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## JM to Move to Later Start Time This Coming Fall

*By Sophie Braccini*

Starting on August 22, students at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School will stop being the earliest risers in the area.

Thanks to the efforts of Principal Joan Danilson, supported by her staff and Superintendent Bruce Burns, the school start time will be moved to 8:30 a.m. from 7:50 a.m. The tweens and teens will get the extra minutes of sleep that research shows are needed during this time in their lives. The bus system was also modified to accommodate the change and staff does not anticipate conflicts with after school activities. The end time will remain the same.

At a parent information session earlier this year, JM school psychologist Kathleen Day, Ph.D., said that not following the natural sleep pattern, or sleep phase delay, is linked to poorer academic performance, poor long-term memory and decision making, increased risk in traffic accidents, as well as depression. Research has shown that by age 11 young people start naturally falling asleep later and getting up later. In spite of this the Moraga middle school was starting at 7:50 a.m., earlier than the elementary schools, and almost all other California middle schools. Danilson has been steadily building a consensus among parents, students and teachers to agree to a change. The school polled the parents, students and teachers and a wide majority supported the change, in spite of concerns. The JM Principal says that teachers and staff were very clear in their desire to do what is best for the kids, but that they had concerns about pushing the school day later overall, as they actually experience a dip in the students' energy and focus later in the afternoon (a fact that is also supported by research).

"Also, a number of the teachers and staff are also parents, so they cited concerns with drop-off and pick-up logistics if the schools all started and ended at the same time," she said. A solution was found by working out a bell schedule where students will have two periods after lunch, which is the same as the current schedule.

One concern was whether the new schedule could have an impact on after-school sports activity and would lead students to drop the optional Z period that will now end at 3:45 p.m. But Danilson confirmed that after sending out a second survey on Z period participation, the number of students opting for a Z period slightly increased.

The last piece of the puzzle was the bus system. Until now the same buses drove students to JM, then to the elementary schools half an hour later. Superintendent Burns says that the reception he received from the Lamorinda Bus Transportation Agency about a later start at JM exceeded his expectations. There were no negotiations. He reports that director Juliet Hansen and her coordinator, Sue Graves, were very open minded and willing to consider multiple alternatives and had a "let's see how we make this work" approach.

Danilson met with LBTA a few times to gather current year transportation ridership information and staff met with the LBTA and collectively developed preliminary routes. LBTA brought on a fifth bus that was needed for Campolindo High School that will be used after the Campo drop-off to transport Moraga students to the elementary schools and JM.

Danilson does not anticipate any problem when school starts, but the staff will reach out to parents, students and teachers in the fall, and after everyone has had ample time to experience the change, to ask for input and feedback.

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

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