

2026 School Start Times Feedback

Survey Description

The survey and messaging included the following information:

The Fairbanks North Star Borough School District is gathering community feedback about current school start times and a potential alternative schedule. This survey is intended to help the district better understand how school start times affect students, families, staff, and the broader community.

Your responses will help inform district leadership and the school board as they review potential options. No decisions have been made at this time and there will be no change to the 2026-27 school year.

Survey Distribution

The survey was sent to all families, high school students, and staff via email and text and was open for three weeks. The survey was posted on district social media as well. The survey closed on **Sunday, April 12**. There were **4,917 responses**.

Question 1: District Connection

“Please identify your affiliation with the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. Select all that apply.” (4,917 responses)

The majority of respondents identified as parents or guardians.

- 66% Parent/Guardian (3,250 responses)
- 19% Students (935 responses)
- 10% Staff - FEA (491 responses)
- 8% Staff - ESSA (380 responses)
- 2% Staff - Substitute/Temporary (103 responses)
- 2% Community Member (no school-age children) (115 responses)
- 1% Community Member (school-age children not in district) (47 responses)
- 1% Staff - Non-Represented (43 responses)
- 1% Staff - FPA (33 responses)

Question 2: School/Program Attendance

“What school/program does your student(s) attend?” (4,125 responses)

Respondents represented students from all grade levels and programs, with elementary and high school families making up the largest groups.

- 43% Elementary (1,772 responses)

- 43% High School (1,770 responses)
- 26% Middle School (1,060 responses)
- 15% School of Choice (619 responses)
- 7% Charter School (306 responses)
- 1% District Program (41 responses)

Question 3: Perspectives on Current Start Times

“Select your level of agreement/disagreement on the following statements:” (4,096 responses)

Responses indicated that about half of respondents are generally satisfied with the current start times, while approximately one-third expressed dissatisfaction.

The current school start times work well for my student.

- 50% Agree/Strongly Agree
- 34% Disagree/Strongly Disagree

The current school start times work well for my family’s schedule.

- 53% Agree/Strongly Agree
- 31% Disagree/Strongly Disagree

Before school care is a challenge for my family.

- 24% Agree/Strongly Agree
- 34% Disagree/Strongly Disagree

After school care is a challenge for my family.

- 24% Agree/Strongly Agree
- 36% Disagree/Strongly Disagree

Overall, I am satisfied with the current school start times.

- 50% Agree/Strongly Agree
- 37% Disagree/Strongly Disagree

Overall, responses suggest mixed perspectives, with modest majority support for the current schedule alongside a substantial portion of respondents indicating concerns or dissatisfaction.

Question 4: Preferred Start Time Schedule

“Please choose which start time schedule would work best for your family.” (3,893 responses)

Respondents were divided on preferred schedules, though the current start times received slightly more support than the alternative option.

All Responses:

- 51% Current school start times
- 40% Alternative school start times
- 9% None of the above

Elementary School Parents/Guardians only:

- 58% Current school start times
- 33% Alternative school start times
- 8% None of the above

Secondary School Parents/Guardians only:

- 50% Current school start times
- 41% Alternative school start times
- 9% None of the above

High School Students only:

- 40% Current school start times
- 49% Alternative school start times
- 11% None of the above

District Staff only:

- 53% Current school start times
- 43% Alternative school start times
- 4% None of the above

Question 5: Student Transportation

“Does your student currently ride a school bus to or from school?” (4,106 responses)

Nearly half of respondents reported their student does not ride the school bus.

- 46% No
- 29% Yes, regularly
- 12% Sometimes

Question 6: Reason Students Do Not Ride Bus

“What are the main reasons your student does not ride the bus?” (1,836 responses)

The most common reason families gave for not using bus transportation was a preference to transport students themselves.

- 43% I prefer to drive or transport my student
- 19% Bus is not available (Charter or School of Choice)
- 18% We live too close to qualify for bus service
- 13% Bus ride is too long
- 13% Safety concerns
- 10% Bus route or stop is not convenient
- 10% Schedule does not work for our family
- 4% My student walks or bikes to school
- 16% Other
 - The majority of the “other” comments were that the student drives to school.

Question 7: Potential Impact on Bus Ridership

“If school start times changed, would your student be more or less likely to ride the bus?” (3,500 responses)

Most respondents indicated that a change in start times would not affect transportation choices.

