

WOODLAND DISTRICT 50 SCHOOL NEWS

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Strategic Plan Charts Course for Journey Toward New Start Times

For Woodland District 50 Board of Education, the discussion on changing school schedules started with a question - Are we doing the best as a district, based on the current educational research and best practice, to create an optimal environment for student learning?

Community members, staff and students who met in November 2017 to develop a Strategic Plan understood that researching school start times is an essential initiative for student well-being. The plan approved by the Board on February 22, 2018 specifically includes researching new educational trends - including school start times - under a goal of "creating learning opportunities to address the physical, mental, emotional and social needs of the 'whole child.'"

During a March 8, 2018 special Board of Education meeting, the Woodland administration, as requested by the Board, shared the research that overwhelmingly supports later start times (after 8:30 a.m.) for adolescents. The advantages, according to the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, is a restful sleep for a developing adolescent child depends not only on the number of hours of sleep, but also when that sleep time begins at night and ends in the morning. Some child experts also believe younger children are more alert earlier in the day than adolescents.

Woodland Board of Education President Dr. Carla Little said, "The Board of Education began discussing the topic of changing the bell schedule, not because it is easy, but because our community members have put their trust in us to do what's right for our children."

The research supported the Board of Education's decision on March 22 to direct the administration to design and implement a plan to change start times, beginning with the 2019-2020 school year. Changing the school day for students goes hand-in-hand with transportation and when school is in session, Woodland moves more than 5,000 students by bus twice a day.

From September through November, multiple drafts of transportation schedules were deliberated in various administrative meetings before development of the schedule released this week. The aim was to keep the plan cost neutral and keep familiar bus drivers in place while giving students the opportunity to achieve optimal learning time during the school day. The traffic patterns and layout of each school property as well as how quickly students get on and off buses were among considerations for the transportation plan.

Not only does the new schedule achieve those goals, but it also makes the first bus pickup, currently at 6:20 a.m., no earlier than 7 a.m. Instead of a schedule with oldest to youngest, the 2019-2020 Revised Start Times Schedule has Woodland Elementary classes starting first,

followed by Woodland Primary, Woodland Middle and Woodland Intermediate. Primary and Elementary routes are combined to avoid neighborhood redundancy or siblings riding separate buses.

On Sept. 22, 2018, the Board amended its March 22, 2018 resolve to include the need for community engagement. An open forum was held October 29, 2018 to educate the public about the benefits of changing the schedule and provide a voice for those in attendance. An implementation survey, tentatively scheduled to go out in January will be used to gather feedback on how to help prepare for the change.

Following the October 29, 2018 community forum, the Governing Board met on November 15, 2018 and discussed moving forward with the changes in the start times schedule, starting in the fall of the 2019-2020 school year.

On December 20, the Board will meet at the Woodland Educational Center, 1105 N. Hunt Club Road. Among items on the agenda is action on the Revised 2019-2020 School Start Times schedule. That action includes the new schedule taking effect at the start of the 2019-2020 school year. The meeting will begin with a 6 p.m. closed session, followed by the open session starting at 7 p.m.

On December 13 at 6 p.m., staff and families are invited to an hour-long meeting in which the first half will be a presentation about the revised bell schedule. That will be followed by audience participation in administration-led groups to gather ideas about carrying out the logistics of the plan. The meeting will be held at Woodland Intermediate School, 1115 N. Hunt Club Road Gurnee.

For more information about the research, presentations, and the schedule for 2019-2020, go to www.dist50.net/starttimes.

How we got here:

- Feb. 22 – Governing Board Meeting – 2018-2023 Strategic Plan approved following a six-month process that included a community survey, focus groups and a community engagement committee of more than 90 participants.
- March 8 Special Board Meeting - Members discuss research regarding school start times to help students
- March 22 Governing Board Meeting - Members approve directing administration to design and implement a plan to change start times starting in fall 2019
- July 26 Governing Board Meeting - A presentation about transportation options in connection with school start times was made for discussion.
- Sept. 27 Governing Board Meeting - Members approved amending March 22 action to include a component of community engagement. October 29 community forum on school start times announced.
- Oct. 25 Governing Board Meeting - Members discussed the timing of the start times initiative and the need to hear from all stakeholders.
- Oct. 29 – Community Forum held with a focus on how the start times discussion began, the research that backs up a proposed change in the schedules and how that benefits children.

- Nov. 15 Governing Board Meeting - Members discussed moving forward with a change in the start time schedule for the fall of 2019.
- Dec. 13 - Community Informational Meeting in which the first half will be a presentation about the revised bell schedule. That will be followed by audience participation in administration-led groups to gather ideas about carrying out the logistics of the plan.
- Dec. 20 - Members discuss action on the 2019-2020 Revised Start Times Schedule
- January (Tentative) – Implementation survey of staff and families

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