On a frigid December morning about 7:45 a.m., students trickled into Gothenburg High School.

Neither freshman Haydon McKenney or eighth grader Taylor Mroczek had been assigned “access time”, but both were headed to classrooms to meet with teachers—McKenney for help with algebra and Mroczek to make up a science test she had missed the previous day.

Access time, when students meet with teachers from 7:45 to 8:15 a.m., began shortly after school started this semester.

Instead of school starting at 8 a.m., classes now begin at 8:15 a.m.

High school principal Randy Evans, who brought the idea to District 20 school board members for approval, said it’s to help students who are failing classes.

But it’s not only for assigned students.

“It’s a huge benefit for all students especially those in extracurricular activities who miss things because of those activities,” Evans said. “I bet a good 20% of the student population comes in every morning when we have the staff here.”

Evans said students are assigned access time when they are failing a class and don't get assignments completed during class.

"Teachers are available then and it works extremely well," he said. "But some kids space it off or don't think it's important."

In that case, those students must attend Saturday school for three hours Saturday morning where students also go if they have excessive tardies.

RANDY EVANS

On this day, Evans and junior high principal Ryan Groene stood inside the front door and checked off the names of students who had been assigned access time as they entered the building.

Teachers notify Evans who those students are by 4 p.m. the previous day.

To be able to start school 15 minutes later each day, Evans said brunch time was whittled down so school ends at the same time it did before—at 3:30 p.m.

Pat Zwink, who teachers Spanish and English, likes access time because it doesn't interfere with after-school activities like work or taking younger siblings home.

Zwink said it also gives kids a second chance to improve if they haven't done well on a project or need to redo an assignment.

“You learn from your mistakes better,” she said.

Because most of her students know what they need to work on before they come in for access time, Zwink said it’s not a problem when 10-15 of them are in the room.

“I also think it makes kids more comfortable in coming in and asking for help,” she said. “Before, they might have been embarrassed where now it’s a normal thing.”

Zwink said she’s also addressed the issue of using the time as a study hall to avoid homework.

“We talked about access appropriateness and how it’s not in lieu of homework that needs to be done at home,” she explained.

First-year instrumental band teacher Tom Belanger described access time as having merit.

Belanger said he has numerous students who come in to ask questions or work on something.

“For example, a student may rehearse a concert piece and get individual feedback from me.” he explained, adding that anything new takes time to adjust to and implement.

Sophomore Tiffani Maurer said some teachers are more accessible during access time than they were after school.

The only downside for her, she said, is having to wake up a little earlier.

Freshman Chase Ostergard said he doesn’t like access time because he can’t serve detention

before school.

With detention now after school, Ostergard said it interferes with sports.

“When I’m late, I have to do more conditioning and I get in trouble with the coach,” he said.

Evans thinks access time is working.

At the end of the 2008 school year, 38 high school students had failed one or more classes.

“We’re projecting 21 at the end of this year,” he said.

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