

**Shrewsbury Public Schools
Sleep Health Advisory Committee**

Report from the Child Care Task Group

November 22, 2022

Child Care Task Group members:

Sara Russell, M.S., CCC-SLP, SPS Parent

Guinevere Molina, M.S, M.Ed, Teacher, Maj. Howard W. Beal School & SPS Parent

Erin Kennedy, M.Ed., Sherwood Middle School Team Chairperson

Kristin Combs, B.A., Teacher Shrewsbury Montessori School & SPS Parent

Todd Bazydlo, M.Ed., Principal, Shrewsbury High School

Introduction

As most families with children have experienced, there is often a discrepancy between the length of time a school-aged child is present in school (6-6½ hours per day), and the length of time a parent or caregiver is required to be at work or attending to adult matters. This creates a need for families to find care for their child(ren) for the times that they themselves are not able to be present, such as prior to the start of and after the end of each school day. Families often plan their work, co-curricular and leisure activities, and child care schedules around the times that children are in school. Consequently, a shift in school start and end times has the potential to impact several aspects of child care, including:

1. Whether or not child care is necessary
2. What type of care provider is available (e.g.: relative/sibling vs. before/after-school program)
3. Increase or decrease in the frequency or length of time that care is needed
4. Specific timing that care is required
5. Financial cost

These factors exist for families within the Shrewsbury Public School (SPS) district as well as for families of SPS staff members who live in other towns. Each family's circumstance is nuanced and specific child care needs and preferences vary.

Statement of Purpose

The Child Care Task Group (CTG) was convened for the purpose of gathering information regarding how child care needs of families and school staff may be impacted by any potential changes in school start times for different grade spans. This report serves as a presentation of the methods used to gather information pertinent to the local child care landscape in Shrewsbury and surrounding towns at this time, our findings and a discussion thereof, and our recommendations for elements that would benefit from further study.

Method

The names and contact information of licensed child care providers were obtained via the search tool on the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) page of the Mass.gov website (https://eeclead.force.com/EEC_child_careSearch). Task group members made contact with the Extended School Care program offered through SPS and local child care providers via telephone and/or email in the following towns/cities: Shrewsbury, Grafton, Northborough, Westborough, Boylston, West Boylston, Worcester, Holden, Rutland, Sterling, Framingham, and Natick. Providers were comprised of full-day center-based care (infant - 5 years), family child care (infant-school age), preschool and kindergarten programs (2.9 years-5 years), and before-school/after-school (school-age) programs. Information pertinent to policies, hours of operation, required lead time for changes made to a student's schedule, and enrollment status for Fall 2023 was recorded. This data was also supported by material available from child care provider websites, the EEC website, and business Facebook pages.

The CTG worked in collaboration with the Logistics Task Group (LTG) to obtain information relative to the finances and operations of the district's Extended School Care (ESC) programs. Additionally, responses from the recent district-wide Thought Exchange survey were reviewed by this task group, to start examining the school community's thoughts of how changes in school schedules might affect sibling child care in homes, staff child care needs, and staff availability outside of the regularly scheduled school day. Individual SPS families and staff were not directly contacted for their input regarding child care during this period as the topic of changing school start times had not yet been formally introduced to the school community prior to the Thought Exchange survey. All information for this report was gathered during the second half of October and first half of November, 2022.

The CTG is still considering the efficacy of administering further surveys of stakeholders' perspectives in order to gain more detailed insights on these important factors.

Findings

We received 58 responses from the 259 care providers we contacted. Some respondents answered our questions in full, while other responses were incomplete. The tables below summarize the data collected with respect to types of child care providers surveyed, enrollment statistics for SPS Extended School Care (ESC)

program, and the range of times available for student drop-off in the morning and pick-up in the afternoon/evening at all child care providers who responded. Please see the attached spreadsheet on the final pages of this report for specifics regarding names and location of child care providers, hours of operation, current and projected enrollment status, lead-time for changes, and additional notes.

TYPES OF child care SURVEYED	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Full-day center-based daycare (infant-age 5)	18
Full-day family daycare (infant-school age)	15
Preschool and Kindergarten programs (including those with Extended Day options)	17
Before/After School Programs	8

Current and Future Enrollment

Current Enrollment at Shrewsbury Public Schools Extended School Care Program: (Per Karen Isaacson, Director of Extended Learning for SPS)

<u>School</u>	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Current AM enrollment</u>	<u>Current PM Enrollment</u>
Beal	130*	40	130
Coolidge	75	30	60
Paton	75	30	65
Spring	75	25	60
Floral	120	25	65
Sherwood	120	-	85

*Beal enrollment may be able to increase capacity if there is increased staff available.

