mean for their jobs.

“With the staggered bus time changes the impact we would probably see in high schools is both custodial possibly having their hours changed, clerical it may or may not effect , those who are doing noon hour bus support they may lose their positions, education assistants that have second jobs may be impacted at high schools because of the extended day, and lost jobs in transportation,”said Boisvert.

District bus drivers at Wednesday’s board meeting were especially concerned not only about the lost jobs but that the changes may lead to seniority members losing out on extra hours gained through field trips.

“If these drivers are driving to a later hour, that means that all these trips would have to come to spare drivers, so this seniority that you know we have worked hard for and stayed with to gain then becomes irrelevant because then the work won’t come to us,” said one bus driver.

Others at the meeting argued that staggered bell times should never have been put on the transportation survey because of the magnitude of how many people it impacts.

“This will impact every student who goes to school at our district and will impact every single family , not just students who ride the bus,” said Dave Mackenzie, a teacher at Clarence Fulton Secondary.

Some employees said they never received the opportunity to give feedback on the proposal despite it impacting their lives.

“If an employer is going to change a major stake in my work day, I think I should have received the common courtesy to know about this change, or potential change, prior to it being put out to the public, like I said I heard it on the radio, I think that was wrong,” said one teacher.

The district insists that all employees had a representative at the table when the transportation committee was constructing the recommendations, and that staggered bell times are still to be decided.

“It has to come before the board and the board will make a decision. We wanted to make sure there was as much input, as much opportunity for public response and feedback,” said Gen Acton, School Trustee with School District 22.

The board is expected to give the final vote on the transportation committee's recommendations in May.