

School to mull later start time

Fairport High students may benefit from more sleep

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The Fairport Central School District is weighing a later start to the day for its high school students, persuaded by strong evidence about teenagers' need for more sleep. The school day now goes from 7:25 a.m. to 2:10 p.m. It is a fairly standard secondary school schedule, but experts in sleep patterns and child development say it doesn't afford students enough rest.

"Chronic sleep loss in children and adolescents is one of the most common — and easily fixable — public health issues in the U.S. today," the American Academy of Pediatrics wrote in a policy statement in 2014. Lack of sleep not only makes it harder for students to learn in the morning, but also contributes to problems with mental health, social-emotional capacity and obesity, according to the research. But while districts express appreciation for the point, a host of logistical challenges stand in the way of change. Chief among them are busing and after-school activity schedules, particularly sports. Later start and end times would also make it more difficult for students who work or have other afternoon commitments. Any change will affect parents who need to drop their children off at day care in the morning on the way to work.

"This is something we talked about when I came to the district 13 years ago, but we just couldn't get momentum behind it," Fairport Superintendent Brett Provenzano said. "The research has pretty much always talked about making sure our students are well rested."

Fairport has assembled a committee of parents, students and staff to study the question and help figure out a way to make later start times a reality.

The first idea, Provenzano said, was simply to switch the start times for secondary and elementary students. The younger students start at either 8:10 or 8:55 a.m.

There were concerns, though, about sending the youngest children out to bus stops when it is still dark out. And those children need their rest as well.

The current thinking is to have both sets of students start later, no earlier than 8:30 a.m. The committee is thinking of ways to consolidate bus routes to make that happen.

There will be a school board workshop on the question April 4; the committee will deliver its final report and recommendations to the board April 19. If the district decides to change, it will spend the 2016-17 school year working out the details and put it into effect in 2017-18.

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Fairport Central schools chief Brett Provenzano
