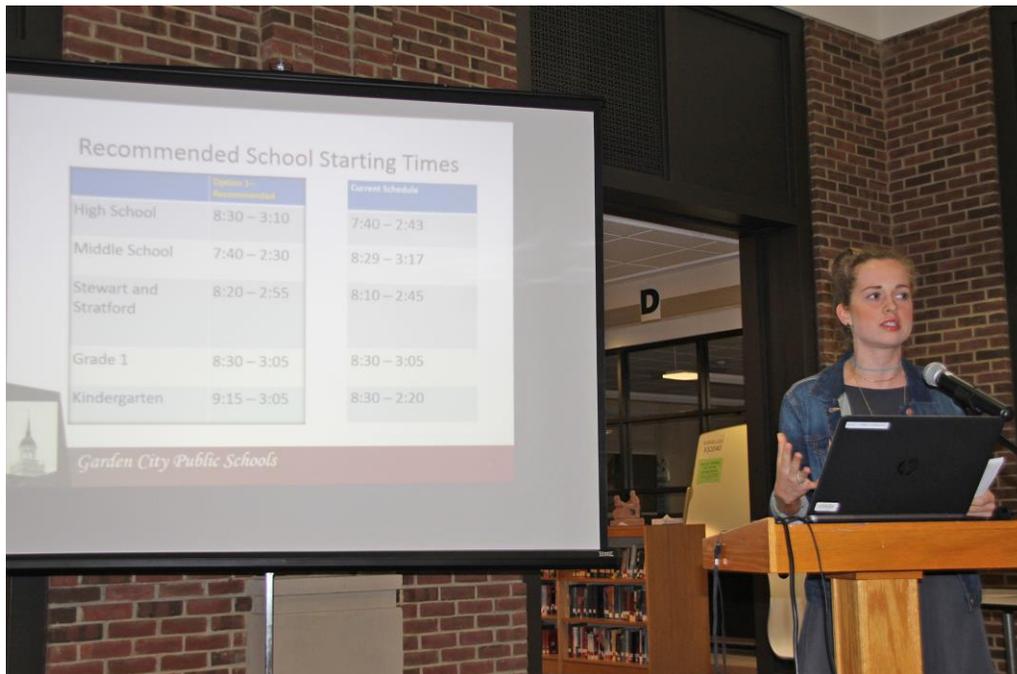


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For Immediate Release:



Board of Education Reserves Decision on School Starting Time

At the May 16th Board of Education Regular Meeting, the district’s School Starting Time Steering Committee, charged with researching the topic of changing school starting times and making recommendations to the Board of Education, presented its report. The Committee, comprised of representatives from PTA, SEPTA, The Men’s Association, district schools’ site-based teams (SBT), a teacher, a student (GCHS senior Mairead Pfaff is pictured here presenting a portion of the Committee’s report), and district and building administrators, recommended Option #1 – moving Garden City High School’s starting time back to 8:30 a.m. in September, 2018. To review the entire report with all the details of what this recommendation entails, please visit:

<http://gc.schoolwires.net/cms/lib8/NY01913305/Centricity/Domain/4/School%20Start%20Time%20Presentation%205-16-17.pdf>

Dr. Feirsen characterized the report as a “courageous moment for us.” The superintendent was a member of the Steering Committee, and spearheaded the effort to make the best choice for the students, parents, and the community. “We are a leader in

Nassau County in changing school starting times. What the Committee recommended does the most good for the most students for the longest time.”

The Board carefully considered the Steering Committee’s recommendation, but decided to reserve judgment until they receive more school starting time options – specifically an option in alignment with Option #2 (primary school students all begin at 8:30 a.m.) – and receives answers to questions posed about traffic issues, lengths of bus rides for students, and specifics about the supervised study halls, clubs, extra help sessions, and intramurals that will take place at the middle school during the time between when the students are dismissed and sports begins.

