

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

2027–28 Bell Schedule

Six Areas Requiring Substantive Public Response

Prepared by ESD Parents United | June 2026

Overview

The Edmonds School District has cited transportation cost as the primary reason a 7:20 AM elementary start is unavoidable. Six concerns — drawn from the district's own public documents, budget records, and board meeting testimony — have not received a substantive public response. They are presented here as unresolved questions the board is being asked to address before this schedule is finalized.

#	Concern	Core Issue
1	Science vs. routing	Studies cited by ESD tested 8:00 AM starts — not 7:20 AM. The proposal is a bus-routing outcome, not a research-backed one.
2	Survey design	The 12 affected schools were unnamed when surveys ran. The headline '70% support' bundled two separate questions.
3	Child safety	Young children will wait at bus stops in darkness, on routes with documented gaps in sidewalks and lighting. No assessment published.
4	Equity	10 of 12 affected schools are Title I. No equity assessment has been published. The harm concentrates on the district's most vulnerable families.
5	Budget	Transportation cited as the binding constraint — yet received the smallest share of new budget in the same year.
6	Timing and Tier 0	The 5th middle school opens in 2028–29. Tier 0 classes remain. The schedule change does not solve the problem it claims to solve.

Concern 1: The Science Does Not Support 7:20 AM

The district's cited research tested 8:00 AM start times — not 7:20 AM

ESD's task force materials cite peer-reviewed studies on school start times, including Meltzer et al. (2021). That study examined a schedule change that moved elementary schools to 8:00 AM — a threshold 40 minutes later

than what ESD is proposing. No peer-reviewed study published to date has identified 7:20 AM as developmentally appropriate for children ages 5–11.

The research record supports two things clearly: later high school starts benefit adolescents, and early elementary starts harm young children. The decision to assign the earliest tier to elementary schools is not what the science recommended. It is what the bus schedule required.

What ESD cited	What it actually tested	What ESD proposes
Meltzer et al. (2021)	Elementary moved to ~8:00 AM → 27 min/night sleep loss	Elementary moved to 7:20 AM — 40 minutes earlier than the tested threshold

Concern 2: The Survey Process Did Not Capture the Views of the Most-Affected Families

The 12 affected schools were not named until after the survey period closed

Across all three rounds of community surveys, families were asked whether they supported the general concept of changing school start times. The 12 elementary schools assigned to the 7:20 AM tier were not publicly identified until after the surveys had closed. A family at Hilltop Elementary could not register opposition to a 7:20 AM start for their specific school because they did not know their school was the one being assigned that start.

This design flaw was noted by respondents after Survey 2 and was not corrected in Survey 3. The most-repeated complaint across both survey rounds: "This survey is unfair without knowing which tier my school is in."

No option without a 7:20 AM elementary start was ever offered

Across all three survey rounds, families were never presented with a schedule option that excluded a 7:20 AM elementary start entirely. In Survey 2, both options included 7:20 AM for some elementary schools — Option 2 simply assigned fewer schools to that tier. Survey 3 presented a single proposal that also included 7:20 AM. At no point were respondents given the opportunity to choose a schedule in which no elementary school started before 8:00 AM.

This is not a neutral design choice. The survey process defined the problem as "how many elementary schools at 7:20 AM" rather than "whether any elementary school should be at 7:20 AM." Widespread opposition to 7:20 AM was expressed in the free-text responses of every survey round by families, students, and staff alike — yet the structure of every survey treated it as an unavoidable parameter, not a variable subject to community input.

The '70% support' figure bundled two separate questions

The district has cited approximately 70% community support for the schedule change. That figure reflects support for the general concept of moving start times — primarily driven by families who want later high school starts. The survey did not ask families in a separable way: "Do you support 7:20 AM as the elementary start time?" Support for later high school starts is not endorsement of 7:20 AM for kindergarteners. These are two different questions about two different populations.

The district cannot claim survey-based community support for the 7:20 AM assignment specifically, because the survey was never designed to capture that.

Additional structural gaps

- Surveys were primarily digital in format, systematically underrepresenting non-English-speaking and lower-income households concentrated at the 10 Title I affected schools.
- The district's own stated commitment to involving all affected stakeholders in decisions that affect them was not met by a process that excluded the specific schools from identification until after surveys closed.

Concern 3: No Child Safety Assessment Has Been Published

Young children will wait at bus stops in darkness for half of the school year

A 7:20 AM school start requires bus pickups across much of the district before 6:45 AM. In the Pacific Northwest, sunrise is as late as 8:00 AM in winter months. From October through March — roughly half the school year — young children waiting for early buses do so before any natural light.

This is not a hypothetical concern. At the June 9, 2026 board meeting, Leah Renfrow, a Hilltop Elementary parent, placed the following on the public record:

"We have no street lights and no sidewalks behind Hilltop Elementary. For the majority of the school year, it will be pitch black and my kids will be walking in dark, sometimes slick and icy conditions as cars speed past us."

Hilltop Elementary is one of the 12 schools assigned to the 7:20 AM tier. The conditions she describes are not unique to that school. Many Tier 1 bus stops are on arterial roads with no sidewalks, no crosswalks, and no street lighting.

The board has now received this concern on the public record. Liability attaches to documented knowledge. The district cannot claim these risks were unforeseeable.

