

## **Webster explores later start times**

### **Webster**

#### **Board members, faculty research the science behind sleep and performance among teenagers**

**Lauren Peace** Rochester Democrat and Chronicle | USA TODAY NETWORK

As the clock strikes 6 a.m., Griffin Peters, a freshman at Webster Schroeder High School, is up and getting ready for school. He brushes his teeth, makes sure his school work is in order, packs what he needs for his extracurricular activities and runs out the door.

By 6:40 a.m., he's on a bus to school, where the bell will ring at 7:25 a.m., signaling the start of first period.

For Griffin, it's math class.

"Attendance is usually pretty good. There are a handful who always come in late," said Griffin, in reference to his class. "But it's not usually until halfway through the period that people are really awake and participating."

At 2:25 p.m., the final bell rings and the school day ends, but Griffin's time at school does not. During swim season, he spends an hour waiting for practice to start, sometimes with friends, sometimes doing homework.

Griffin gets home for dinner in the evening — sometimes he grabs a bite on the drive back — and then spends the rest of his evening doing homework and relaxing in the time that's left. It's not until 11 p.m. that he finally gets in bed.

Less than seven hours later, it starts all over.

The same routine of late nights and early mornings is replicated by many of Webster's high school students, prompting the school board to explore change.

The Webster Central School District announced at the beginning of the year that it would be taking action to "design a process and gather feedback around exploring later

See **WEBSTER**, Page **8A**



**Carmen Gumina, superintendent of the Webster Central School District, talks with Lilah Hann and other students while gathering input on a proposal for later school start times. MAX SCHULTE/@MAXROCPHOTO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER “Arguing against the science for sleep times is like arguing against gravity.”**

### **Carmen Gumina**

Webster Central School District superintendent

---

## **Webster explores later start times**

### **Webster**

Continued from Page 1A

school start times” for secondary students.

The effort follows years of research indicating that sleep is important to the emotional and academic success of teenagers. Most teens aren’t getting enough.

In 2016, the American Medical Association issued a new policy encouraging middle schools and high schools to start no earlier than 8:30 a.m.

But on the current schedule, Webster high schools start more than an hour earlier, while elementary schools don’t begin their day until close to 9 a.m.

“The Board of Education and I have been discussing this for two or three years now,” Superintendent Carmen Gumina said. “Many members of the board have attended workshops and gone to conferences related to start times and the science behind the overall effect on the health of our teens. Arguing against the science for sleep times is like arguing against gravity.

“Now, it’s about looking into the logistical challenges that we face in moving forward with this.”

## Why Webster?

This isn't the first time a school district in Monroe County has looked into changing school start times. Two years ago, the Fairport Central School District heard from a committee that recommended high school start times be pushed back. Last year, Superintendent Brett Provenzano said that the plan would be implemented during this school year, but in February 2018, Provenzano announced that because the district is in the middle of a broader future planning initiative, there won't be changes to the current schedule any time soon.

In May 2016, the Pittsford Central School District heard recommendations from a committee of almost 50 people who spent approximately two years studying alternative start times. The committee made a recommendation that would have moved high school start times up 15 minutes, but the district decided not to implement changes at the high school level. Around this time last year, the Brighton Central School District was weighing four alternatives to its current schedule, including the option to push high school start times back to 9 a.m., but Superintendent Kevin McGowan told the *Democrat and Chronicle* that plans to implement later start times have yet to be made. "Although the science is certainly compelling, as currently understood, a change in start times would be very costly due to changes in transportation," said McGowan. "District surveys of parents, students and staff also yielded mixed results. We are continuing to study the issue while exploring all possible strategies in order to develop potential implementation plans that could be considered for future planning." So why, after multiple attempts by other districts to change start times have been made, and failed, will Webster be different? "That's the million-dollar question," said Gumina. "I can't answer that because I don't have that data right now, but I'm a former biology teacher, and speaking purely from the science behind it, I hope that we can find a way to do this for the physical, social and emotional well-being of our kids. It just makes sense."

## Buses and bells

Griffin is the oldest of three boys, with a younger brother, Sawyer, in middle school and another, Tanner, at the elementary level.

"When my first two get up, it's still dark outside and they're just not ready," said his mother, Stacie Peters. "On the other hand, my 7-year-old, Tanner, is like an alarm clock. He's up at 7 a.m. and ready to go."

For several years, school districts have entertained the idea of swapping the start times of their youngest and oldest students to accommodate the ways in which the adolescent sleep cycle tends to vary with age. "There's a lot of time in the morning between when Tanner wakes up and when he starts his school day, and sometimes that time is wasted," Stacie Peters said. "I think it could be really beneficial for him to get an earlier start, and I feel like my older two would be more successful with a better night's sleep."

But as co-president of Webster Central's PTSA, she knows that it's never that easy. According to Gumina, primary logistical concerns can be narrowed down to two areas: buses and bells. "Buses, meaning we can't start all of our kids at the same time. If we could, we'd just have everybody start at 8:30, but there aren't enough buses for that," said Gumina. "That would take an additional 80 buses and drivers, and, even if we could find that many, we couldn't incur that cost. So now we have to figure out how do we use the buses that we have and still start our older kids at 8:30?" Although swapping the start times of the elementary schoolers with the high school students seems like a simple fix, the potential complications that could arise for families who rely on their older children as a source of child care need to be considered. "If we swapped the times, we'd end up with our younger kids home before our older kids," Gumina said. "Some families have the older siblings getting younger siblings off of the bus now, and the change would mean that families would need to sort out daycare challenges."

As the district looks into the change, Gumina said that the needs of all stakeholders will be considered.

"I think we can get creative and come up with solutions," he said. "That might mean working with daycare providers and YMCAs to see if we can come up with some after school wraparound that is more readily accessible."

The second issue, is that of bells, specifically those at the end of the day.

“So many of our students take part in extracurricular activities, and several have jobs they go to after school,” Gumina said. “If all of a sudden the dismissal bell is now at 3 or 3:10 p.m. instead of 2:30, we need to consider how that will impact our students’ schedules.”

### **Hearing stakeholders**

Over the course of the next year, Gumina has committed to interviewing 1,000 students to gather data on their reactions to the possibility of later start times, and receive feedback and suggestions.

“Most of the feedback that has come to me face to face has been overwhelmingly positive,” Gumina said. “But we want to make sure we’re hearing the voices of all stakeholders during this process, and that we’re giving everybody enough time to make any arrangements they might need to if the schedule were to change.”

Recommendations are expected to be made to the board in August, and could be acted on in September.

Implementation of changes wouldn’t occur until September 2019. Several small-group committees comprised of school community members are currently being formed to meet over the course of the next several months to help inform any future recommendations. A larger public forum to address progress and roadblocks is planned for the end of the school year.

*LPEACE@Gannett*

*.com Includes reporting by staff writer Justin Murphy.*



**Griffin, Sawyer and Tanner Peters are students in Webster Central School District, where school officials are looking to change start times to make sure that high school students are getting enough sleep. PROVIDED**