

Wilmette Schools Get New Schedule

by Emily Spectre • April 5, 2017

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WILMETTE- Wilmette families will be adjusting to a new school schedule in the fall, after new start and end times were approved for the 2017-18 school year at a special meeting of the District 39 Board of Education held on April 3.

The new schedule, which was originally proposed at a March 20 school board meeting, includes an earlier start time for kindergarten through fourth grade students, while junior high students will benefit from a later start time.

The new schedule includes a start time of 8:35 a.m. for morning kindergarteners and an end time of 12:40 p.m., while afternoon kindergarteners will start at 11:10 a.m. and end at 3:15 p.m. Grades one through four will start at 8:35 a.m. — 15 minutes earlier than the current start time — and will end at 3:15 p.m. On Fridays only, first through fourth grade students will end early at 2:15 p.m, while the kindergarten schedule will remain the same.

Students at the Wilmette Junior High School will start at 8:25 a.m. and end at 3:10 p.m., in contrast to the current schedule of 7:45 a.m. to 2:46 p.m. Highcrest Middle School's schedule will remain largely the same, with students starting at 8:50 a.m. and finishing at 3:35 p.m.

The new schedule will add 20 minutes of instructional time for students in grades one through four and more collaborative planning time and training for elementary teachers. Superintendent Ray Lechner pointed to uninterrupted blocks of time for core content instruction, as well as dedicated time for providing interventions to students as benefits of the new schedule.

Likewise, WJHS students will benefit from a later start-time that is in line with recommendations by the American Medical Association, that junior high students start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. While band students will benefit from the later start time — rehearsals are held before school — orchestra students will continue with 7:00 a.m. rehearsals at Marie Murphy Middle School for the 2017-2018 school year. Dr. Lechner has promised to explore improving start times for orchestra students in the future and has scheduled a meeting with parents for April 6.

The schedule changes stem from a teacher contract that was approved in December 2016, where a scheduling committee was formed to address changes to the kindergarten through fourth grade

schedule. The scheduling committee presented a new schedule to the board on February 27. After receiving feedback from parents, Dr. Lechner presented a revised schedule at the March 20 school board meeting.

Parents expressed concern that the original start time of 8:00 a.m. for kindergarten through fourth grade was too early, and also raised concerns about an early dismissal once a week for the half-day kindergarten program. The revised schedule addressed both of these issues, while also shifting the early dismissal to Friday from the originally proposed Thursday, in response to feedback from parents.

The new schedule means that District 39 will require five additional buses at a cost of \$265,100. In an effort to balance parents' desire for a later start time for elementary students — the first proposal of 8:00 a.m. would not have required additional buses — and control costs, the district approved splitting the costs of the additional buses with parents. Bus fees will increase by \$63 for round-trip passes and by \$48 for one-way bus passes. "We felt this was the best middle ground approach," Dr. Lechner said, at the April 3 meeting.

Board members approved the revised schedule with few comments. Vice President Mark Steen noted the effort that was put into the new schedule. "I think you've demonstrated how much work this really was and I appreciate that," he said to Dr. Lechner.