Fairfax County PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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K–12 School Start Times Recommendations

School Board Work Session

Board Direction and Background

School Board Direction

Official Motion: Oct 23, 2025, vote directed the Superintendent to postpone any division-wide implementation of changes to school start times until no earlier than the 2027–28 school year to allow for the full implementation of the new transportation routing software and consideration of potential updates to school boundaries.

Additionally, the School Board directed the Superintendent to present to the Board, no later than December 2026, a plan outlining viable options for healthy school start times that, where possible, are budget-neutral and minimize impacts on staff.

Background

- Study Initiated: Contract awarded to a vendor (Sept 2023) to evaluate Middle School start time options
- Work Sessions: Options A–E presented at Board Work Sessions in Dec 2024 and Feb 2025
- Fall 2025: Transportation option and 30-minute shift later option presented to Board
- Board direction previously stated
- Board Consensus: Preferred options that are scientifically grounded, manageable for transport, and budget-aligned

Community Engagement

Prior Community Engagement

- Survey Reach: 25,655 participants in Fall 2025 across staff, parents, and community
- Choice: 30-min shift received 42%; ES First received 32%.
- Preference: Staff preferred Elem 1st (37%); Parents preferred 30 min shift (46%)
- Top Concerns Cited for Both Options:
  - Work Schedules (84%)
  - Extracurriculars (83%)
  - Transportation (75%)
  - Morning darkness (67%)

Proposed Community Engagement

- Survey: Additional feedback on options to inform the School Board on family and staff impacts of K-12 start time changes
- Collaboration with Office of Research & Program Evaluation, Community Engagement, and Communications Team to achieve successful survey response like 2025 survey.
- Potential Community Meetings
- Survey Window: November 2026

Key Themes & Consensus from School Board Feedback

1. Decision Framework

- **Data-Driven:** Data must drive the ultimate recommendation
- **Science-Anchored:** Sleep science should anchor the core rationale
- **Community Input:** Family & staff input should inform, not drive, the final decision

2. Bell Schedule Structure

- **Elementary Order:** Elementary Schools starting first is generally acceptable
- **Tier Interval:** A runtime of 100–110 minutes across tiers is acceptable

3. Fiscal & Operations

- **Cost Priority:** Fiscal impact remains a primary decision factor
- **Civil Twilight:** Morning darkness concerns are manageable if properly mitigated
- **Communication:** Comprehensive communication will be critical for success

Elementary School First Option

School Level / Tier	Proposed Bell Schedule	Operational Details
Elementary Tier 1	7:30 a.m. – 2:15 p.m.	Earlier ES tier; aligns with younger sleep patterns
Elementary Tier 2	8:00 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.	Standard ES tier; limits late afternoon dismissal
High School / Secondary	8:40 a.m. – 3:25 p.m.	TJHSST: 8:40 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (7h 20m day)
Middle School	9:20 a.m. – 4:05 p.m.	8:30+ a.m. start for all MS adolescents

Current Bell Schedule

School Level / Tier	Bell Schedule
Middle School	7:30 a.m. – 2:15 p.m.
Secondary/ High School	8:00 a.m. – 2:45 p.m. 8:10 a.m. – 2:55 p.m.
Elementary School Tiers Between	8:30 a.m. – 3:15 p.m. 9:20 a.m. – 4:05 p.m.

Specialty & Special Ed Alignment

- **Cedar Lane & Davis Center**: 8:40 a.m. – 3:25 p.m. (aligned cleanly with High School tier)
- **Burke MS & Montrose ALC**: 9:20 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (aligned with Middle School tier)
- **Key & Kilmer Centers**: 9:20 a.m. – 3:20 p.m. (6-hour day window)
- **Pre-K / PAC Programs**: Cleanly accommodated within Tier 1 & Tier 2 ES bell windows

HS/SS Sports & Community Use

- **HS/SS Sports:** Game times not affected. Practice start times will shift 30 mins later
- **Community Use:** Begins 2.5 hours after school dismissal bell per MOU
- **MS Sports:** Review program objectives and feasibility

Key Rationale & Sleep Science Grounding:

Fully aligns with American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) recommendations for adolescents to start school at 8:30am or later. Younger elementary students do not experience the circadian shift and adapt more readily to earlier start times.