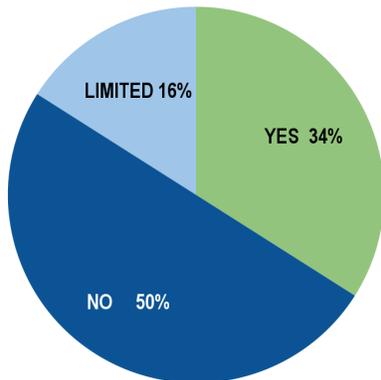
Notes on SPS Extended School Care (ESC) -

- Enrollment numbers can vary by day (typically higher on Tues/Thurs than on M/W/F). The numbers above represent peak enrollment at this time.
- Prior to the pandemic, we had larger groups across the board, and we had a waitlist for the after-school program. Since there are still quite a few people working at home, we have openings in every building and no waiting list.

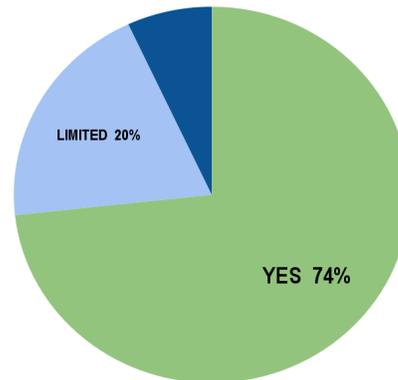
According to the enrollment data above, ESC programs offered by SPS generally have openings, with the exception of Beal afternoon care. Generally, student capacity is determined by staff availability.

The charts below summarize the status of current openings available in our sample of child care providers, as well as predicted enrollment status for Fall 2023, should a family enroll now or as soon as enrollment opens.

Childcare Providers with Current Openings



Childcare Providers Expecting Openings Fall 2023



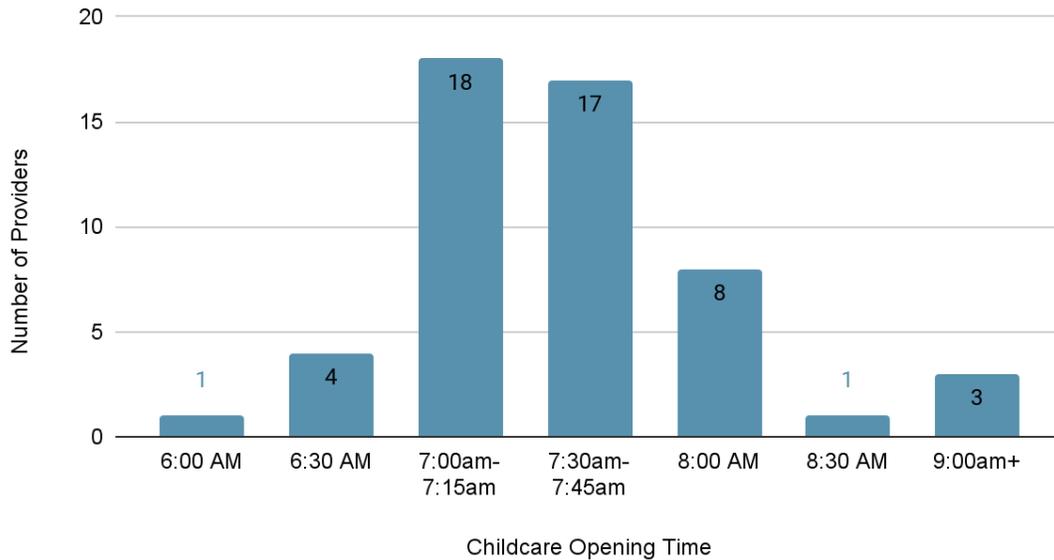
Current Enrollment: There are more openings at centers and in family daycares for children of preschool and school ages due to larger class sizes and more generous staff/student ratios at that age. However, full-day programs (centers and family daycare) for infants and toddlers consistently have a waitlist. There are only limited openings at this time for these age groups, with a similar outlook for Fall 2023.

Future Enrollment: Many preschool programs have begun or will shortly begin enrollment for the 2023/2024 school year. Many (74%) of our sampled child care providers currently have openings for Fall 2023. However, once the school year starts, waitlists at many, are expected. The earlier that families enroll their children or place them on waitlists, the greater the likelihood they will be able to secure a spot for next school year.

