

HITTING

Snooze

Does the early bird really get the worm?

By the Play editorial board

Every day, students file into school before 7:40 a.m.

Every school year, students are not getting the most out of their education and putting their physical and mental health at risk due to sleep deprivation.

Every school year, nothing changes.

How long will the cycle continue?

Sleep is a simple, biological need. Just as humans need to eat, breathe and exercise, they need adequate sleep, and without it, they are at risk for detrimental effects. This is especially true for teenagers concerned with academics, extracurriculars, work schedules, college planning and so on, all while trying to maintain good physical and mental health.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, adolescents should have roughly eight to 10 hours of sleep each night in order to properly function. Still, this guideline fails to be met by the majority of high schoolers. The Sleep Foundation said teens average fewer than seven hours of sleep per school night by the end of high school.

Lack of sleep may be caused by academic rigor, extracurricular activities, work, problems at home or any number of other factors. Regardless of the cause, there is no denying high school students are victim of sleep deprivation.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that high schools begin at 8:30 a.m. at the earliest. We fail to meet

this standard by nearly an hour.

By adjusting the school start time for high schools and middle schools in the district to begin at 8:40 a.m., this will meet the 8:30 start time minimum recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Other schools across the country have pushed back start times and have seen great success.

A school district in Seattle made the decision to push back school start times in the 2016-2017 school year. Middle and high school students, who previously began at 7:50 a.m., had a new start time of 8:45 a.m.

The University of Washington conducted a study in which they observed the students before and after the time change. The results of the study were just what the district had hoped for -- students used the time to sleep in, grades increased and there was a decrease in absence and tardiness. Across the board, changes with this time shift were overwhelmingly positive.

So why are so many schools so resistant to this change?

One argument against starting school earlier is the many logistical and financial factors, potential major setbacks of implementing a later start time at Maize. Starting school early has been the status quo for a long time, and many are afraid of what it might mean to change.

"It's interesting because I think it's a matter of perspective," superintendent Chad Higgins said. "I understand there is research out there that indicates one thing or another."

Higgins said he believes there are no easy solutions to the downsides of starting school later.

"We have so many kids to transport, and we don't have enough bus drivers," Higgins said.

Due to its size, our district runs on a two-tier system, with the secondary schools and elementary schools starting at different times to have the ability to run buses at two times. The superintendent said with the current school start times, we start as late as possible so families have sufficient time to get up, eat

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and so forth "without having the last tier go so late that we are hitting rush hour traffic," Higgins said.

Higgins said there are three options available when considering a later start time: all district schools start at the same time, flip-flop the secondary and elementary school start times or slide everything later.

"We'd spend a lot more money if our kids start at the same time and end at the same time," he said. "So the other option would be to flip-flop. That means having the little guys, the kindergartners, on the bus at 6:30. That's not appealing either. So it's not easy."

Principal Chris Botts supports the idea of a later start time, especially for district high schools.

"Research shows that later start times, especially for teenagers, is critical," Botts said. "Mentally, physically, emotionally, socially it [the current start time] is not best for what our students need."

Previously, Botts was the principal at Complete, which starts its day at 8:25 a.m.

"You can see firsthand even just the 45 minutes the success students are having there with attendance and their emotional well-being seems to be improved once they get over there," Botts said. "I do think the later start time is a factor in that."

For the future of our health, for the future of our education -- we need change. Teens cannot continue attending school every day as sleep deprived zombies. ■

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*—Chad Higgins,
superintendent*