The entire effort came about because a significant amount of research now clearly indicating that adolescents’ circadian rhythms are reset during puberty making it difficult for them to fall asleep before 11 p.m. and wake up early in the morning. With a start time of 7:43 a.m., Garden City High School students have faced a dauntingly early schedule.

In light of the new research, schools across the nation are reconsidering the early starting times they have in place for teenaged students. Research also informs that older adolescents need more sleep time than younger ones, and that no amount of discipline and time-management can overcome teen physiology.

The Board’s School Starting Time Steering Committee was an offshoot of the high school SBT which began meeting on the issue back in 2015, and first reported their findings to the Board at the June 14, 2016 meeting.

Communications on the possibility of changing school starting times was key from the beginning, so members of the Steering Committee were charged with keeping their constituency groups informed. Members reached out to parents during PTA meetings and at SBT discussions. The superintendent emailed a letter to all parents announcing the time change consideration and inviting feedback through parent and student surveys (staff was also surveyed). All information was posted to the district website to a dedicated page with all meeting agendas, press releases, and links to research studies conducted by leading health organizations such as the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics (www.gardencity.k12.ny.us, “Recent News,” “School Starting Time Study”). Informational links were tweeted on social media and retweeted by the GC PTA. And residents were invited to voice their opinions at a Community Forum hosted by the Steering Committee on May 1st.

In reaching its recommendation on May 16th, the Steering Committee was guided by five criteria: student safety, research, stakeholder input, logistics (busing, athletics, student supervision, staff assignments and schedules), and financial considerations.

The Committee considered four starting time options as “viable” (the three options are posted on the website and a fourth option – keeping everything the same) from the dozen the district’s Transportation Department put forth to accommodate a change at the high school from the current 7:42 a.m. starting time to 8:30 a.m. - the starting time multiple health organizations indicate is the earliest older adolescents should begin school. Most of the 12 options presented to the Committee were eliminated due to cost: some options would require purchasing new buses (about \$140,000 each, plus the driver), and/or outsourcing busing; others required hiring more school personnel for supervision.

Clearly, bus transportation was a major concern. The district buses currently run on very tight schedules – drivers drop off students at one school and are immediately on their way to pick up and drop off at another. Changing the high school starting time would change the high school bus run times (and most of Garden City’s students,

including the high school students, use district buses), and, in turn, that would change starting times and bus run times for the other district schools. Garden City Public Schools is also required by law to transport students to private schools, another moving piece in the puzzle. The transportation logistics of changing the high school starting time are significant.

Athletics, too, was a major concern. The Committee began its discussions in the fall asking for a recommendation from the Athletics Department for the latest high school dismissal time possible so athletes could get to sports and compete in home and away games. A dismissal of 3:10 p.m. was set as workable, and the Committee then worked backwards to establish a new high school starting time.

Financial considerations also figured highly during the discussions. In the current tax cap era where public school budgets are a zero-sum game, and where Garden City Public Schools is experiencing enrollment increases (with no attendant tax levy cap exclusions), the Committee looked for the option that would be the most fiscally responsible. Option # 1 would require approximately \$50-60,000 in supervision for the middle school post-dismissal, pre-athletic time. Option # 2 would require an additional \$260,000 over Option # 1 for the supervision of kindergarten students; Option # 3, \$360,000 for outsourcing of buses. Survey results confirmed that Garden City's respondents did not want an option that would increase school spending (86% of parents responded; 42% of staff; and 89% of students).

The above-mentioned considerations, along with input from the community, all weighed heavily on the Committee as it deliberated toward consensus. Ultimately, doing what is best for Garden City's students was the nexus of the decision making. The Board and district would like to acknowledge the time and efforts devoted to this issue by the Committee members. The Board and district also thank the community members who attended the meetings and added to the starting time discussion.

As decided in public session on May 16th, the Board has reserved judgment on the issue until further questions are answered and alternative options are reviewed. We encourage parents to keep informed by checking the "School Starting Time Study" web page as new information becomes available.