Healthy School Start Times and SDUSD
Doing what’s best for our students

“The positive feedback I’ve received from students, parents and staff regarding our change to a later start time has been overwhelming. Parents have reported to me that their mornings at home have gone from a battle over getting their middle schooler out of bed, to peaceful mornings where they are actually able to eat breakfast with their child. Students have reported appreciating the extra sleep. Staff have reported morning classes have higher levels of student engagement in years past. Students appear more alert and focused.”
 ~Kyle Keenan, principal of Biddeford Middle School, Biddeford, ME

"I think the tone of the day has changed dramatically. That's reflected in the overall (mood) of the student body. It's very clear to me it's a more relaxed opening of school than with the 7:25 a.m. start time. Students seem to be more alert and they don't seem to be rushing to get to class within seconds of getting to school."
 ~ Tom Conrad, Nauset High School Principal, Nauset, MA

It’s hard, it’s courageous, but Sharon would never go back. “Once the School Committee made the decision, where there’s a will there’s a way. And if this is the right thing for our students and their growth, we had to find a way to make that happen. If I polled 1,200 students now, I’d get 1,200 kids saying, ‘I would never go back to school at 7:25.”
 ~ Sharon Principal, Jose Libano, Sharon MA.

“The results were stunning. There’s no other word to use,’’ said “We didn’t think we’d get that much bang for the buck.’’
 ~Patricia Moss, Academic Dean, St. George’s School, Middletown, R.I.

**Healthy High School Start Times:**

**Why should high schools start no earlier than 8:30 AM?**

* After decades of compelling scientific research, we now know that early school start times pose serious health and safety risks to teenage children.
* At puberty, kids’ body clocks shift. This circadian rhythm shift makes it harder for them to fall asleep until later at night (for teens, closer to 11 p.m.) and leads to them sleeping later in the morning. Waking a 16-year-old at 6:30 a.m. is the equivalent of waking a 40-year-old at 4:30 a.m.
* Teens require 8.5-9.5 hours of sleep per night. When schools start too early in the morning, adolescents wind up sleep-deprived.
* As a result, they’re more at risk for depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, obesity and substance use, as well as serious health conditions later in life. They’re also at risk for drowsy-driving crashes.
* At school, too-early start times result in more absences and tardies, lower test scores and graduation rates, and even increased rates of student-athlete injuries.
* Moving start times to 8:30 a.m. or later has been shown to be the single best way to address adolescent sleep deprivation and its associated health and public-safety risks. That’s why the **CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, American Psychological Association** and others all recommend this.
* Later start times are also seen as an equity issue, given that kids from minority populations and lower socioeconomic status families get less sleep than their counterparts.
* Studies have shown that when start times are moved later, kids with the lowest scores show the biggest increases.

**How do start times affect teacher outcomes and academic success?**

Repeated studies have shown that when the school day starts later grades, standardized test scores and graduation rates go up.

* Economists have found that a one-hour delay in start time increased math test scores by 3.3 percentile points and reading test scores by 3.7 points. In addition, the lowest-scoring students showed the biggest jumps. *(Source: article in* Economics of Education Review*, Dec. 2012)*
* Academic gains are almost DOUBLE for financially disadvantaged or lower-performing kids.
* A one-hour delay in start times produces the same academic benefit as being in a class with one-third fewer students or with a teacher whose performance is one standard deviation higher. *(Source: Teny M. Shapiro, Santa Clara University economist)*
* When 30,000 high-school students in 29 schools in 7 states shifted start times to 8:30 a.m. or later, the average graduation rate increased from 79 percent to 88 percent. *(Source: article in* Sleep Health*, Journal of the National Sleep Foundation, April 2017)*
* This same study found that the average attendance rate increased from 90% to 94%.
* Absences and tardiness will decrease and academic achievement will increase. According to the 2016-17 *California Healthy Kids Survey* of SDUSD students, 11% of 7th graders, 16% of 9th graders, and 23% of 11th graders reported they had missed school during the last 30 days because they “didn’t get enough sleep.”
* The estimated benefit of an 8:30 AM or later school start time per student is a cumulative increase of 0.175 standard deviations in test scores by the time the student finishes high school. This impact is equivalent to an additional two months of schooling. When translated into earnings, the average student who starts school later would make about $17,500 more over the course of her life (Brookings, Sept. 27, 2011). https://www.brookings.edu/research/organizing-schools-to-improve-student-achievement-start-times-grade-configurations-and-teacher-assignments/

**What about zero period?**

* In many cases, zero periods are used to offer enrichment opportunities such as art or music, which have been shown to be beneficial for critical thinking, brain development, and academic success. However, with the current school schedules, these “zero period” options may begin as early as 6:30 a.m. With a later school day, zero period would also start later. For children for whom private lessons aren’t an option due to family finances, these classes provide enrichment opportunities they wouldn’t have otherwise.

**Why should high schools change to healthy school start times?**

* Healthy start times are a public health issue. The District should assist in the protection of the health and safety of our children; yet currently, students are required to wake at a time that has been proven to be unhealthy and unsafe.
* Establishing a “no earlier than” start time is no different than setting a minimum number of hours per day of classroom time or a minimum number of instructional hours.
* Start times of 8:30 a.m. or later have been proven to increase test scores and graduation rates, which are both regularly assessed by the state’s Department of Education to measure educational effectiveness.
* According to the 2016-17 *California Healthy Kids Survey* of SDUSD students, 11% of 7th graders, 16% of 9th graders, and 23% of 11th graders reported they had missed school during the last 30 days because they “didn’t get enough sleep.”
* A 4% increase in the attendance rate could yield additional funding for the SDUSD.

