Children need their sleep. Without it, their academic performance can suffer.

Dr. Joseph Ojile, founder of the Clayton Sleep Institute, addressed a gathering of Parkway voluntary transfer parents and advised them on how sleep directly impacts students’ alertness and their ability to learn. “Sleep helps consolidate what they learn and prepares the brain to take in new information,” he told the parents. “Sleep also helps with learning new tasks faster.”

Students who get the right amount of sleep have a greater chance of doing better in school, according to Dr. Ojile. He says students who are sleep deprived often fall asleep in school, have low grades, have difficulty focusing and get in trouble for bad behavior. Lack of sleep can also lower the immune system, contribute to acne and other skin problems and even lead to depression.

So how much sleep is necessary? Dr. Ojile recommends students in kindergartners through grade eight get 10 - 11 hours of sleep each night, while high schoolers should have 9 - 10.

*That means that a third grader who gets up at 6 a.m. should go to bed at 8 p.m.*

### A Good Night’s Sleep is Best for Learning

**By Peggy Magee**

See Important News from the Transportation Department on reverse side.

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**County Friends’ Lifestyles**

**Show Transfer Student What is Possible**

Terrill Smith, on right, a former student of the voluntary transfer program and the Construction Prep Center, makes regular return visits to the Center to give current students tips on construction techniques and to inspire them by sharing his story. By attending the Rockwood school district, he says he learned other families and neighborhoods and learned about what is possible in life. “I realized that this was the lifestyle I wanted.”

Terrill Smith, 33, credits the side that provided a stable school and community environment with helping him become the person he is today. Smith is a successful home builder and entrepreneur who takes time to mentor students at the Construction Prep Center in Webstn, a program that trains adults – many from disadvantaged or troubled backgrounds – to enter the construction trade. Smith is a product of the construction program as well as the St. Louis student transfer program.

The suburban school district he attended – Rockwood – showed Smith a side of life markedly different from what he observed in his own neighborhood in mid-town St. Louis. His years in Rockwood started with Eureka Elementary, followed by LaSalle Springs Middle and Eureka High. “I went to the homes of my classmates and saw their solid family structures, their safe neighborhoods and the organized way in which their households operate,” he recalls. “I realized that this was the lifestyle I wanted.”

He remembers too the ‘unbelievable’ quality of education he received, the caring teachers who reached out to students and the parents who launched fundraising and other school projects, all in support of their children. By just casually observing the parents working together, he says, “I saw the good that can come from strategizing, communicating and networking.” Having also floated between schools in the Kansas City and St. Louis districts, he reports, “The education in Rockwood was always way ahead of anywhere else I attended.”

His experience in Rockwood allowed Smith to see what is possible in life, he reports, and that ultimately led him to understand the importance of making good choices. But that didn’t happen until after he hit rock bottom. As fast as a bullet (literally), he surrendered off the right course he was on – being proud of himself for meeting the high academic expectations at Eureka High and enjoying his football coaches and teammates – to a path of self-destruction.

The turning point is when he was shot in the back by a stray bullet not far from his home in the city. After being hospitalized for two weeks, he made a full recovery and returned to school but, he points out, “I had changed. I was angry. I turned away. I gave into the wrong peer pressure.”

He got involved with “illegal stuff” he says, and because he had always excelled at everything, he worked at being the best at that. He was scheduled to graduate from Eureka High in 1995, but didn’t.

After a 90-day suspension in his senior year, he chose not to return to school. His troubles continued to mount and at one point he faced the possibility of going to prison.

Smith believes his environment played a part in his decline, yet he also acknowledges that he made bad choices. “Our environment is so powerful in terms of steering us in a positive direction,” he explains. “If you cannot physically change your environment, then take yourself out mentally. We have the ability to create our own destiny because we have choices.”

Smith got a second chance with his involvement in the Construction Prep Center, a kind of boot camp that not only offers trade-related skills, but instills a work ethic and professionalism in its students. A stand-out participant, he motivated his classmates and after graduation, was hired as a carpenter’s apprentice for a large builder.