Elementary School First Option - Annual Investment

DRIVER PERSONNEL

$1,687,780

20 Drivers × $84,389 / year
(Salary + Benefits)

ADDITIONAL BUSES

+0 Buses

Operates within the bus fleet

TOTAL ANNUAL FINANCIAL IMPACT

$1,687,780

Financial Rationale & Budget Alignment:

- **School Board Alignment**: Cost neutral, where possible
- **Avoids High-Cost Alternatives Previously Presented**: Scenarios requiring full fleet alignment or 80-minute runtimes required 75–150 additional buses ($6.4M – $17.3M/yr). Represents a fiscally disciplined solution.
- **Start Time Shifts Later:** No additional financial impact for variations (5 mins, 10 mins, 15 mins , 20 mins, etc)

30-Minute Shift Option

School Level / Tier	Current Bell Schedule	Proposed Bell Schedule	Operational Details
Middle School	7:30a.m. – 2:15 p.m.	8:00 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.	
Secondary School	8:00 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.	8:30 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.	Guarantees 8:30+ a.m. start for all SS adolescents
High School	8:10 a.m. – 2:55 p.m.	8:40 a.m. – 3:25 p.m.	Guarantees 8:30+ a.m. start for all HS adolescents
Elementary School Tiers Between	8:30 a.m – 3:15 p.m. 9:20 a.m – 4:05 p.m.	9:00 a.m – 3:45 p.m. 9:50 a.m – 4:35 p.m.	

ADDITIONAL BUSES

+0 Buses

Operates within the bus fleet

NET BUDGET COST

$0 Impact

100% budget neutral

Key Rationale & Sleep Science Grounding:

- **Partial Sleep Science Alignment:** High schools & secondary schools meet 8:30a.m. or later per AAP/AASM standards, and middle schools shift to 8:00 a.m.— closer to the recommended adolescent sleep guidelines
- **Fiscal & Operational Feasibility:** Delivers an immediate 30-minute shift for all grade levels with **$0 fiscal impact** (+0 buses required).
- **Start Time Shifts Later:** No additional financial impact for variations (5 mins, 10 mins, 15 mins , 20 mins, etc)

No Change Option

School Level / Tier	Current Bell Schedule	Operational Details
Middle School	7:30a.m. – 2:15 p.m.	No Changes
Secondary School	8:00 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.	No Changes
High School	8:10 a.m. – 2:55 p.m.	No Changes
Elementary School Tiers Between	8:30 a.m – 3:15 p.m. 9:20 a.m – 4:05 p.m.	No Changes

Key Rationale:

- **Fiscal & Operational Feasibility:** Maintains current operations with **$0 fiscal impact** (+0 buses required) and zero disruption to existing transportation routing, staffing, or family schedules.

ADDITIONAL BUSES

+0 Buses

Operates within the bus fleet

NET BUDGET COST

$0 Impact

100% budget neutral

Definition & Methodology of Civil Twilight

Scientific & Legal Definition Framework

Solar Angle Threshold

Morning civil twilight (dawn) is defined as the period when the sun is 6 degrees below the eastern horizon and ends at sunrise.

Evening civil twilight (dusk) is defined as the period beginning at sunset and ends when the sun is 6 degrees below the western horizon.

Illumination Quality

Marks the point when natural ambient daylight is sufficient under clear weather for outdoor human activities without artificial lighting.