Hours of Operation

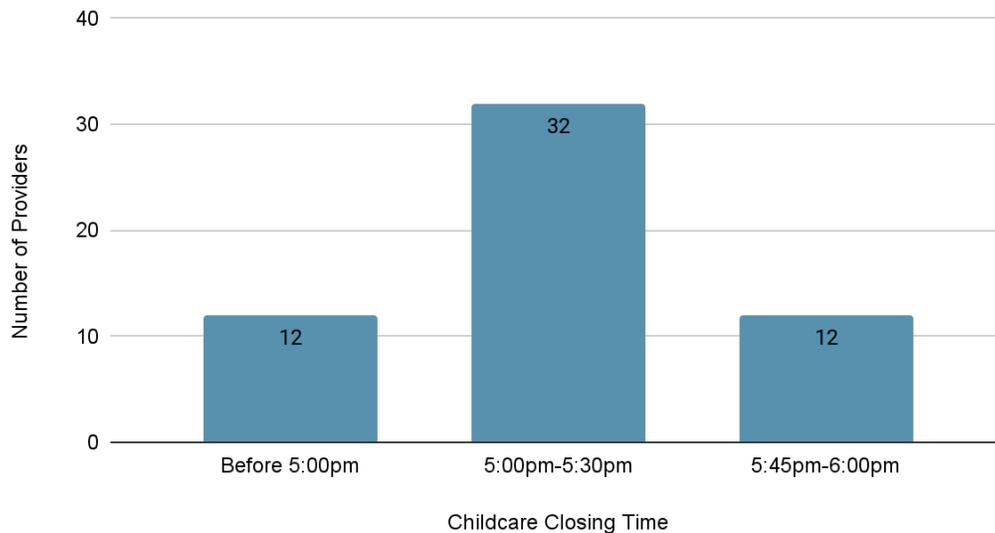
The hours that a child care provider is open for children is a key factor for meeting the needs of families seeking care. As illustrated in the chart below, most (76%) of sampled child care programs start before 8:00am (10% of total start times were earlier than 7:00am), and 24% start 8:00am or later. Later starts tend to be associated with preschool/Kindergarten programs.

Childcare Provider Opening Times



Most (77%) child care providers close at 5:00pm or later (55% between 5:00-5:30pm, and 22% between 5:45-6:00pm), and 23% of sampled providers (mostly school and family daycare programs) close before 5:00pm. Centers and Extended Day programs are more likely to be open until 5:30pm or 6:00pm.

Childcare Provider Closing Times



Other Findings from the data collected:

1. Policies: Some full-day care providers set a daily maximum for the number of hours any child can remain in care, usually ranging from 8-10 hours per child.
2. Lead-Time for Changes: Once enrolled in a child care program, lead time to give notice of arrival/departure changes (as long as these times are within current operating hours), is generally 0-48 hours. Providers often require more time (14-30 days) to add/subtract days to a child's weekly schedule or withdraw from the program. Most Extended Day programs appear flexible with changes once a child is enrolled in the program. However, there may be a longer period of notice required to newly enroll or add/subtract days to a student's weekly schedule. In general, preschool/kindergarten programs are less flexible with schedule changes due to specific program start/end times.

Considerations, Summary, and Recommendations for Further Study

Considerations

With the enrollment numbers of the SPS Extended School Care program being lower than they were prior to “the Covid years” of 2020 and 2021, it appears that trends in after-school child care have shifted and it raises the question of who is providing afternoon care to these children? Are elementary students being cared for by older siblings, or have parent/caregiver work schedules adjusted to allow for these individuals to be working from home or have greater flexibility to be present in the afternoon hours?

Although no determination has yet been made about whether start times might change, exactly how those times might shift, and what subsequent adaptations school day logistics could take, it is essential that we examine the *potential* ways in which child care needs may shift for families of SPS staff and students should this change take place.

The following are some scenarios with possible effects on child care, when compared with the current school start timetable:

Potential Scenarios	DISTRICT FAMILIES			SPS STAFF		
	Elementary School	Middle School	High School	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
1 Maintain current order, Shift times later (HS --> MS --> ES)	May increase need for AM care and decrease need for PM care	May increase need for AM care and decrease need for PM care	Child specific	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care
2 Shift times later and change order to MS --> HS --> ES	May increase need for AM care and decrease need for PM care	Unlikely to result in changes to child care needs	Child specific	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care	Unlikely to result in changes to child care needs	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care
3 Shift times later and change order ES --> MS --> HS	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care	May increase need for AM care and decrease need for PM care	Child specific	May increase need for AM care and decrease need for PM care	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care
4 Shift times later and change order to ES --> HS --> MS	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care	May increase need for AM care and decrease need for PM care	Child specific	May increase need for AM care and decrease need for PM care	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care	May decrease need for AM care and increase need for PM care

HS = High School, MS = Middle School, ES = Elementary School

**Scenario 1: Maintain current order and globally shift start times later
High School → Middle School → Elementary School**

- 1) This scenario dismisses older students before younger students and thus, confers the benefit of maintaining older students' ability to care for younger siblings after school.
- 2) Since before-school care may be needed for families with children at the middle school level, this option may result in the need to add a morning ESC program at Sherwood Middle School. It may simultaneously reduce afternoon hours by 2.5 hours per week for a few ESC employees.
- 3) With current school start/end times, there tends to be a large number of middle school students who populate the streets and businesses near the center of town after school, which has at times, resulted in complaints from community

members and the business owners. A later start/end time at this age-level may provide some relief to this issue.

