Q: **Why is the District considering new school schedules?**

A: Over the past several years, much attention has focused on delaying the start of the school day as a way to address chronic sleep loss in adolescents. The biological changes that youth undergo with the onset of puberty lead to a shift in circadian rhythms, pushing the onset of sleepiness later into the evening than either younger children or adults – to about 11:00 p.m. Given the recommendations for adolescents to sleep 8-10 hours per night, a bedtime of 11:00 p.m. should ideally be coupled with a wakeup time of no earlier than 7:00-7:30 a.m. These biological patterns are in conflict with early school start times, leading several organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Medical Association (AMA), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevent (CDC), to recommend that middle and high school start times begin no earlier than 8:30 a.m.

Q: **What are the current school schedules used by LMSD schools?**

A: As of the 2019-2020 academic year:
- High schools begin the student day at 7:30 a.m. and end at 2:40 p.m., which totals 7 hours and 10 minutes.
- Middle schools begin the student day at 8:15 a.m. and end at 3:05 p.m., which totals 6 hours and 50 minutes.
- Elementary schools begin the student day at 9:00 a.m. and end at 3:35 p.m., which totals 6 hours and 35 minutes.

Q: **What are the recommended times that the Board is considering?**

A: The recommended schedule proposed on October 24, 2019 is as follows:
- **Tier 1:** Elementary schools would run from 7:45 a.m. to 2:35 p.m., a 6-hour and 50-minute day for elementary students. This would add 15 minutes the elementary student day, which would likely be used for physical activity or other non-instructional purposes. Kindergarten would operate from 7:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. and 11:35 a.m. to 2:35 p.m., increasing the current half-day kindergarten program to 3 hours.
- **Tier 2:** High schools would run from at 8:25 a.m. to 3:25 p.m., a 7-hour day for high school students. This would deduct 10 minutes from the high school day, which would likely be taken from transition time, announcements, and Lunch and Learn.
- **Tier 3:** Middle schools would run from 9:05 a.m. to 4:05 p.m., a 7-hour day for middle school students. This would add 10 minutes to the middle school schedule, which would likely be used for transition time and/or more time for lunch.
Q: How was this recommendation developed?

A: An advisory committee comprised of LMSD staff, parents/guardians, students and community stakeholders worked through a structured, evidence-based decision-making protocol with a professional facilitation team from TregoEd. This committee narrowed down the options with the best balance of benefits and risks, and a Core Logistics Team comprised of district administrators examined the feasibility of these options. The final recommendation emerged as the schedule that most closely aligned with the decision-criteria created by the Advisory Committee while remaining feasible.

Q: What other options have been examined?

A: The following models were also considered:

**The Two-Tier Schedule Model**
This model promotes a schedule in which elementary and secondary schools (middle and high school) operate on two different schedules rather than three, as they currently do in LMSD. This model is commonly used in PA school districts with smaller student enrollment and where secondary schools are located less than one mile apart, sometimes sharing the same property.

While this option was initially the most appealing to the Advisory Committee and was the best fit with the criteria established, closer examination of the model revealed that the District does not have the capacity to support a fleet size increase of 40%, or 53 buses in addition to the 123 vehicles currently maintained and operated by the District. For each additional bus that is needed, so is a driver and parking space. The District is currently at capacity for bus parking and is thirteen drivers short, up from 9 drivers short at the beginning of the academic year. For a more comprehensive description of transportation system challenges, see below.

**The Re-Order**
This model repositions the schools within three tiers to any order that would achieve a middle and high school start time as close as possible to 8:30 a.m. or later, as recommended by the medical and health communities. For the purpose of the advisory committee’s consideration, the re-ordered model was:

- Elementary Schools: 7:30-2:05 (6 hours, 35 minutes)
- High School: 8:15-3:25 (7 hours, 10 minutes)
- Middle School: 9:00-3:50 (6 hours, 50 minutes)
When scored against the decision-making criteria, this model scored among the top three in overall score, and when adjustments were made to increase the transportation feasibility and safety of elementary students during civil dawn, it was an even more closely aligned with the decision-making criteria. This adjusted re-order schedule is what was ultimately recommended to the Board of School Directors on October 24, 2019.

Elementary Schools: 7:45-2:35 (6 hours, 50 minutes)
High School: 8:25-3:25 (7 hours)
Middle School: 9:05-4:05 (7 hours)

The Current Schedule
The current schedule was included as an option for consideration by the Advisory Committee. When scored against the decision-making criteria, it scored among the top three models in overall score, although the scores were lower for the criteria considered most important by the committee.