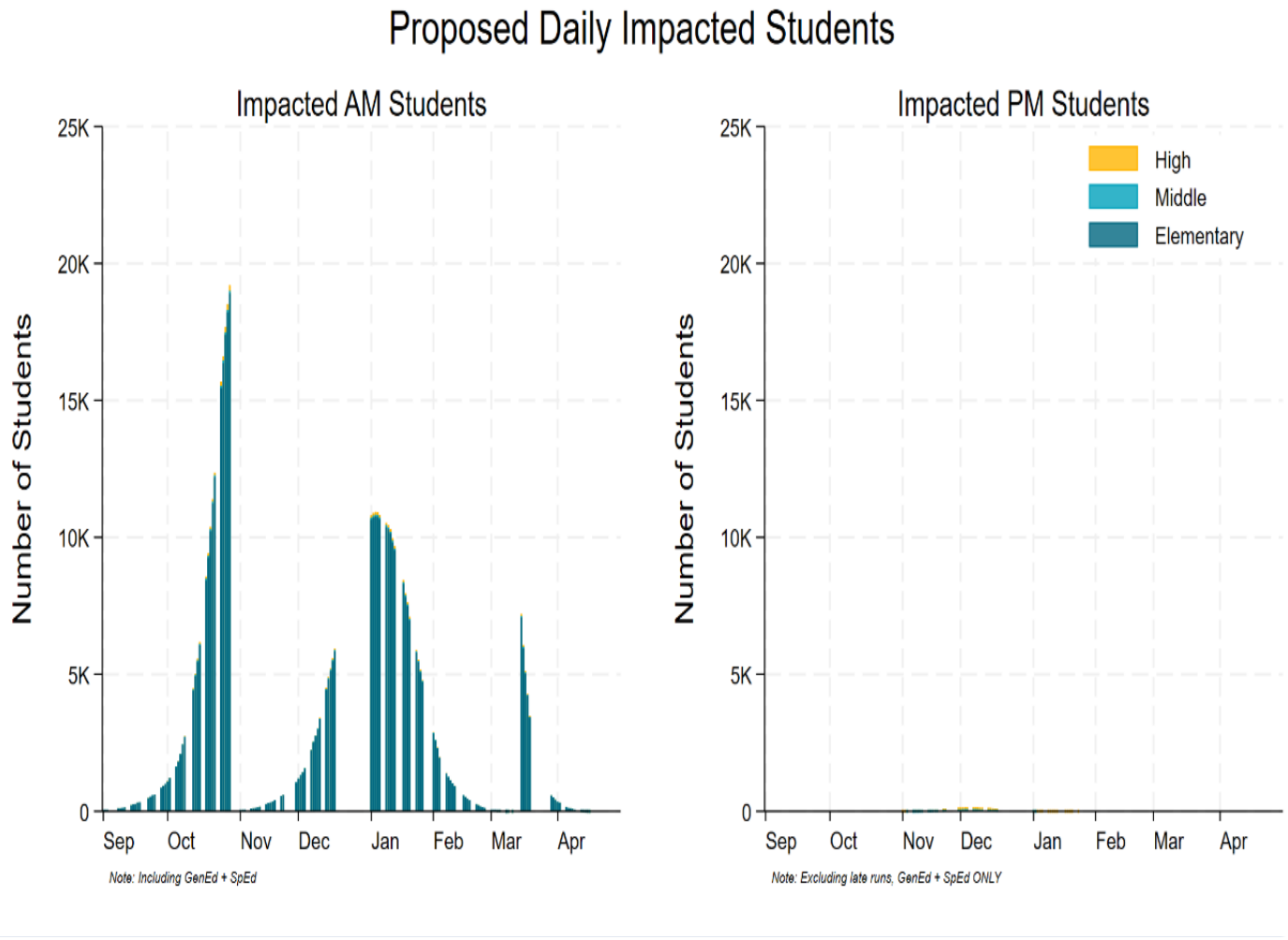
Timing Window

Occurs approximately 25 to 30 minutes prior to official sunrise in Northern Virginia during late fall and winter months. And 25 to 30 minutes after official sunset.

Transition Light

Represents transition light rather than full nighttime darkness.

Elementary First Option – Civil Twilight – Daily Impacted Students



AM Peak 1 · Late October

~19,000 Students (16%)

Pre-DST Fallback window (~3,300 stops). Drops to near zero immediately after clock change.

