

FAQs on School Start Time

Adjusting school start times in my district will take a lot of time and effort. Is it really worth it?

Yes. Two decades worth of concrete and indisputable evidence from around the world on adolescent sleep rhythms, sleep loss and the effect of later school start times reveals: less depression, fewer car accidents, better academic performance, less substance use, less tardiness, improved graduation rates and less obesity.

How about waiting to adjust school start times when we are closing or opening a school or need to change the bus schedule for another reason?

Waiting only delays student benefits. Sleep is essential for life and needs to be viewed as a basic biologic imperative, like the need to eat or use the bathroom. Policy and practice changes need to be adopted to allow teenagers the right amount of sleep (8-10 hours) at the right time (10:45pm - 8:00am) to feel well rested and be successful.

Why 8:30 am? Isn't 8:00 am good enough?

Data on those schools that moved their start times to 8 am rather than 8:30 or later, revealed only incremental results. In these schools with an earlier school start time, less than half of the students were able to obtain 8 hours of sleep or more. This amount of sleep is the "tipping point" needed as research reveals clear benefits for students who obtain 8 hours of sleep or more in respect to depression and substance use like caffeine, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

<http://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/162769>

With a later school start time for middle school and high school students, won't kids just stay up later at night?

Contrary to fears and expectations, there is evidence that students will obtain more sleep when school start time is shifted later.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24336089>

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Wouldn't teens get more sleep if parents just made them go to bed earlier and take away TV and cell phone access?

While good parenting includes limiting access to TV and cell phones in the evening, along with setting and enforcing bedtimes, that's not good enough. Science reveals teenagers have a shift in their sleep cycle that is due to developmental changes which signals the brain to feel sleepy. As a result, teens are generally unable to fall asleep before about 10:45 PM and the brain remains in the sleep mode until about 8 AM.

Are there many school districts in Minnesota considering the switch?

Yes. More and larger schools in the state have identified ways to overcome common concerns by communicating with parents and community members about busing, extracurricular activities, including athletics, and adjusting elementary age start times if needed. They have overcoming barriers to positively impact the health and well-being of their students.

School Policy and Practice Changes that Can Improve Sleep for Students



- Change to a later school start time, 8:30 or later
- Eliminate zero hour
- Avoid core curriculum and AP classes first hour, if school start time cannot be changed
- Make electronic homework submission deadlines earlier in the evening, not 11:59 pm
- End official school activities (e.g., sports and play practices) by a reasonable time to allow students time for a family dinner and no later than 10 hours before bus pick-up the next day
- Coordination between teachers to avoid students having several tests in on day
- When giving iPads or other electronic devices to students, provide guidelines to turn them off at least 1 hour before bed
- Include Sleep Education in health class
- Assess for sleep deprivation when counseling students about behavioral issues or preparing an individual plan