The Push Model
This model takes the existing tier order (high, middle, and elementary) and pushes all schedules further into the day than they are now. That would mean that start times and end times would be moved forward. As an example, a 30-minute push would translate to LMSD schools as follows:

High Schools: 8:00 a.m. to 3:10 p.m. (7 hours, 10 minutes)
Middle Schools: 8:45 a.m. to 3:35 p.m. (6 hours, 50 minutes)
Elementary Schools: 9:30 a.m. to 4:05 p.m. (6 hours, 35 minutes)

The Push Model scored lower than the other models on the decision-making criteria established by the advisory committee members, therefore it was removed from further consideration.

The Flip Model
This model flips the first and last positions in the three tier system, which would swap the start times for high schools (currently first tier) and elementary schools (currently third tier). The Flip works well in school districts where all schools have the same length of the school day or in districts that operate a two tier system, neither of which applies to LMSD. An application of the “The Flip” in LMSD to yield the following schedule:

Elementary Schools: 7:30-2:05 (6 hours, 35 minutes)
Middle School: 8:15-3:05 (6 hours, 50 minutes)
High School: 9:00-4:10 (7 hours, 10 minutes)
The Flip Model scored lower than the other models on the decision-making criteria established by the advisory committee members, therefore it was removed from further consideration.

Q: How would a later start time impact staff?

A: Many LMSD staff members do not live in the District and can have lengthy commutes. They also may have children and changing their work hours could affect their childcare arrangements. That is in addition to the above-mentioned effects on staff members who coach or sponsor clubs, or those who may have outside employment.

Q: What are the transportation issues?

A: LMSD buses more than 9,000 students to about 125 locations across the Delaware Valley each day using a three-tiered system. That means the same buses are used to run three different routes each morning and three different routes at dismissal. Transporting the same number of students if start times are closer together or simultaneous would require more buses, more bus drivers and additional bus parking. Adequate bus parking is already a challenge. Hiring more qualified drivers is costly and challenging in the current job market. Buying and maintaining additional buses is also quite expensive.

Fleet Details (2019-2020): The fleet currently includes 123 vehicles, including:
- 84 large buses (72 passenger),
- 28 medium buses (48 passenger),
- 2 small buses (30 passenger), and
- 9 accessible vehicles.

Driver Shortage: Lower Merion School District bus drivers are CDL-certified employees who work a minimum of 5 hours per day between. The District provides a benefits package for drivers, unlike many neighboring school districts, making it an attractive position for CDL drivers interested in school transportation. As of December 2019, the District has 13 driver vacancies. The District began the school year with a shortage of 9 drivers. For more information about the bus driver shortage in this region and across the nation, read “School bus driver shortage squeezes districts around the region” (Philadelphia Inquirer, 11.10.2019).

Parking and Facilities: Secure, township-approved space is needed to park school buses. Additionally, parking space for bus drivers’ personal vehicles is needed. The school district is currently at capacity for parking buses:
Current Overnight Parking:

- 74 buses parked at Matsonford Road; at physical capacity
- 25 buses parked at Harriton High School; at approved capacity
- 24 buses parked Lower Merion High School; at approved capacity

Potential new space: The property adjacent to Welsh Valley Middle school is one possible space for parking 12 additional buses. In November 2019 the Board of School Directors approved a motion for the District to proceed with an approval request with Lower Merion Township. The District intends to file the request in Spring 2020.

Other properties explored:

- The new middle school, planned to open in Fall 2022, will not accommodate overnight parking due to space limitations.
- The property designated for new middle school field space will not accommodate overnight bus parking due to space limitations.
- For a comprehensive overview (including aerial photographs and diagrams) of the parking limitations at each of the current 10 LMSD schools and other properties explored for bus parking in recent years, review the materials from the July 21, 2014 Board of School Directors meeting.
- For a list of over 45 additional properties the District has explored for bus parking, see slide 35 of the July 21, 2014 Board of School Directors meeting presentation on Bus Parking.

Q: Why do elementary school times have to change if the sleep issue affects Middle and High School students?

A: LMSD uses a three-tier transportation system. The same buses are used to complete elementary, middle and high school runs at three different times. So, if fewer than three tiers exist under any new schedule scenario, additional buses would have to be purchased and additional drivers would have to be hired. Since switching just HS and MS times would not result in start times after 8:30 a.m. for those adolescent students, elementary start times much change as well. See above for more detail regarding transportation.

Q: What is the timeline for implementation?

A: The Board is expected to take action on the recommendation in spring 2020. The recommendation is for the new schedules to be implemented in Sept. 2020.