- 67% No change
- 20% More likely
- 13% Less likely

Question 8: Impact on Enrollment (Community member with non-district students only)

“If your child(ren) are NOT currently enrolled in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, would the availability of before-school care at your neighborhood school influence your decision to enroll them?” (36 responses)

Responses from non-district families were mixed, though one-half reported before-school care would not influence enrollment decisions.

- **50%** No, it would not influence my decision
- **33%** Yes, it would make enrollment more likely
- **17%** It might influence my decision

Question 9: Open Comments

“Do you have any additional comments about school start times or how they impact your family?” (1,927 responses)

Nearly 2,000 respondents provided written comments sharing additional perspectives, concerns, and suggestions regarding school start times, childcare, transportation, student sleep, extracurricular activities, and family schedules.

Elementary Parent/Guardians

Elementary parent comments largely supported maintaining the current elementary schedule, with many families saying it aligns well with work schedules, childcare, and daily routines. Concerns about earlier elementary start times focused on increased stress for younger students, before-school supervision, and disruptions to family schedules, including households that rely on older siblings for after-school care. While many respondents acknowledged the benefits of later secondary start times for teen sleep and well-being, they also expressed concern about unintended impacts on younger students and working families.

“The current elementary schedule works well for our family. Moving elementary students earlier would create significant childcare issues and make mornings much more stressful for working parents.”

“I understand the benefits of later start times for older students, but younger children should not have to start school earlier because of it. Elementary students still need adequate sleep and supervision in the mornings.”

“Our family depends on older siblings helping after school. If secondary students start later and elementary students start earlier, it would make transportation and after-school care much more difficult for us.”

Middle and High School Parent/Guardians

Secondary parent comments showed stronger support for later start times, with many citing student sleep deprivation, fatigue, stress, and difficulty focusing during the school day. Parents frequently referenced adolescent sleep research and believed later starts could improve student well-being and academic performance. Concerns focused on impacts to athletics, extracurricular activities, after-school jobs, homework, transportation, and family schedules, particularly during winter months.

“Teenagers are not built to function well this early in the morning. A later start time would better support their mental health, attendance, and ability to learn.”

“I support later start times for secondary students, but I am concerned about the impact on sports, activities, and students getting home very late during the winter months.”

“Our family schedule already revolves around work, transportation, and multiple schools. Any change to start times needs to carefully consider how it affects family logistics and after-school responsibilities.”

Staff

Staff responses reflected mixed perspectives. Some supported later secondary start times to better align with adolescent sleep needs, while others raised concerns about impacts on athletics, student activities, transportation, childcare, and employee schedules. Many comments emphasized the importance of balancing student wellness with practical operational and family considerations.

“Many teens arrive late to school because they are too tired to wake up so early. Teens function better when their classes start later. Read the research.”

“A change would result in logistical difficulties with drop off/pick up times and extra curricular activities.”

“I worry that moving elementary schools earlier would mean younger students are outside waiting for buses in the dark and cold during the winter.”

Students

Student comments generally showed greater openness to later secondary start times, with many describing challenges related to sleep, focus, energy, and mental health under the current schedule. At the same time, students expressed concern that later dismissal times could interfere with jobs, sports, extracurricular activities,

homework, and family responsibilities. Several suggested a compromise schedule with a more moderate adjustment to start times.

“It’s exhausting for me as a teen to wake up at 6.”

“Most kids like myself work after school, so getting out later would make balancing school and work much harder.”

“I think school should start later, but not as late as 9:15 because then we get home too late for sports, homework, and family time.”

Community

Community responses reflected divided opinions. Some supported keeping the current schedule and emphasized consistency for families, activities, and work schedules, while others supported later secondary start times based on adolescent sleep research and student wellness. Many encouraged the district to carefully weigh both educational benefits and community impacts before considering districtwide changes.

“As a prior secondary school teacher I strongly recommend the later start time for teens. For years the data has shown later start times significantly improve learning and retention in older students...”

“I would leave the secondary level as is for sure. I think it helps prepare them for most work schedules once they leave school.”

“There is no perfect solution that will work for everyone.”

Overall Feedback Summary

Across all respondent groups, feedback reflected a balance between interest in the potential benefits of later secondary start times and concerns about the broader impacts schedule changes could have on families, transportation, childcare, athletics, extracurricular activities, and daily routines. Elementary families and community members generally showed stronger support for maintaining the current schedule, while secondary families and students expressed greater openness to later start times for adolescents, particularly related to sleep, mental health, and academic readiness. Staff responses reflected mixed perspectives and frequently emphasized the need to balance student wellness with operational and logistical considerations.