

October 23, 2009

The following is my perspective regarding the SLEEP initiative to adjust school start times.

As a school board member I would not vote to change the start times for schools because these times have worked for the last 30 years and I don't think anything is different now that would necessitate changing the schedule.

Instead of focusing efforts on adjusting the start times to improve student attentiveness in class, I would propose that the Board consider improving the ergonomic environment in the classroom to create a classroom that is less fatiguing and more conducive to learning. There are several factors in the classroom that lead to student fatigue and inattention that were not present 30 years ago, some of which might be a cause of today's students needing so much medication.

In particular, we used to have wooden desks, lots of natural spectrum light, and windows that could open. By comparison, today's students are required to sit in very uncomfortable slippery and non supportive plastic chairs in rooms with off spectrum fluorescent lighting and a controlled air environment. They are expected to sit in this space for 50 minutes and then they get a 10 minute break to sit for another 50 minutes and it continues throughout the day, every day.

Most parents could probably not tolerate these conditions. These conditions create body and eyestrain and fatigue, can cause headaches, all of which will cause inattentivenesses.

The administrators and teachers by comparison can provide their own chair and they have the ability to move at will about the school and classroom. The student has to stay seated.

Some classrooms have more natural light then others, but in the renovations of schools to add air conditioning, many windows were sealed or eliminated to reduce heat gain or loss and the reduced natural light from the reduced windows was provided by fluorescent bulbs for energy efficiency. The incandescent bulbs we had in classrooms provided a more natural spectrum of light.

So instead of allowing the children to sleep later, I would prefer to work toward engineering a more comfortable and stimulating learning environment. In most classrooms today, even if they do sleep later, they are still going to be in a space that is not conducive to sitting, listening, and observing for extended periods of time. It is almost as if we are sending our children to a torture chamber.

I would like to further develop these concepts whether I am elected to the position or not.

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