

Start-time committee ponders next steps

BY SUE BUCK
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The committee studying the possibility of delaying high school start time will draft a report of findings and conclusions for the Farmington school board, but it may be somewhat open-ended in its recommendations.

At their first meeting after the Feb. 28 public forum at the Costick Center in Farmington Hills, committee members wondered whether they could have presented information and answered the naysayers differently. Response at the forum was largely negative.

During a meeting with subcommittee chairs March 4, Farmington School Superintendent Bob Maxfield admitted he was disappointed.

"At least somebody had the nerve to raise the question," said Maxfield, who initiated the discussion with other superintendents. "I think everyone has found the conversation beneficial. It could be it's right for the rest of the world but not for Farmington. Given what we know about finances, I hear the community saying, 'We're not ready for it now.' From time to time we can say, 'Is it time to take it back to the community and revisit it?'"

Some have told Maxfield the research had moribund, but others have called later starts "codding," he said. Only two people made comments in support of later high school start times at the forum, which drew more than 100 people.

While budget cuts loom heavily, some committee members said they looked at the school start issue strictly on its merits. They said the budget wasn't under discussion last fall when the committee formed.

Members also commented on what they perceived as rude remarks and reaction during the forum.

"I remember there was a meeting here where the attitude of the crowd here wasn't very favorable," said Pam Charleston-Lyons, a subcommittee member. "It surprises me when the shoe is on the other foot that we would be so surprised. You could have cut the tension with a knife."

Keeping the dialogue open with an eye on new research is a goal, Maxfield said.

More meetings planned
A survey taken by students in grades 9-11 in required English classes will be discussed during a student forum on school start times at Students Operating Schools Day March 8.

Barbara Cherm said 2,167 students were surveyed: 89% (42 percent) from Farmington High; 588 (27 percent) from Harrison and 680 (31 percent) North Farmington High.

The results show negativity but not overwhelmingly so, said Cherm, who is director of evaluation, assessment and special projects.

Phil Neuman, who chairs the community outreach subcommittee, said he's "not ready to throw

Swinehart: Later start won't work for athletes

BY SUE BUCK
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A proposed later start time for high school students in Farmington won't work for athletes and their schedules, said Brian Swinehart director of athletics and physical education.

"That doesn't mean, though, that he questions or disputes existing adolescent sleep time research."

"I'm looking at it from a purely athletic standpoint, looking at the event and getting to the event," Swinehart said. "We're running into a lot of conflicts."

Jody Miltello, Swinehart's secretary, explained his position Monday during the school start time committee meeting at the Farmington Training Center. Swinehart was at a district basketball tournament.

He elaborated by phone Tuesday, adding he's heard from many coaches and parents on the subject.

"There's also the compression of time," Swinehart said. "That's two hours now to get work started. They may not get back from an event until 9:30 p.m. or 10 p.m."

Parents told Swinehart their kids use the time after school dismissal at 2:20 p.m. and before practice or boarding the bus at 4:30 p.m. to study and complete homework assignments.

"Time is very difficult," he said. "A lot of things are coming up, roadblocks."

Gym space and facility usage are in demand, he added. Events like golf tournaments need to be played during daylight hours and must start by 3 p.m.

The district switches to the Oakland Athletic Association this fall, which will require an adjustment period, Swinehart said, citing a number of other factors that will affect the issue.

"It's a difficult transition," he said.

in the sponge."
"The picture is not rosy," said Zan Alley, Uniserve director for the Michigan Education Association. "We are looking at more cuts

this year in anticipation of next year. Whatever we try has to be cost neutral."

Alley continues to place her primary concerns with the contract-

al concerns which affect employees though she supports the sleep time research findings, she said.

Robert Blair, a resident who has attended meetings, noted not all the feedback he heard from his neighbors was negative.

The public had also asked to see studies contrary to the research presented. "Everyone wants the other side of the study," noted Debbie Pevin, a committee member. Cherm said that will be hard to ferret out and she wondered why someone would do a study against late start.

People want a balanced approach, Alley said. "I don't think there is a con," Alley said. "It's a little bit like smoking. Let's have as many people say smoking is good for you as all the medical people smoking is bad for you."

People often want to see a correlation with grades in the research gathered in Minnesota. Cherm said grades are a stable entity.

"I'm not sure any research is going to show grades and test scores will be that malleable," she said.

Research shows a segment of kids will benefit. For example, they won't drop out.

"If there's no harm to most kids but it helps a certain segment, then maybe you have something worth proceeding with," Cherm said.

The school start time committee will meet again at 7 p.m. April 16 at the Farmington Training Center.

Dunckel students suspended for putting pills in teacher's coffee

BY PAUL R. PACE
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Two Dunckel Middle School girls are indefinitely suspended after putting a pain reliever pill in a teacher's coffee Monday, according to school officials.

Diane Bauman of the district's community relations office said the teacher was not harmed and has not missed work.

Dunckel Principal Jim Myers said the female math/English teacher was examined by a doctor and did not suffer any ill effects. He said it is unclear what exactly the pill was, but confirmed it was an over-the-counter pain reliever.

Estalene Michaelson, director of safe schools and student services, said the teacher was "deeply hurt" by the matter.

According to Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer, the teacher was alerted by a student in her class that the two sixth-grade girls had put something in their drink. He said one of the students was still in possession of a crushed, 200-milligram Advil caplet.

He said other students may be involved in the case.

The dosed coffee and the

crushed tablet will be sent to the Michigan State Police crime lab for analysis. The action may have been in the planning stages since students returned from winter break on Feb. 18, police said.

Myers said the school continues to investigate and the two girls will be indefinitely suspended until the conclusion of the investigation and a future hearing. A maximum punishment could be expulsion, Myers said, adding they could also be charged criminally.

Dwyer said the police department is also continuing to investigate, and any evidence of criminal activity will be presented to the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office for determination of criminal charges. He said other students who may have been involved in the action, may be charged as well.

Myers said the two students when asked why they did it, they "didn't have a good reason."

Whatever the reason, Dwyer said, "The attack on the teacher is an extremely serious matter and we will treat it as such."

— Staff writer Sue Buck contributed to this report.

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