

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Appropriations Committee on Pre-K - 12 Education

BILL: CS/SB 296

INTRODUCER: Education Pre-K - 12 Committee and Senator Bradley and others

SUBJECT: Middle School and High School Start Times

DATE: March 10, 2025 **REVISED:** _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Sabitsch</u>	<u>Bouck</u>	<u>ED</u>	Fav/CS
2.	<u>Gray</u>	<u>Elwell</u>	<u>AED</u>	Favorable
3.	_____	_____	<u>FP</u>	_____

Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

I. Summary:

CS/SB 296 removes the requirement that by July 1, 2026, the instructional day at all district and charter middle schools may not start before 8 a.m. and high schools may not start before 8:30 a.m.

This bill does not have a fiscal impact on state revenues or expenditures. However, school districts will likely avoid a significant negative fiscal impact, due to the removal of school start time requirements beginning in the 2026-2027 school year. See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2025.

II. Present Situation:

District School Boards

Each district school board is responsible for the establishment, organization, and operation of schools in the district's geographic area. Each district school board is required to adopt policies for the opening and closing of schools within the district, however the opening date of schools may not be earlier than August 10th of each year.¹

¹ Section 1001.42(4), F.S.

In 2023² district school boards were required to set specified start times for middle and high schools, with implementation required by July 1, 2026. After that date, middle schools cannot begin the instructional day before 8 a.m., and high schools cannot start before 8:30 a.m. Additionally, district school boards must inform their communities about the health, safety and academic impacts of sleep deprivation on middle and high school students. The law also requires district school boards to discuss local strategies for implementing the later school start times.³ State Board of Education (SBE) rule requires that district school board policy must ensure that no more than one and one-half hours will elapse between the time a student boards a district operated bus and the start of the school day.⁴

Charter Schools

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools established through an agreement or "charter" typically between the school and the local district school board. This agreement grants the charter school a degree of flexibility compared to traditional public schools in exchange for a commitment to higher standards of accountability. All charter schools in Florida are public schools and are part of the state's public education system. During the 2022-2023 school year, 382,367 students were enrolled in 726 charter schools across 46 districts.⁵ Charter schools are granted exemptions from certain operational requirements related to facilities, administration, and finance. However, charter schools must comply with statutory requirements specified in law, including the requirements for middle and high school start times.⁶

School Start Times in Florida

According to the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), the average start time for all Florida high schools (541 schools) is 7:45 a.m. Forty-six percent of high schools start before 7:30 a.m., and 19 percent of high schools start between 7:30 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. There were 49 Florida school districts with at least one high school that started before 8:00 a.m. and of those, 22 districts had at least one high school that started before 7:30 a.m. For Florida middle schools (490 schools) the average start time is 9:03 a.m., with only eight percent of schools starting prior to 8:00 a.m.⁷

OPPAGA requested specific information from twelve districts that had either changed or were considering changing school start times to determine motivations and barriers. Eight of those school districts had recently changed some or all school start times while four school districts had considered changes to start time but did not make changes. Reported motivations among the respondents included:

² Ch. 2023-78, Laws of Fla.

³ Section 1001.42(4)(f), F.S.

⁴ Rule 6A-3.0171(6), F.A.C.

⁵ Florida Department of Education, Office of Independent Education & Parental Choice, *Fact Sheet Florida's Charter Schools* (October 2023), available at <https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7696/urlt/Charter-Sept-2022.pdf> at 1 (last visited Mar. 5, 2025).

⁶ Section 1002.33(16), F.S.

⁷ Email, OPPAGA Report: *OPPAGA Research on School Start Times*, (Mar. 13, 2023) (on file with the Senate Committee on Education Pre-K-12).