AM Peak 2 · Dec – January

~10,700 Students (9%)

Winter Solstice window (~1,800 stops) during the latest annual sunrises.

AM Peak 3 · Mid-March

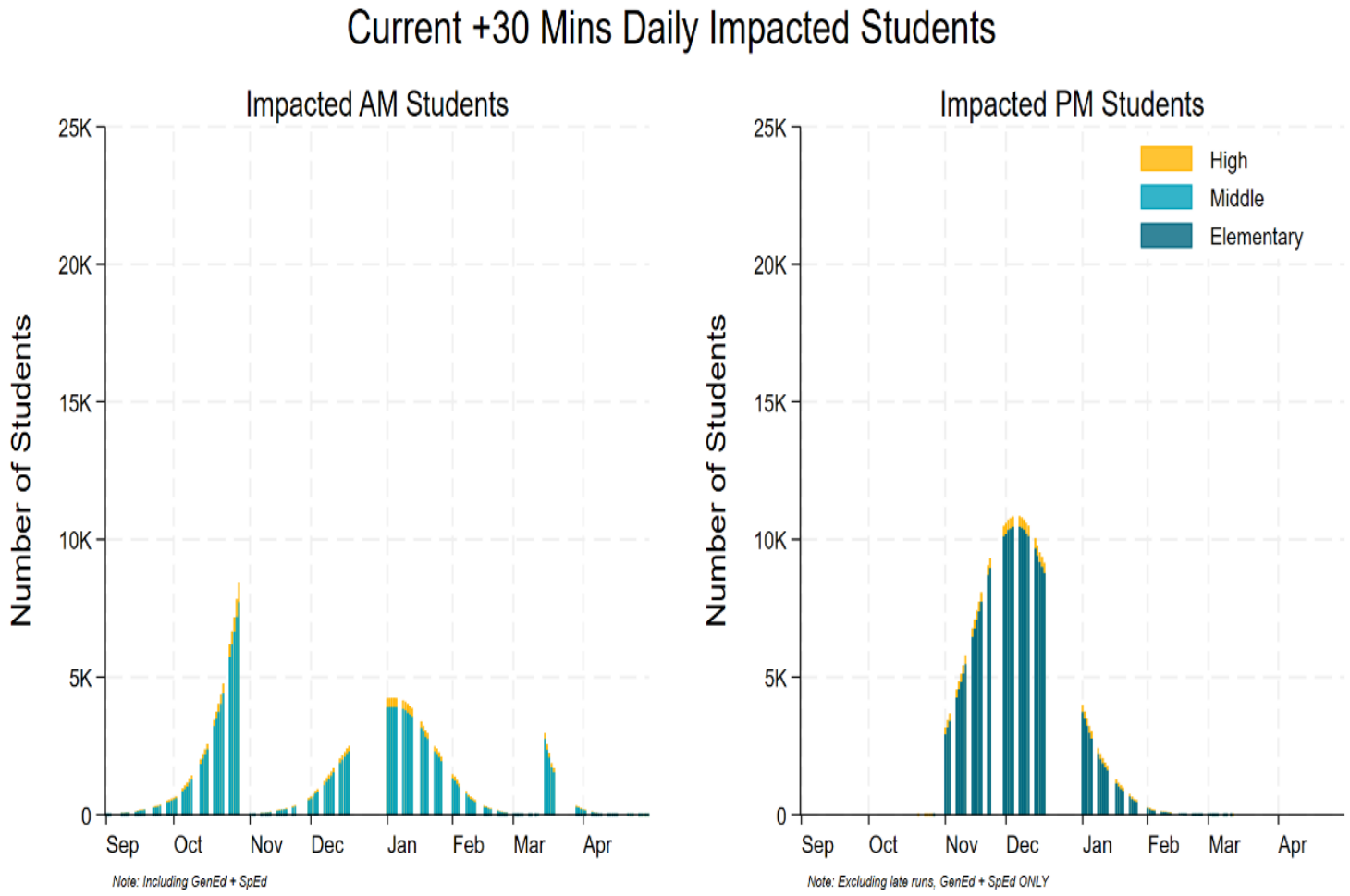
~7,000 Students (6%)

Spring Clock Change window (~1,200 stops). Quickly dissipates as morning daylight grows.