**Scenario 2: Shift times later and change order of start times such that:
Middle School → High School → Elementary School**

- 1) Similar to Scenario 1, this option preserves older students' ability to care for younger siblings after school.
- 2) Another benefit of this scenario is that district families with middle school students and SPS middle school staff with children are likely to have child care needs that are similar to the current schedule.
- 3) No significant changes to current ESC programming would be needed.

**Scenarios 3 & 4: Shift times later and change order of start times such that:
Elementary School → Middle or High School → High or Middle School**

- 1) If school start times are switched such that elementary school starts *before* the middle and high schools, it may drive an increased need for those families who use older siblings as the afternoon child care provider to find alternative care for the afternoon. This care may incur financial cost if it is not provided by another family member.
- 2) It is also possible that in some families, elementary school students may be accompanied to the morning bus or driven to school by an older high school student, which may eliminate the benefit of the later start time for that high school student.
- 3) Should the elementary school start time be shifted to the earliest tier, the before school ESC program would no longer operate, resulting in a loss of morning hours for approximately 20 staff. However, this would mostly be offset by an earlier start to the afternoon ESC program. Additionally, afternoon program length would increase, which may result in higher tuition rates for families due to increased cost to operate a longer afternoon ESC program.
- 4) If elementary school has the earliest start time, there is the potential for some young children to arrive at school early in the morning and then remain in ESC for a longer period while parents complete their workday. This is a concern that was echoed in the recent Thought Exchange survey of parents.
- 5) Similar to Scenario 1, this option may require the addition of a before-school ESC program at Sherwood Middle School. The later dismissal time for middle school may also provide some relief to the issue of middle schoolers congregating in the center of town after school.

- 6) Shifting elementary school into the earliest start time may make attendance at after-school co-curricular or outside activities easier due to earlier dismissal time.
- 7) These two scenarios are most likely to present a change in child care needs for the largest number of staff as there is a relatively large time shift for two of the three school levels in both options. This may in turn, have greater impacts on the timing of child care needs for SPS staff at the age levels most affected.

Summary

Child care can be a complex issue for many, as families evolve and children grow older. There are myriad options that district families and SPS staff may consider when deciding how to best care for their children and simultaneously honor their commitments to work, health, family, and the community in which they live. From the feedback we received from child care providers in Shrewsbury and surrounding towns, we see that there are many styles of child care available spanning center-based, family child care, public and private preschools and kindergartens, before and after-school programs, and in-home care provided by relatives or babysitters/nannies. Center and school-based programs are attempting to meet greater demand for earlier drop-off and later pick-up times, as evidenced by early opening and late closing times, as well as the addition of Extended Day programs to preschool, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten programs. Family daycares are the most numerous type of child care available, but their ratio requirements require smaller enrollment numbers.

Each family associated with SPS has its own ecosystem that comprises the number of caregivers within a family system, number and ages of children, caregiver work structure, co-curricular and leisure activities, and unique considerations, priorities, attitudes, and preferences. Should school start/end times change, it is presumed that child care needs for some SPS staff and student families will change. However, because of the distinctiveness of individual family needs, it is difficult to predict the exact impact without a direct survey of these groups themselves. The possibilities discussed above are general examples of potential shifts in care need trends.

Recommendations

- 1) It is recommended that direct surveying of SPS families and staff be conducted to determine current child care usage and predictions as to how their child care needs would change should the start of school shift earlier or later. This would allow SPS and the Sleep Health Advisory and School Committees to:
 - a) Better understand the specifics of the involvement of high school students in the care of younger siblings after school.
 - b) Determine whether, and to what degree, a shift in school start times could result in the usage of high school students for the provision of before-school care and/or transportation in numbers that may be counterproductive to the purpose of shifting high school start times later.

- c) Predict enrollment in before- and after-school Extended Day programming such that these programs can be as prepared as possible to meet the changing needs of SPS families.
- d) Understand the effects on SPS staff ability to meet child care needs for their own families.
- e) Add valuable insight to the determination/selection of the most viable option(s) for school start/end times.

2) Should the determination to change school start times be made, it is recommended that SPS communicate to district families and staff the specific start/end times for each school as well as expected morning drop-off and bus pick-up windows, staff arrival/departure times, and any other known co-curricular or Extended Day program time changes such that families and staff have specifics with which to plan the timing of their child care.

3) Upon receiving communication of any changes to school start times, it is recommended that district families and SPS staff closely assess their child care needs under the new schedule and work to secure child care as early as possible.