What has not been published

- A safety assessment of Tier 1 bus stops under winter morning conditions
- A list of Tier 1 stops that lack sidewalks, street lighting, or safe pedestrian infrastructure
- A mitigation plan for stops identified as unsafe before 7:00 AM
- Any assessment of how many elementary students walk to stops alone, and at what ages

The district is asking families to accept these conditions for seven years of elementary school without publishing the assessment that would tell them what those conditions actually are.

Concern 4: No Equity Assessment Has Been Published

10 of the 12 affected schools are Title I — the harm is not distributed equally

The 12 elementary schools assigned to the 7:20 AM tier include: Beverly, Cedar Valley, Cedar Way, Chase Lake, College Place, Hilltop, Martha Lake, Meadowdale, Mountlake Terrace, Oak Heights, Terrace Park, and Westgate. Ten of these twelve are Title I schools — the district's highest-concentration low-income communities.

A 7:20 AM start imposes costs that fall disproportionately on lower-income families:

- Childcare gap: 1:50 PM dismissal creates approximately 2 hours of daily unsupervised time. Center-based after-school care in Snohomish County typically costs \$400–\$600/month for this slot. For families earning below the district median, this is not an inconvenience — it is a budget crisis.
- Sleep environment: Low-income children are significantly more likely to live in conditions that impair sleep quality — noise, crowding, inadequate temperature control. A 7:20 AM start has a larger sleep impact on these children than on their more affluent peers, who are more likely to have quiet bedrooms, consistent routines, and flexible parental schedules.
- Transportation alternatives: Families without cars cannot drive children to school if the bus assignment becomes untenable. They cannot relocate. The families with the fewest alternatives bear the most burden.

The sleep research amplifies this. A 2025 Brown University study found that rates of elementary children meeting the nine-hour sleep guideline are significantly lower among Latino children — a population concentrated in Title I schools. ESD's proposal does not push adequately-sleeping children below the threshold. It pushes an already sleep-deficient population further into harm.

What has not been published

- An equity impact assessment for the tier assignments
- Any analysis of childcare cost burden on Title I school families
- Any assessment of whether the survey process reached non-English-speaking families at affected schools

Concern 5: The Budget Record Contradicts the Transportation Constraint

Transportation received the smallest share of new budget in the year it was cited as the binding constraint

The district has cited transportation cost as the primary reason a 7:20 AM elementary tier is unavoidable. The 2024–25 to 2025–26 budget comparison raises questions about that framing:

Budget Line	2024–25	2025–26	Change	% Δ
Pupil Transportation	\$18.2M	\$19.1M	+\$0.9M	+4.9%
Central Administration	\$21.8M	\$26.8M	+\$5.1M	+22.9%
Program 97 / HR Employee Benefits	\$0.6M	\$5.4M	+\$4.8M	+782%

Source: Edmonds School District F-195 Annual Budgets, 2024–25 and 2025–26 (OSPI).

The district also leaves \$8.9 million in unused state transportation entitlement annually, operates at 100% OSPI transportation efficiency, and carries a \$1.2 million allocation surplus. The community's transportation analysis demonstrates a three-tier alternative costing \$90,000 per year — covered 13 times over by the existing surplus. The district is not in a transportation funding crisis. It has not demonstrated that the 7:20 AM tier was the only financially viable option.

Concern 6: The Proposal Does Not Solve the Problem It Claims to Solve — and the Timing Is Misaligned

Tier 0 / zero-period classes remain untouched

The district has framed this schedule change as a response to the sleep science on adolescents. But the students suffering the earliest starts in the district are not being helped by this change. Students enrolled in zero-period Band, IB, and other Tier 0 programs start at approximately 6:20 AM. Families have reported wake-up times of 4:00–4:30 AM and bus stop departures as early as 5:20 AM.

These programs — International Baccalaureate and Band — are programs the district actively promotes as hallmarks of its academic offering. Students who choose them face a scheduling penalty: participation in these programs requires accepting start times that no sleep researcher would endorse. The proposed schedule change does not address Tier 0 at all.

The 2028 boundary review affects every school in the district

ESD has confirmed a Boundary Review Committee process beginning fall 2026, with boundary changes taking effect at the start of the 2028 school year. The review is driven by two simultaneous changes: the opening of a fifth middle school (Salish Middle School) and the district-wide transition of sixth grade from elementary to middle school.

That second change — moving sixth grade out of all 24 elementary schools — alters enrollment at every elementary school in the district. Changed enrollment means changed catchment areas, changed student populations per school, and changed bus routes for elementary schools, not just middle schools. This is a district-wide route restructuring event.

Implementing a major bell schedule change in 2027–28 — affecting transportation contracts, driver assignments, and route structures across all school levels — and then redesigning those same routes for both elementary and middle schools the following year means two complete route overhauls in consecutive years. That is operationally inefficient and imposes disruption on families twice rather than once.

What We Are Asking

These six concerns are not an argument against later high school start times. ESD Parents United supports that goal. The concerns are an argument that this decision — affecting the sleep, development, safety, and financial security of thousands of elementary-age children — deserves a higher standard of evidence, process, and transparency than what the public record currently shows.

We are asking the board to:

- Direct the district to publish the safety assessment for Tier 1 bus stops under winter morning conditions before any schedule is finalized.
- Direct the district to publish an equity impact assessment for the tier assignments, including childcare cost burden on Title I families.
- Direct the transportation department to model the three-tier alternative using district routing software and present findings publicly.
- Consider aligning the schedule implementation with the 2028–29 middle school opening to avoid a second full route redesign one year later.

The community has produced the analytical work in two weeks. We are asking for a substantive response before this schedule is adopted.

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