

Transportation key in start times for schools

BY SUE BUCK

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The transportation subcommittee was the first of four to meet at the Farmington School District studies the possibility of delaying school start times.

The Dec. 10 meeting, chaired by parent Angie Smith, was held at the Farmington Training Center. Members listened to Transportation Director Bill Tousley outline tentative plans based on start time options of 8:30 a.m. and 9 a.m. They want Tousley to provide a cost estimate for both times.

The information they gather will be passed on to school board members, who will make the final decision.

"This isn't set in stone," Tousley repeated throughout the meeting. "I'm still messaging this."

With an 8:30 a.m. start time, high schoolers would need to be out by 3:15 p.m. for Tousley to get drivers to the elementary

schools by 4 p.m. Current dismissal times for high schoolers are 2:18 p.m. at Farmington and Harrison High schools and 2:23 p.m. at North Farmington High School.

With the 8:30 a.m. start time, if students need to leave at 2:45 p.m. for an activity or athletic event, they would miss a half hour of class. With the 9 a.m. start time, they would miss an hour and 15 minutes.

Other subcommittees will study community outreach, teaching and learning and co-curricular activities. The community outreach meeting is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Dec. 17 at the FTC. The co-curricular meeting is 6 p.m. Jan. 7 at FTC. The teaching and learning group met at 7 a.m. Dec. 12.

All four subcommittees will give their reports or summaries at the 7 p.m. Jan. 7 meeting at the FTC.

The district initiated discussions recently with other school

districts to determine an interest in changing start times based on adolescent sleep time research. Some districts in Minnesota have reported positive results. Their experience and independent research don't reveal dramatic improvements in grades, but overall achievement improved.

Teachers said students were more alert, less depressed and there was a better classroom atmosphere. Results were measured largely by student self-evaluations.

"We need to look a long look, it's not as simple as it was in Minnesota," Tousley said. The Edina, Minn. school district has one high school, one middle school and six elementary schools. That compares with three high schools, four middle schools, and 13 elementary schools in Farmington.

District staff and parents attended a regional forum Nov. 28, which featured representatives from Edina Schools.

"There was no mention of special ed, and in my personal opinion, the outcome of test scores got fluffed off," Tousley said. "They didn't seem to address it."

On the positive side

Zan Alley, the Uniserv director for the Farmington Michigan Education Association agreed there was no correlation with a rise in test scores, however schools also experienced less tardiness, fewer fights and visits to the school nurse.

"Those factors presented a better environment," Alley said. Though other Minnesota districts seemed supportive, they didn't follow suit in making changes, she noted.

West Bloomfield is expected to initiate later start times next year.

Alley said the union suggested three years ago that the district explore the later start time issue based on research, but she couldn't say which aspect was most

appealing. Some Michigan school superintendents, including Farmington's Bob Maxfield, recognized a need for discussion about two years ago.

Alley is interested in the possible reduction/loss of time for drivers. "This means a loss for current employees," Alley said. "Some start earlier than others." Tousley said he didn't have a total reduction figured out. Bus drivers get paid in a time block. If the 8:45-9 a.m. time block is altered to 7 a.m., that's a 15-minute difference each day - "quite a bit of money," Tousley said.

Drivers can expect to encounter both construction and more traffic later in the day. The district will need to buy about four more buses and hire additional drivers at a more than \$400,000 cost.

"Transportation-wise, I'll do whatever they want to pay for," Tousley said.

"I have big fear we will run

late at all of our schools," said Sue Kin, president of the bus drivers' union. "Now we have a fair minimum of time at all of our schools. We worked really hard to get that time."

The school district has also informed private schools like Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Fabian School and Hillside Day School of the discussions and possible impact on their start times.

"Buses determine our start times," said Roberta Clemak, principal of Our Lady of Sorrows School. "They will never get a consensus of everyone. People don't like change."

She personally favors an earlier start time. Sorrows' school day starts at 8:15 a.m. and ends at 3:40 p.m. Some children don't board the bus until 4 p.m. and some ride the bus for an hour. That makes for a long day with dinner, homework and athletics, she said.

"I would love to start school at 8:30 a.m.," Clemak said.

Construction from page A1

On April 15, 1998, Farmington received \$9,496,233.

According to Cheryl Cannon, assistant superintendent for business, finance and operation, \$7.7 million of the Durant proceeds was used to reduce bonds issued. \$1,145,778 went to the Community Service Fund and \$650,455 went for football field lights and playgrounds.

The Community Service Fund was established and supports programs within the district with only the interest earned.

The fund supports after-school tutoring for middle school students as part of the after-school youth programs, and scholarships for at-risk students to attend community education, tuition-based programs such as Educare, a half-day enrichment program for kindergartners, preschool, band and sports

camp, summer school and others.

Maxfield said the district is close to finishing up the projects. URS Greiner, the district's architecture/engineers and McCarthy Smith/BEV, the district's construction manager, completed the project on schedule and within budget, officials said.

Educational spaces were improved district-wide with 12 of the 13 elementary schools receiving new large group instruction rooms, four new gyms and five new cafeterias.

O. E. Dunkel has a new cafeteria, kitchen and media center addition. Technical education spaces were renovated at Dunkel, Warner and East Middle School, similar to a 1993 renovation at Power Middle School.

Office spaces were renovated in new locations at O. E. Dunkel

and East. A central kitchen and cafeteria were added to East Middle School.

All three high schools received new additions and/or renovated spaces for science areas, technical education, art, vocal and instrumental music spaces and athletic facilities including new auxiliary gyms at Farmington and North Farmington High Schools.

Twelve of the 13 elementary school, both early childhood centers, all four middle school the three high schools, Farmington Training Center, Farmington Community Schools and Ten Mile School were freshened up with new interior finishes.

Mile School received new energy efficient lighting systems and new heating and air conditioning systems controlled by a central energy management system.

Fiber optic cable links all buildings to a new network operations center located at the Ten Mile Annex, the site for the Alternative Academy.

Farmington Training Center, Farmington Community Schools and Ten Mile School were freshened up with new interior finishes.

would take longer and cost more. Dornan said clerks would be required to plan for this in several ways. One would be to provide additional voting booths in the precincts to help avoid long lines. If booths are not on hand, additional ones will have to be purchased, she said.

Dornan said the Michigan

Association of Municipal Clerks opposes the legislation as does the State Council of Election Officials.

She said the potential financial impact lies in costs for additional tabulators, printing, programming, voting booths and more workers.

Ballot from page A1

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