

Sleep patterns of the young and studious

By **KELLY L. ROHE**
Special to the Record-Eagle

“Early to bed, early to rise” is the advice school-aged children should follow as they prepare to head back to school after a summer filled with late nights playing outside and late mornings sleeping in.

But this advice isn't as easy to follow as it sounds. Students can find it difficult to readjust their natural sleep cycles for the new school year. More than just going to bed earlier, it means resetting their biological “clock” and allowing their bodies to shut down at an earlier time.

It is never too soon to get students back on track and ready for the early morning school bell. Linda Schell, Traverse City resident and mother of four boys ages 10 to 19, begins this summer ritual the second week of August to get her boys' systems ready for the 6:30 a.m. alarm clocks not too far off in the distance.

“My boys go to bed at about 10 or 11 during the summer months,” said Schell. “And they sleep until 9, 10 and sometimes even 11 in the morning. So, beginning the second week of August every year we begin to call them in at 8 p.m. and make sure they are in bed by 9 p.m. We also try to wake them earlier in the morning to get them used to getting up before 10 a.m.”

Schell is not alone. Many parents in the Grand Traverse region feel this is a very important part of the back to school routine. Doctors and sleep specialists believe that it is never too soon to begin preparing children for this “shock” or disruption to their system.

According to physician David

Walker, a sleep specialist and co-owner of Sleep Diagnostics of Northern Michigan, students who do not get enough sleep do not often manifest this lack of sleep through displays of tiredness but through displays of poor behavior.

Walker believes that many parents don't realize the importance of good sleep habits and the effects that poor sleep habits will have on their school-aged children.

“Parents get upset when children don't perform well in school or when they act out,” Walker said. “But they often don't find the reason why these behaviors are occurring. Many times it is because the child is sleep deprived and cannot think clearly. Sleep deprivation has been proven to be the cause of lower grades in schools and studies throughout the country. Walker said one study reported that students who sleep less than six hours per night can have a lower grade point average by one or two points.

Zombie-like children can be frustrating for parents to deal with. Students who need to be dragged out of bed often suffer truancy and just don't concentrate during the first hour or two of school. They can be disruptive to the entire household, with the end result being fatigue, poor performance in school and worse grades. However, this can be prevented with proper planning during the back-to-school season and healthy sleep habits year round.

Pediatric sleep specialist Cynthia Nichols of the Munson Sleep Disorder Center recommends that parents alter their children's sleep schedules ahead of time.

“Waiting for school to begin is a mistake,” said Nichols, Ph.D. “I recommend regulating the child's routine three weeks before school,



Record-Eagle/John L. Russell

Waking up is hard for some students like Jeremy Schell of Traverse City. Here, he re-enacts the fall ritual of getting up early for school as his brothers, from left, Jacob, Tyler, Ben and mother, Linda, look on.

anticipating (his or her) sleep time and rise time and adjusting the schedule to meet that at least 50 percent of the way two weeks before school, and having the child on the school 'bed and rise' schedule for at least one week before school begins.”

Nichols also believes that it is important to alter a child's rise time before altering their bed time. “Instead of making children go to bed earlier, parents should first wake their children at the appropriate time,” she said. “That will encourage them to go to bed earlier naturally.”

The typical child needs a varied amount of sleep depending on age. According to Walker, teenagers need 9.25 hours, elementary aged children need 10 hours and preschool aged children need 11 hours, with half of those requiring a nap.

“If students meet those sleep requirements they will be more functional during waking hours,” Walker said. “There is no quick fix. However, maintaining healthy sleep cycles seven days a week

year round lessens the likelihood of a child falling back into bad sleep habits and suffering sleep deprivation.”

According to Nichols, one sign of an overtired child is longer sleep patterns on the weekends. “If your child is sleeping significantly longer on the weekends, that is a sign that something is wrong with their sleep patterns,” he said. “You cannot 'make up' for lost sleep. Catching up on the weekends does nothing for functionality.”

Schell said her boys get their required sleep and get into the new fall schedule pretty easily. “But we don't give them a choice,” she added. “As parents, we need that time in the late evenings too. We really believe, as a family, that you need to prepare your children for the new schedule. It's hard with everything going on around us and our busy schedules but it's important. I value my sleep and I want my children to value theirs and see the importance in good sleep.”

Kelly L. Rohe is a local freelance writer.

Retirement: Fond memories and looking forward



By **STEPHANIE JOSEPH LONG**
Special to the Record-Eagle

Come September, teachers across northern lower Michigan will be waiting at their classroom doors to welcome thousands of children back to school. But a small handful won't be among them. They are the newly retired educators who will watch this fall ritual from the sidelines for the first time in many years.

Larry Dobler, Joe Lemieux and Becky Thornton Odinga are among these teachers and administrators. All have retired from teaching after having served in both public and private schools for their entire professional careers.

Dobler, the only principal Westwoods Elementary School has known, retired in June but admits that retirement hasn't really caught up with him yet. He expects the first day of school to be tough for him and plans to head out of town to avoid the impact of not being part of the school culture for the first time in 33 years.

“So far this summer, I've been doing what I would normally be doing,” he said. “On Sept. 4, though, I'll be camping on Isle Royal.”

“When the school year gets rolling, I'm sure I'll feel a tug.”

Dobler served at Westwoods for 12 years. He credited his invitation to head the new school when it opened as one of the defining

moments of his career.

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Larry Dobler, the recently retired principal of Traverse City's Westwoods Elementary School, helps wife Rebecca prepare breakfast for granddaughter Phoebe. Dobler plans on spending more time with his family from now on.

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