

Board eyes letting teens sleep longer to learn

by **Tim Whitnell**
Metroland West Media

*The amount of sleep required by the average person is five minutes more — **Wilson Mizener***

*A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book — **Irish proverb***

*I'm not a very good sleeper. But you know what? I'm willing to put in a few extra hours every day to get better. That's just the kind of hard worker I am. — **Jarod Kintz, Whenever You're Gone, I'm Here For You***

The Halton District School Board (HDSB) has authorized a study that will consider the feasibility of rearranging busing schedules to accommodate later starting times to the school day, in order to give teenagers more time to sleep and, presumably, a better chance at learning.

Oakville trustee Kelly Amos received unanimous support from the other 10 trustees at the Jan. 7 school board meeting for her motion asking the board to direct its transportation consortium to conduct a related study.

The study by Halton Student Transportation Services (HSTS) would look at realigning busing to all public high schools to start times between 8:45 a.m. and 9:15 a.m.



Kelly Amos

The HSTS, a consortium serving Halton's public and Catholic boards, transports more than 28,000 students on 453 buses, mini buses, vans and wheelchair-accessible vehicles daily, at a cost of more than \$18 million per year.

An interim report from the HSTS, with its findings, is to be back before the public board trustees in early March, said Amos.

She acknowledged there could be potential ramifications for the transportation budget and the impact on elementary and extra-curricular programming.

"We are asking for an overall, not a

comprehensive, study," Amos said late last week about the forthcoming HSTS report.

"This realignment of start times would allow for a later start in the day for many of the Halton District School Board's high schools, and would allow students the benefit of more sleep and would help to improve academic grades, mental health and physical health," Amos said in her rationale for requesting the start times/busing schedules study.

"I, personally, believe that anything later would be a benefit to students. The ones with 8:05 (a.m. starts) might benefit more. Unless the first class has activity attached to it or is stimulating, it is hard for them to focus. Earlier is definitely not better," Amos later said.

In her report to the board, she said The American Academy of Pediatrics released a statement last August recommending schools delay the start of class to no earlier than 8:30 a.m.

"Chronic sleep loss in children and adolescents is one of the most common — and easily fixable — public health issues in the U.S. today," Amos quoted pediatrician Judith Owens, in her report to the board.

Currently, Robert Bateman H.S. in Burlington has the earliest period one start time among all Halton public high schools at 8:05 a.m.; Georgetown District H.S. has the latest at 8:58 a.m.

The most common start times in Halton

public high schools are between 8:10-8:15 a.m. with the next most common range being 8:25-8:45 a.m.

In her report, Amos stated bluntly that a lack of sleep increases a student's risk of failure in school.

She referenced a new Swedish study in the journal *Sleep Medicine*. She says it shows that adolescents who suffer from sleep disturbance or habitual short sleep duration are less likely to succeed academically compared to those who enjoy a good night's sleep.

In the new study involving more than 20,000 adolescents aged 12 to 19 from Uppsala County in Sweden, Amos said that researchers from Uppsala University demonstrated that reports of sleep disturbance and habitual short sleep duration (less than seven hours per day) increased the risk of failure in school.

Amos said she intends to share with the Halton Catholic board her motion/report that was passed at the Jan. 7 board meeting.

The Catholic board is under no obligation to join the public board in a possible change to high school start times, she said.

"It can be done without them, but it could be done with them. They have different routes; some are the same," she said of Catholic board schools busing.

"That's all part of the puzzle. I just want a preliminary snapshot of what needs to be done and the ramifications."



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