

Board learns Schools of Choice busing may end

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Farmington School Superintendent Bob Maxfield gave school board members a "heads up" Dec. 4.

Transportation for secondary School of Choice students may be affected in light of discussions about delaying school start times.

"This is a long-standing practice, which doesn't necessarily

make sense, for a variety of reasons," Maxfield said. "We're not going to ask you to make a decision now, but we wanted to get it out in front of the community."

The district approved the School of Choice program in March 1992. Buses now take the School of Choice students to their home school and then shuttle them to their preferred school.

About 235 students are eligible to ride the bus; 125 kids do,

said Cheryl Cannon, assistant superintendent for business, finance and operations.

This compares to a total enrollment of 5,400 secondary students.

"In order to accommodate middle school students, they need to be dropped off 15-20 minutes before school start," Cannon said. "It affects a small percentage of secondary students."

Transportation director Bill Tausley was asked recently to

look at what it would take "transportation-wise and schedule-wise" to accommodate possible later school start times, Cannon said.

"There really isn't a cost saving in driver's time to eliminate it," she said. "The savings would be in mileage."

School of Choice applications note that there may not be transportation for School of Choice students next year.

"We would ask that there still

be some secondary transportation options," Maxfield said. "It wouldn't necessarily impact students in specialized programs."

There's an obligation to bus foreign students in the "newcomer" to Harrison High School and East Middle School, he said.

Currently, start time for East, Dunckel, Power and Warner Middle Schools is 7:40 a.m. Farmington and North Farmington High start their days at 7:30 a.m.; Harrison, at 7:25 a.m.

Mansion celebration

The Warner Mansion will celebrate the holidays Victorian style with authentic Victorian decorations and music by Marylou and Hugh Battley, 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 9.

The mansion is located at 33805 Grand River in downtown Farmington.

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mother and school volunteer Colleen Feige listed some of the positive results from the later school start time, including:

■ Students are more alert and more attentive in morning classes.

■ Students are more prompt arriving for morning classes, easier to motivate, have more time in the mornings to get extra help from teachers and are less cranky.

■ Teachers are better rested, less rushed and have more mental energy for their morning classes.

■ Students, on the whole, got better grades and were less depressed.

■ Attendance rates increased.

"I've been an educator for 35 years, and this later start time is

the best thing I've ever done to encourage learning," Dragseth said.

Blondy said he conducted an informal poll among his teenage patients and asked if they could learn better at 9 a.m. or 7 a.m.

"More than 70 percent of them said 9 a.m.," Blondy said. "The older the student, the more in agreement with the later start time."

He also pointed out some safety reasons for allowing adolescents to get more sleep.

"Teenagers need more sleep than younger children," he said. "Teenage fatal car crashes are associated with early morning classes."

Another advantage with earlier start times, he pointed out, is that the school day ends later,

meaning students would be home alone for shorter periods before parents get home from work.

William Camp of Farmington said he still isn't sure later start times are the right way to go for his district.

"I think it's the single best thing we can do for our kids," said Farmington Supt. Bob Maxfield, who facilitated the forum.

West Bloomfield Supt. Seymour Gretchko said his district is close to changing to the later start time. One of the reasons is that transportation changes may be relatively easy because most school buildings are located along or near Orchard Lake Road.



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