PM Stops Impact Summary

For PM stops, only 41 stops (0.8%) and 95 middle school students (0.4%) are dropped off in low-light conditions

30-Minute Shift Option – Civil Twilight – Daily Impacted Students



Peak 1 · Late October

~8,400 Students (7%)

Pre-DST Fallback window (~2,300 stops). Drops to near zero immediately after clock change.

Peak 2 · Dec – January

~4,200 Students (3%)

Winter Solstice window (~1,400 stops) during the latest annual sunrises.

Peak 3 · Mid-March

~3,000 Students (2%)

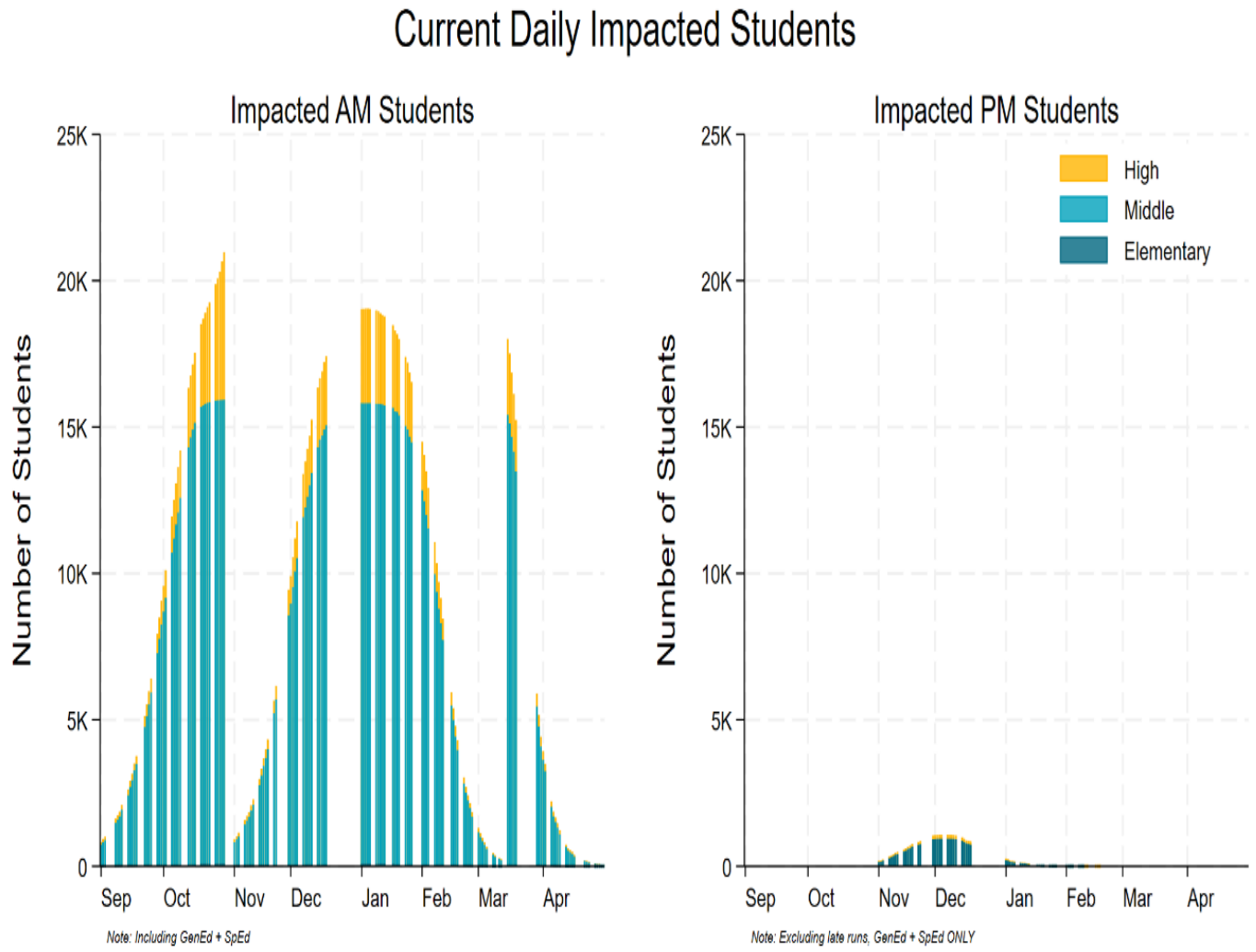
Spring Clock Change window (~1,000 stops). Quickly dissipates as morning daylight grows.

