

# Transportation key in start times for schools

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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 muddling 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 p.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 figure out. Bus drivers get paid in a time block. If the 6:45-9 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. Fabine School and Hillel 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 9:15 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.

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