Since leaving the program 10 years ago, he has returned on a regular basis to pass along advice and lessons learned to current students.

During a return visit, Smith met and befriended a student who became instrumental in providing further opportunities for him. The doors the friend opened led the talented tradesman to start his own successful construction company. Recently, he began a separate business designing and distributing customized silicone wrist bands. He and his two children live in a rented house in Frontenac so they can attend the Ladue school district. He is active in their lives and works hard guiding them in how to best find success and happiness.

“It’s all about hard work,” Smith stresses, noting the importance of listening, learning and putting forth full effort. “The choices we make affect us tremendously” he adds, “and my rule is to never make a decision that compromises my integrity or character.” He believes that opportunities present themselves everyday “and it is up to us to grab hold and make the most of them.”

The opportunity he was given some 25 years ago, to attend a school district in St. Louis County, is one for which he continues to be thankful. “It showed me another side of life that I realized I too could have if I made good choices.”
An afterschool club at Parkway South High School has 40 African-American students—the majority who are voluntary transfer students—focusing on their grades, feeling connected to the school community and building a strong support system with each other. Not to mention they get to “stomp” to their heart’s content. It’s the “P.South” Step Team, a group that performs combinations of complex rhythms and sounds through footsteps, spoken word and hand claps. Stepping or step dancing has a long tradition in African-American fraternities and sororities.

Under the direction of administrative assistant/building manager BJ Larese, the team has garnered respect and excitement throughout the school community and won many awards in step-offs with other local step teams. But success in competitions is secondary for the steppers. Their main goal is to have a winning record of grades and effort. “We are an academically-focused club” reports Brian Moore, adding that discipline and character building are also emphasized. “I tell the students that when they leave high school, either society will tell them what they can do or they can tell society what they are going to do. That choice is theirs to make.”

James’ club motto, “Better Our Education with Step!” is something the steppers take seriously. Junior Tia Terry admits that her participation motivates her to keep her grades up. “If our grades fall below a C, we are restricted from competing.”

All the students, in fact, work extra hard so that when James checks their grades, as he does every other week, he knows who is working toward the goal he has set for each student earning between a 3.5 and 4.0 grade point average by the end of the school year. “If their grades are not good, I check to see if they are turning in their homework,” he explains. If they are not, he encourages them to do so, even if they don’t understand the material, so the teacher knows in what area to provide additional help. He advises them to talk to the teacher about getting extra help or, if needed, he will mediate between the student and teacher.

An expression that James repeatedly uses is, “Get out of the hallway,” his way of mov- ing students along to their next class so they can get settled in their seats, prepared to listen and learn. “It becomes a domino effect,” he explains. “When the step team sets the example of getting to class on time or going to the home-work room for help, other students follow their lead.”

“Academics is our first pri-

### SLEEP

Getting the right amount of sleep is especially challenging during teenage years, when the body’s circadian rhythm (internal biological clock) is temporarily reset, causing teens to fall asleep later at night and wake up later in the morning. Typically, high schools have very early start times, meaning that teens may not get anywhere near the six or seven hours of sleep a night. “They tend to make up for the sleep deficit by sleeping later on weekends,” says Dr. Ojile.

As the doctor generally advises people to pay back their sleep debt, he cautions that when teens make up sleep on weekends, it can cause further trouble. “Because of the variations of sleep and wake time, it could lead to problems with sleep limitation during the week, circadian rhythm disruption and insomnia.” His recommendation is that they make an effort to go to bed on school nights at a time that enables them to get nine or ten hours of sleep.

Concern about sleep deprived kids is nothing new. Experts have been fretting about tired children since at least 1897, research shows. But the problem is even greater these days with the vast amounts of time kids are spending with computers, cell phones and televisions in bed. “The most important thing for children from falling off to sleep on time,” says Dr. Ojile.

While enforcing strict bed times may seem daunting to some parents, Dr. Ojile insists that it is critical. “Sleep is important to a student’s overall health as diet and exercise.”