



Dunlap heeds input on school start

Proposal to change school day structure for teacher collaboration period does not advance

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DUNLAP — An abundance of negative public opinion has derailed a proposal to drastically change the start and end times for all grades in the Dunlap School District.

"The district has said all along that if this proposal did not have broadbased community support then we would not recommend it," said Superintendent Jay Marino. "No one was going to shove this through. It was never a done deal."

Now it's no deal, at least in the proposal's current form. Turns out Marino and a school committee have decided not to recommend the proposal, intended to create an hour a week for teacher collaboration time, that would have moved up the start of the school day at the middle and high schools by one hour and moved back the start at the elementary schools by 45 minutes.

Corresponding changes would have been made at the end of the school day as well: Under terms of the proposal, elementary school would be 8:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., middle school 7:35 a.m. to 2:47 p.m. and high school 7:30 a.m. to 2:47 p.m., with a one hour early release on Wednesdays.

The idea was to establish one hour a week, after students left on Wednesdays, that was dedicated to teacher collaboration. A second benefit, Marino said, would be to get students in middle and high school out of class earlier in the afternoon so they would not miss class because of early dismissal to participate in after-school activities.

The proposal wasn't universally panned by parents and teachers, but there was significant disapproval. The district sent out 2,100 letters to every home in the district with a student in it, and 200 direct e-mails to teachers inviting participation in a survey. Almost 900 people responded, including 700 responses that included open-ended comments that went beyond merely answering the questions. In total, 55 percent of the respondents reported "they could adjust" to the proposed changes; 45 percent reported "they could not adjust."

Each extreme view on the topic, those who said the change would have an "unbearable impact" on the family and those who said it would have a "positive impact" on the family registered 20 percent of the total.

"We said we wanted to hear from (the community) and we heard," Marino said. "We were looking for a greater majority that could accept the change."

The next step is to return to the committee, digest the information and see if there is another, more palatable way to get to the same goal, Marino said.

"The easiest thing is to put out a first proposal and have everyone say they love it because then our work is done," he said. "I think we have something very positive in that the community doesn't think it was a crazy idea. Fifty-five percent saw that it had merit and we can work from there."

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