(Start Times, continued)

School Committee Chair Michelle Kirkby also pointed out that the signed petition was never shared with her for the committee.

(Through its annual VOCAL survey, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education asks students as young as 4th grade to rate the statement, "students help to decide rules (in my school)." Medfield elementary students were also recently asked to vote on the name of a town park.)

And even though School Committee member Leo Brehm expressed support for later start times for high school and middle students, he abstained from voting on the motion for a variety of reasons that reflected other parent feedback. He also expressed surprise that the Medfield teachers union appeared to have more say on the final schedule than School Committee.

Other district experience is mixed

Despite the compelling case for changing start times, many districts have struggled to find the right balance of **start and end** times to work for all ages of students, plus teachers, parents/guardians and modern society.

Districts such as Westwood and Dover-Sherborn spent two or more years researching the issue (unlike Medfield's eight months), presenting pros and cons to parents, holding information sessions with proposed times on the table, and taking other steps before moving forward. Even then, it hasn't been smooth sailing.

A math teacher from Dover-Sherborn High School posted on social media that she and many of her colleagues do not feel the new schedule has been worthwhile.

"It really changed the culture at D-S when they switched to 8:35 to 3:10," the teacher wrote. She noted it negatively impacted the ability of students to get extra help, and the change has never been well evaluated. "Parents should teach time management and responsible screen time so students get enough sleep."

Committee ignores request for pause, important data

"Though I agree with the science, I'd like to take a pause. This is the single largest change this committee is making outside of what we did during the pandemic," said Brehm, who added that he didn't have much time to manage the feedback he was getting. "I only had since the meeting on the 10th (October)." (The meeting when final actual times were put forth.)

He also noted, "One of the things that continues to plague us is needing to do a better job of communicating changes. It's not like we gave people a vote on the change. The window to reflect on the impact was much shorter."

Similar to the D-S teacher, Brehm expressed a concern about how success will be measured.

Chair Kirkby noted that she recently learned other districts have used the MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey data as a measurement tool.

However, even though the most recent MWAHS data has been available since the summer, and other districts have had school committee presentations on their survey results, Medfield School Committee has yet to take that step. Baseline MWAHS results were never provided to help make the case for the change in Medfield school start times.

Regardless of requests of the committee to "pause," Medfield School Committee voted to adopt the new start and dismissal times for the 2025-26 school year.