



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BARRINGTON 220

Dr. Harris and BHS English teacher Laura Minerva speak with students.

# The Great Late Sleep Debate

**B**ARRINGTON 220 IS DIVING DEEPLY into the idea of a later start to school times for adolescent students through the Input 220 Advisory Council this year. This discussion is the third and most complex topic stemming from the board of education's strategic value of creating optimal time for learning. Adjusting the school calendar to allow for high school finals to fall before winter break was implemented in 2014, and the option of full-day kindergarten enrichment began this fall.

The topic of teen sleep paired with later school start times has become common both in conversation and in the media. However, there isn't a simple solution to this issue. Factors such as traffic, transportation costs, extracurricular activities, and community impact all must be considered before implementing a later start for middle and

high school students.

The Input 220 Advisory Committee is assisting the board of education in determining whether the school district should and could optimize the defined time and configuration of an instructional day based on student and organizational needs, while understanding the system-wide impact on grades Pre-K through 12.

The group has been meeting regularly since the spring of 2015, and will soon present a summary of its findings to the board of education for consideration. We asked Superintendent Dr. Brian Harris about the process thus far.

**QB:** *How was the committee put together? Who is represented from the school district and community?*

**BH:** We used an application process last school

year for those interested in being part of this committee. Thirty-five members were selected from an applicant pool that represents all 12 schools in Barrington 220 School District as well as Saint Anne Catholic School. Community members without students in the district were also selected to be part of the group. The main focus areas the group is studying are:

- Transportation and Traffic
- Studies on Adolescent Sleep Needs vs. School Start Times
- Sports, Arts, and Extracurricular Activities
- Benchmark School Districts
- Blended Learning Possibilities

**QB:** *What does research say about adolescent sleep needs compared to school start times?*

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Dr. Harris interacts with students in the newly renovated commons area at Barrington High School.

A "LATE START" PUBLIC INPUT SESSION IS SCHEDULED FOR THURS., NOV. 12  
 EVENING START TIME TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON  
 LOCATION: BARRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

**BH:** According to a 2014 study in the *Journal for Preventing Chronic Disease*, insufficient sleep is common among high school students, with less than one third of U.S. teenagers sleeping at least eight hours on school nights. In a policy statement published in 2014, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) urged middle and high schools to modify start times as a means to enable students to get adequate sleep and improve their health, safety, academic performance, and quality of life. AAP recommended that "middle and high schools should aim for a starting time of no earlier than 8:30 a.m." A start time of 8:30 a.m. or later in our high school and middle schools would provide adolescent students the opportunity to achieve the 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep recommended by AAP and the eight to 10 hours recommended by the National Sleep Foundation.

**QB:** *Has Input 220 studied other school districts that have implemented a later start time? What has the group learned?*

**BH:** The Input 220 Advisory Council has researched many reputable school districts across the United States that changed to a later start time for teenagers. Every school district with whom they spoke or read about experienced significant benefits from beginning high school and middle school classes later. These included greater student achievement (especially in morning classes); higher standardized test scores; a reduction in

sports injuries; decreases in tardiness and absenteeism; declining teenage car accidents; and in some cases, improved performance by varsity and junior varsity sports teams at the high school level. The best results were achieved with start times after 8:30 a.m. Interestingly, Input 220 could not find a single district that had changed start times that later reverted to the earlier start. In fact, every district with whom they spoke indicated the initial resistance to change was the worst part of the process; all reported measurable benefits with little to no impact on traffic, sports, etc.

**QB:** *Explain what would need to happen with bus transportation in order for a late start to occur.*

**BH:** A major challenge involved is the cost and planning around bus transportation. Barrington Transportation Company currently runs consecutive or tiered bus routes, meaning a driver will bring high school students to school first, then re-route to pick-up students from middle and elementary levels. If any elementary, middle, or high school start times overlapped with each other, it would create complexity within our bus transportation and the district would likely incur more costs.

**QB:** *If school began later in the morning, what would be the impact on after-school extracurricular and sports activities?*

**BH:** Changing the start time would have a nominal impact on before- and after-school activities. If high school students were released after 3 p.m., practices, games, and other extra-curricular activities may end later in the evening, but that could be balanced by allowing reasonable activities before school in the morning, without encroaching on the all-important goal of creating more time for much-needed sleep. Students who need to work after school may also need to adjust their schedules, and families that depend on older siblings for childcare might also need to make adjustments. We understand these might be challenges for some students and families, although research and the experience of other school districts having gone through this indicate the benefits justify the change.

**QB:** *With all the technology provided to Barrington 220 students, could blended or online learning be part of the later start time solution?*

**BH:** Barrington High School provides a rigorous and innovative environment to prepare students for the independent style of learning they will experience in a higher education setting. Many high schools across the country increasingly require students to complete at least one online/blended course to graduate because they know virtually every collegiate program now includes some type of online component. Barrington 220 students and staff must eventually have more options for learning and teaching through an online or blended curriculum, where some instruction occurs virtually outside the normal school day with traditional instruction also continuing in the classroom. This flexibility could be part of the start-times solution, but it is unclear how the two objectives might interrelate at this time. While the school district hopes to optimize school start times as soon as feasible, blended learning will likely take longer to evolve and may need to be phased in over a period of time. 



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Principal Jim Aalfs

## Hough Street School Earns Blue Ribbon Award

**H**OUGH STREET SCHOOL is one of 335 schools nationwide to receive the National Blue Ribbon School award. This honor recognizes schools for helping students achieve at very high levels and for making progress in closing the achievement gap. For Principal Jim Aalfs, the award represents all of the hard work over many years, the cutting edge staff, a strong PTO, and parents—who he says “are the biggest help.”

“We have immense pride in [this award] validating what’s been going on here for a long time,” Aalfs said. When Aalfs learned of the nomination, he called the past two principals of Hough Street School—Lori Wilcox and Becky Gill—to share the news and thank them for their hard work. “It’s a long road to get here,” he says.

Aalfs grew up on a farm in Iowa where his family grew grain and raised livestock, and he says it was a great place to be from. His local church in Iowa led many students to Judson University in Elgin, where he went to college. His wife, Kara, is from Dundee, and they have a son and a daughter.

This is Aalfs third year at Hough, but like Barrington 220 Superintendent Dr. Brian Harris, his first job in the district was at Station Middle School as an assistant principal. He moved away for a few years to District 300 in Hampshire, and then received a call from then-Superintendent Tom Leonard about an opening. “I feel very blessed to be at this school,” he says. “As a village school, it’s as close to ‘Mayberry’ as possible. About three quarters of the students walk to school.”

The front office staff helps maintain that “Mayberry” feeling. Dori Knapik has greeted students and families at Hough for 25 years. Julie Sulak helps set a warm tone and keeps trust strong. Aalfs agrees with the need for trust. “I firmly believe that before you teach kids, you have to reach kids. They have to know you care, and even though there are high expectations—our kids know that the teachers like them, and care about them,” he says.

Ten years before the Village of Barrington was incorporated, the school was in operation. The current building at Hough and Lake Streets is the third that has stood on that site. And now, the school joins many others in Barrington 220 as a Blue Ribbon School in this Sesquicentennial year. 



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