PM Peak · November-Dec

~11,000 Students (9%)

3,226 Elementary School Students are affected during this period. (4%)

No Change Option – Civil Twilight – Daily Impacted Students



AM Peak 1 · Late October

~21,000 Students (17%)

Pre-DST Fallback window (~5,700 stops). Drops to near zero immediately after clock change.

AM Peak 2 · Dec – February

~19,700 Students (16%)

Longer duration of affected students. Winter Solstice window (~4,100 stops) during the latest annual sunrises.

AM Peak 3 · Mid-March

~18,000 Students (15%)

Spring Clock Change window (~5,000 stops). Quickly dissipates as morning daylight grows.

PM Drop-Off Impact

158 Students (0.1%)

For PM stops, only 158 students (0.2%) are dropped off in low-light conditions.

Elementary First Bus Stop Impact



Civil Twilight Mitigation Strategies

1. Regulatory Alignment & Safety Standards

- NHTSA & Virginia guidance do NOT establish civil twilight as a single safety threshold
- Focus is on sight distance, speed limits, illumination, and pedestrian access
- Stop placements are evaluated to prioritize well-lit streetlight locations

2. Adult Supervision & Receipt Protocols

- Family Responsibility: Reinforce family responsibility for safe travel to/from stops
- Adult Receipt: Review age-specific requirements for Pre-K/K riders
- Adult Accompaniment: Encourage neighborhood walking groups and adult stop supervision

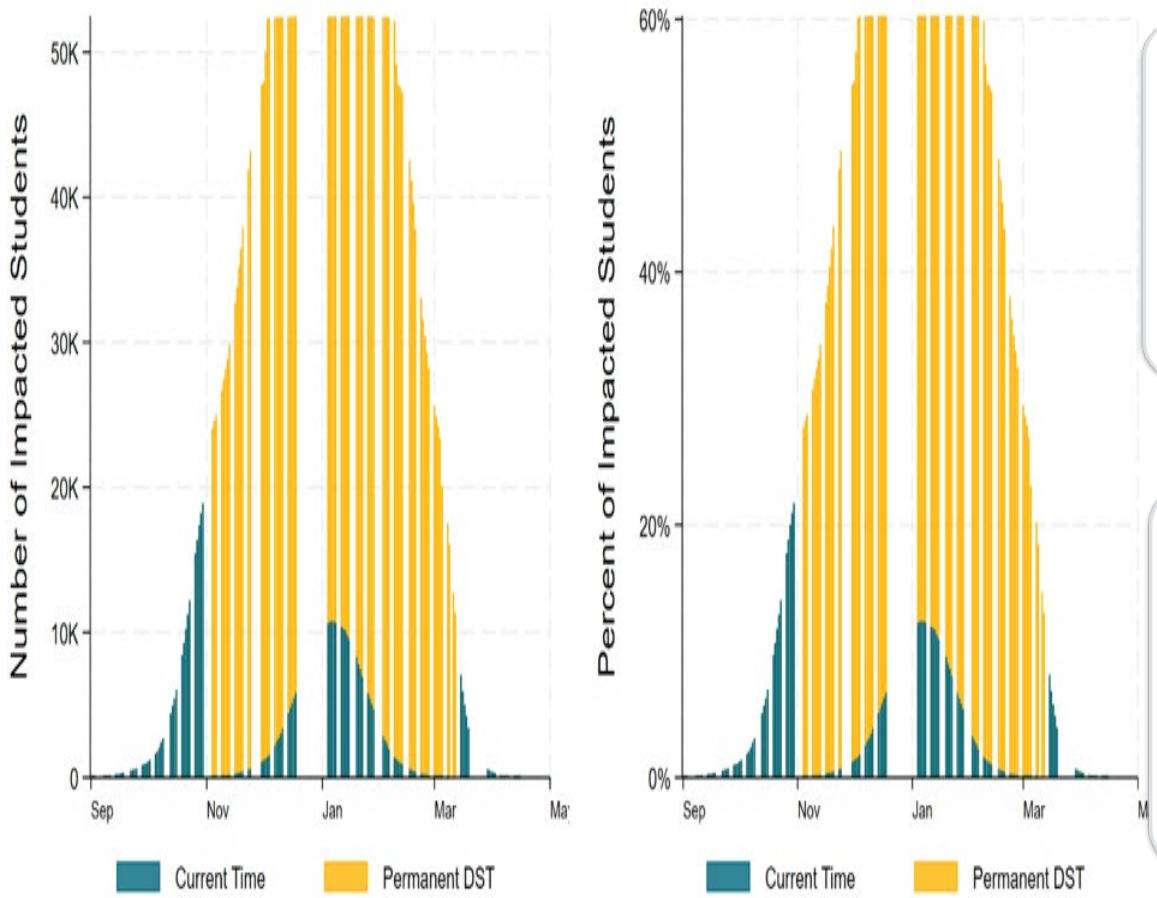
3. High-Visibility Gear & Identification

