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## Students in Sequoia Union High School District may get more time to snooze

**By Shaun Bishop**  
**Daily News Staff Writer**

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Sequoia Union High School District students could grab a few extra winks next year if the board of trustees approves a proposal to push back first-period bell times across the district.

Officials are considering a new policy that would set 8:30 a.m. as the earliest start time for students taking six or fewer classes at the district's four 2,000-student high schools.

Proponents say later bell times would give students who are juggling after-school activities, sports, homework and social lives a better chance of getting the nine to 10 hours of sleep per night that studies say they need.

"While we may never get our teens — in this American society, this hustle-bustle society we live in — to get nine hours of sleep every night, we can at least do a better job of setting up an environment where they can get more sleep than they currently are," Superintendent Pat Gemma said.

Fully rested teens have improved memory, reaction time, mood and athletic performance, according to researchers. Administrators also believe allowing students to get more sleep could improve attendance and lead to more attentive driving.

Waking up later may be especially important for teenagers, who have been shown to have later biological sleep and wake patterns than adults, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

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The board of trustees discussed the proposed schedule change in December and asked Gemma to consult with each campus about whether

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the policy could be implemented by the start of next school year. The superintendent said he plans to gather input from principals and possibly bring a final policy back to the board for approval in February.

This year, Carlmont and Sequoia high schools both start first period at 8 a.m. most days, while Menlo-Atherton starts at 7:50 a.m. Carlmont and Woodside both have "zero periods" for a small group of students that start at 7 a.m.

In the neighboring Palo Alto Unified and Mountain View-Los Altos Union High districts, students start class between 7 and 8 a.m., according to bell schedules posted on the Web.

Under the proposed Sequoia Union policy, students taking six or fewer classes could begin school no earlier than 8:30 a.m. The roughly 50 percent of students that take seven classes would still need to start around 8 a.m. in order to fit in their entire schedule, Gemma said.

The district's fourth high school, Woodside, switched to a later schedule for the first time this year, with 60 percent of students starting class at 9:05 a.m. Principal David Reilly said he believes the change has had a positive impact.

"When the students' first class is at 9:05, they're on time, they're coming ready to work," Reilly said. "They're not sitting there with a cup of coffee, with their heads down, half asleep."

Reilly said some students are upset that they've lost an hour of their afternoons, now that they get out at 3:10 p.m. instead of 2:10 p.m. Conflicts with athletic schedules are also an issue, though that was a challenge before the schedule change, too, Reilly said.

While teachers at Woodside have been mostly supportive of the change, some at other campuses are concerned that the district-wide proposal is a "rush job" that is being considered with little input from faculty, said Greg Gruszynski, president of the Sequoia District Teachers Association.

Parents who have to adhere to work schedules or who have to drop students off at other schools also need plenty of notice for such a change, Gruszynski said. "I don't have a concern with the idea, it's just the implementation," he said.

Still, one parent who has worked on a sleep education program at Menlo-Atherton said later bell schedules are long overdue. Eileen Van Rheen, whose daughter went to Menlo-Atherton, said she has been pushing for years to have later start times.

"It's a cultural shift, it takes a while," Van Rheen said, "and I'm hoping we're finally at a tipping point."

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