



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 of worldwide, indisputable evidence on adolescent sleep rhythms, sleep loss and the effect of later school start times reveals: better academic performance, improved graduation rates; less depression, substance use, tardiness, obesity and car accidents.

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 (10:45 p.m. – 8:00 a.m. is when most teens sleep best) to feel well rested, successful and healthy.

Why is an 8:30 a.m. school start time recommended? Isn't 8:00 a.m. good enough?

Data on schools that moved their start times to 8 a.m. rather than 8:30 a.m. or later, revealed less robust results. In 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 with respect to depression and substance use like caffeine, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

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.

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 biological shift in their sleep cycle that is due to developmental changes which actually signal the brain to feel sleepy later. Thus, teens can have a difficult time falling asleep before about 10:45 p.m. and the brain remains in the sleep mode until about 8 a.m.

Sports are important in our school district. Will moving the start time effect our programs?

Yes, for the better. Coaches are appreciating the competitive edge a good night sleep can provide as players are more “on their game.” Team members demonstrate improved performance, remember plays better and are more alert, leading to fewer injuries [\[LW1\]](#) . Professional sports teams are adjusting travel schedules to allow their players adequate time to sleep. To allow for time in the evening, school districts in our state are

doing away with 2 and a half hour practices and are stressing the importance of “coaching smarter, rather than coaching longer.”

Is there a cost to moving to a later school start time? Will bus routes need to be added and will that increase taxes?

To avoid additional costs, school districts who do not have money in their budget to add buses will often flip school start times and bus routes, so the elementary age students take the early bus routes instead of the older students.

Will having elementary age children start earlier effect their sleep and health?

While there is not a wealth of research around elementary-aged students starting earlier, biologically this makes sense. Younger children are naturally predisposed to earlier bedtimes and earlier wake-up times. They are already focused, engaged and ready for learning at this time of day.

My child is very busy with sports and other extracurricular activities, plus hours of homework each night. How are we supposed to fit it all in if there is less time in the evening?

Parents want children to “do well” and “be well.” Finding the right balance between these two can sometimes be a challenge. If a child is overscheduled, they may have trouble keeping up with homework, feel tired, anxious, depressed or frequently complain of headaches or stomach aches which can be a sign of stress. Make sure your child has time for meals and to obtain the right amount of sleep. Allow for down-time and staying connected as a family.

Are there many school districts in Minnesota considering the switch?

Yes. A growing number of large districts 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 overcome barriers to positively impact the health and well-being of their students.

I would like to know more about sleep and the topic of moving school start times to see the research myself. Where can I go to learn more?

American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) www.sleepeducation.org – a professional society comprised of clinicians, scientists and other healthcare professionals. They serve as a leading voice in the sleep field. They set standards and promote excellence in sleep medicine health care, education and research. The AASM public education website is full of information on sleep and sleep disorders for all ages, including teenagers.

The National Sleep Foundation www.sleepfoundation.org – an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to improving public health and safety through public understanding of sleep and sleep disorders, and by supporting public education, sleep-related research, and advocacy.

Start School Later www.startschoollater.net – an advocacy group of health professionals, sleep scientists, educators, parents, students and other concerned citizens working to ensure that all public schools can set hours compatible with health, safety, equity and learning. The site offers educational materials and links to numerous articles and research. They also serve as a centralized launching pad for local chapters who are advocating for later start times in their regions and communities.