- High-Visibility Vests: Evaluate high-visibility vests/gear for early-tier Pre-K and Kindergarten riders based on neighboring district models
- Reflector Integration: Coordinate with schools to distribute reflective tags for student backpacks
- Bus Safety Enhancements: Investigate bus enhancements that better illuminate the areas around the bus.

4. Real-Time Tracking Technology

- FCPS MyRide K-12: Provide real-time bus tracking and delay notifications to families
- Outdoor Wait Limits: Allows families to time arrival precisely, limiting outdoor wait times strictly to the 5–10-minute policy window

Sunshine Protection Act
Civil Twilight Impact - Permanent DST ES STUDENTS



Sunshine Protection Act Scenario

- **Federal Legislative Context:** The U.S. House passed the Sunshine Protection Act (H.R. 139) to make Daylight Saving Time permanent year-round. Referred to Senate.
- **Clock-Change Elimination:** Under permanent DST, clocks would fallback in November one time and remain there permanently.

Bus Stop and Student Exposure

- **Exposure Expansion:** From Dec 3 through Feb 8 (35 instructional days), over 95% of all 9,320 elementary bus stops would load before civil dawn.
- **Daily Affected Students:** An estimated ~46,500 additional elementary students per day would load in pre-dawn conditions compared to current clock changes.

Meeting, Decision Timeline, and Implementation Plan

Key Meeting / Milestone	Target Date	Core Purpose & Action
Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	**Oct 21, 2026**	Review final proposed options, cost estimates, and civil twilight mitigations.
Meeting Managers	**Oct 28, 2026**	Review with meeting managers prior to work session.
School Board Work Session	**Nov 10, 2026**	Present recommendations, supporting data to the full Board.
School Board Meeting (Briefing)	**Dec 3, 2026**	Formal briefing item on Board agenda.
School Board Meeting (Vote)	**Dec 17, 2026**	Action Item: School Board vote on K–12 start times proposal for school year 2027–28 implementation.

Post-Approval Implementation Phase (SY 2027–28 Preparation):

1. Finalize routing & driver recruitment to operationalize School Board vote
2. Coordinate with concurrent Boundary Review adjustments to maximize fleet efficiency
3. Launch comprehensive family and staff communications campaign well in advance of SY 2027–28