



PALO ALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

TO: Students, Parents, and Staff of Gunn and Paly High Schools

FROM: Glenn "Max" McGee, Ph.D.

RE: Zero Period

DATE: April 10, 2015

As you are undoubtedly well aware, there has recently been considerable and even contentious discussion regarding zero period. During the last couple of weeks, I have read numerous emails from students, parents, pediatricians and faculty; reviewed surveys of students conducted by students and faculty; and listened to compelling arguments on the pros and cons of the issue from students, pediatricians, parents, teachers, and community members. I think it is time to make a decision and take action rather than drag this conversation out at the Board and Committee level over the next several weeks.

As a morning person myself, I clearly understand that having the option to take an academic class during zero period can be both stress reducing and academically beneficial. For a certain percentage of adolescents—let's say about one standard deviation from the normal bell curve distribution (~16%)—who are either morning people or go to bed early enough to get at least 8.5 hours of sleep, zero period probably does have some benefits. For most others, however, I think that based on the preponderance of pediatricians' recommendations and related research about how important sleep is to teenagers as well as about their general sleep patterns, it is wise not to start the academic day much before 8:30 a.m.

As a compromise solution that is in the best interest of the majority of our students, then, I have told the high school principals that for the 2015-16 academic year and beyond, we are to limit zero period classes to physical education or a non-graded class. I have also asked Dr. Hermann to set up a brown bag lunch or two with students and staff to meet with me and a couple of pediatricians so we can address their questions and concerns.

On another but related note, the Gunn High School Creative Bell Schedule Committee is developing four options for the new school schedule, all of which I believe will reduce student stress and provide staff and students with some opportunities for enhancing teaching and learning. These models will be presented in a Town Hall meeting on Monday evening, April 20th at Gunn. The Committee is also crafting a survey about them for each stakeholder group, and Dr. Herrmann has noted that the schedule options will be discussed at the April staff meeting. It is my understanding that while the models are not yet finalized, we don't think that any of them will be starting school before the current time of 8:25, though one may start earlier two days a week and much later three days a week. The Committee is working hard and we are eager to hear their ideas and your opinions of them. Dr. Herrmann will provide additional details regarding the meetings and surveys next week.

Thank you for your understanding. Now that the decision is made, I hope we can move forward and have a strong finish to our year by focusing on what we do best: developing students' knowledge, critical thinking and problem-solving skills and nurturing their curiosity, creativity and resilience, thus empowering every child to reach his or her fullest intellectual, social, and creative potential.

Sincerely,

Glenn W. "Max" McGee