- Transportation issues to improve on-time bus schedules, address driver shortages, reduce transit times, comply with Center for Disease Control (CDC) social distancing recommendations, and improve operational efficiencies.
- Student health and safety issues to improve general student health and to address the health needs of high school students, in particular.
- Student learning issues to promote student academic achievement, increase learning time lost due to weather-related closures, and increase the length of the elementary school day.⁸

Reported barriers that were confronted when considering start time changes included:

- Childcare and student supervision issues concerning care for siblings, childcare arrangements, limited school staff and concerns about child safety in dawn/pre-dawn hours.
- After-school activities issues concerning afterschool employment for high school students, effects on extended day programs, and the ability to attend afterschool activities.
- Transportation issues concerning the costs of adding bus routes and buses, rising bus driver wages and limited bus drivers, and capital funding issues.⁹

Current Responses to Start Time Legislation

In response to the 2023 legislation that prescribed start times for middle schools and high schools, Florida school districts have already taken actionable steps to meet the requirements. Additionally, \$5 million was appropriated to assist school districts and charter schools in implementing the requirements. Possible uses for funding included:

- Development of plans.
- Transportation.
- Instructional planning.
- Other school-related resources.¹⁰

The DOE is required to provide a report to the Legislature before January 1, 2026, documenting the grant awards and their total expenditures as well as the effect of later start times on student and school performance, truancy, absenteeism, tardiness, drop-out rates, and mental and behavioral health.¹¹

Information gathered from several informal surveys of Florida school districts revealed a mixture of:

- Districts that have not begun the process of changing start times or are waiting to see if there are legislative changes.
- Districts that are at the beginning stages of planning and discussing the needed changes with their communities.
- Districts that have taken active steps toward changing start times by conducting cost analyses, purchasing new software, and evaluating transportation needs.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Email, OPPAGA Report: *OPPAGA Research on School Start Times*, (Mar. 13, 2023) (on file with the Senate Committee on Education Pre-K-12).

¹⁰ Specific Appropriation 96, Ch. 2023-239, L.O.F.

¹¹ *Id.*

- Districts that either were already in compliance with the new start times or have already made the adjustments and are now in compliance with the law regarding middle school and high school start times.¹²

Specific comments provided through the surveys included:

“We have analyzed the impact of the change on our ability to serve students and have found that it would be cost prohibitive to do so in terms of both personnel and the number of school buses needed.”

“The district created a working group to help identify how internal and external stakeholders will be affected. The working group aimed to determine the operations changes and financial impacts. All board members have been briefed, and a work session has been scheduled to discuss the next steps.”

“The major obstacle for our district is school transportation and lack of supervision of students in the afternoon. As it stands now, our school start times would need to flip, meaning many of our youngest students who live in the most rural areas will be outside in the darkness waiting on the bus.”

“Disrupted Schedules for parents - Later start time can disrupt schedules for parents who work traditional hours.”

“Pushing back start times will either push back after school activity times, therefore causing students to go to bed later OR if after school activity times stay the same, students will miss additional class time due to being checked out early to participate in after school activities.”

“The new start times could force a two-tier transportation schedule which doubles the salary, wear and tear of the school buses and consumables such as fuel and DEF fluid”

“Currently, the same school bus driver completes a full middle and high school route and then completes a full elementary school route. With the proposed start time change, double the current number of bus drivers will be required to complete the routes at the same time. With the current challenges and severe shortage of school bus drivers, this presents a virtually insurmountable barrier from an operational standpoint.”

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill repeals the provisions in s. 1001.42, F.S., that provided specific requirements related to middle school and high school start times.

The bill removes from the powers and duties of district school boards the requirement that, by July 1, 2026, the instructional day for middle schools may not begin earlier than 8 a.m. and the instructional day for high schools may not begin earlier than 8:30 a.m.

¹² Emails, Small District Council Consortium and Florida Association of School District Superintendents, (Feb. 25, 2025) (on file with the Senate Committee on Education Pre-K-12).

Additionally, the bill removes the requirement of district school boards to discuss local strategies to implement the specified later school start times.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2025.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

This bill does not have a fiscal impact on state revenues or expenditures. However, school districts will likely avoid a significant negative fiscal impact, due to the removal of school start time requirements beginning in the 2026-2027 school year.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 1001.42 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

CS by Education Pre-K – 12 on March 3, 2025:

The committee substitute maintains from the bill the repeal of specific middle school and high school start times and the date by which those times must be implemented. However, the amendment restores current law that requires each district school board and charter school to inform its community about issues related to sleep deprivation and school start times and consider the benefits of later start times when adopting middle and high school start times.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.