**What are the mental health implications?**

There is a proven link between sleep deprivation, school start times and teen hopelessness and suicidal ideation.

* The most recent California Healthy Kids Survey found that 19% of 9th-graders and 19% of 11th-graders had considered suicide within the past 30 days. Additionally, 26% of 7th-graders, 32% of 9th-graders and 34% of 11th-graders felt chronically sad or hopeless.
* Over 60 studies have found correlations between chronic insufficient sleep and suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death of teenagers. Sleeping less than 8 hours per night is associated with a statistically significant greater risk of suicide in teenagers than sleeping 8 to 9 hours. With every hour of lost sleep, there is an 11% increase in teen suicide attempts. Depression is not a moderating factor.
* Adolescents who experience chronic sleep deprivation because of early school start times are likely to have decreased ability to regulate negative emotions and moods.  Studies demonstrate that when healthy adolescents’ sleep duration is restricted to 6.5 hours per night for 5 nights or more, they are significantly more tense/anxious, angry/hostile, confused, and fatigued.
* Daytime sleepiness is associated with adverse cognitive and emotional consequences such as impaired decision-making and increased impulsivity. Daytime sleepiness predicts the onset of alcohol use, heavy drinking, and alcohol-related consequences; and shorter sleep duration predicted the onset of marijuana use.
* Students with insufficient sleep have higher odds of engaging in the majority of school violence-related behaviors examined compared to students with sufficient sleep. Males with insufficient sleep are at increased risk of weapon carrying at school, a finding not observed for females with insufficient sleep.
* Adolescents who sleep > 9 hours have better life satisfaction scores, fewer general health complaints, and better quality relationships with family compared to those sleeping less.
* For each hour less of sleep among adolescents studied in the Fairfax County, Va., Youth Survey, feelings of being sad or hopeless increased by 38% and the odds of seriously considering suicide increased 42%. It was also associated with 58% greater odds of attempted suicide.

**How do start times affect students from lower socioeconomic status families and minority populations?**

* Later start times are seen as an equity issue, given that research shows that kids from minority populations and lower socioeconomic status families get less sleep than their counterparts. This serves to widen both current academic gaps and future opportunity gaps.
* Students from low-income families may not have a parent available to drive them to school, making them dependent on public transportation or responsible for walking or riding their bikes to school. Doing so may result in longer travel times, which means they may be waking even earlier than their counterparts and therefore may be even more sleep deprived (and at increased risk if they’re leaving the house while it’s still dark).
* Students who experience or perceive the experience of discrimination have “poorer average sleep” than those who do not. These students already suffer from inadequate sleep for good health, safety and learning. Unhealthy school start times adds to their sleep deprivation.

**How will this affect working parents?**

* For just about every working family who will find a new bell schedule convenient, there is another that will find it inconvenient. It is literally impossible for a district to schedule the operating hours of all of its schools – kindergarten, grade school, middle school, and high school – at times that are aligned with all the varying work schedules of all parents. For example, current early start times are not convenient for many parents whose jobs keep them (and often their children) up later at night, like those in retail, restaurants, entertainment, public safety, or those who work two jobs.
* Many families also already face change when their kids move from elementary to middle school or from middle to high school, which may have different schedules.
* There are ways that schools can help working families, such as opening the cafeteria or library, providing enrichment opportunities, allowing more kids to eat breakfast at school, and facilitating carpooling. However, just because **some** parents may be unable to provide healthy sleep hours for their teens does not mean that school district policy should **prevent all** of their teen students from getting the amount of sleep doctors say they need to be healthy and safe.
* Finally, **within the** **same family**, work schedules, school schedules, and carpool opportunities frequently change. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor statistics, people change jobs on average every 4 years. Commitment to children's health and safety, however, is a constant and should be the foundation upon which school decisions are made.

**How will this affect kids who get themselves to school?**

* By high school, many students are responsible for getting themselves to school. Having new, sleep-deprived drivers on the road is a public safety issue: teens and young adults are involved in more than half of all drowsy driving crashes each year!
* Students who walk, bike or take the bus to school may currently be doing so while it is still dark, putting them at risk.

**What about kids who work?**

* Teenagers who work long hours to help support their families are particularly hurt when school starts too early in the morning. It’s not unusual for these students to have to work until 10 or 11 p.m., which makes it difficult for them to get enough sleep if they have to wake at 5 or 6 a.m. to get to school on time.
* Additionally, many employers who hire high-school students generally don’t require the additional staffing until 4 p.m. or later, as opposed to in the early afternoon hours.

**Don’t early start times prepare teens for the real world?**

* Adolescence is a time of rapid growth and change that requires more sleep than adulthood does. While adults need at least 7 hours of sleep per night, teens need 8.5 to 9.5 hours.
* Moreover, the circadian rhythm shift that takes place during adolescence makes it harder for teens to fall asleep until close to 11 p.m. When combined with too-early start times, the result is sleep deprivation. This shift also means that waking a teen at 6:30 a.m. can be seen as the equivalent of waking a 40-year-old at 4:30 a.m.
* Adolescence is a time of rapid brain development as well as a surge in hormones and emotions. At the same time, adolescents often have impaired judgment and high levels of academic stress. This is a period when they need protection and support, not a boot camp for adult life.
* Sleep-deprived teens are also at increased risk for depression, suicide, risk-taking behaviors and unintentional injuries and even death. For more information, please refer to “**What are the mental health implications?”**
* Early start times were not always the case. According to the National Center for Health Research, in the 1950s and 1960s, most schools started between 8:30 and 9 a.m.
* Post-high school start times vary. College courses generally do not require students to be in their seats every morning at 7:30 a.m. or even earlier. The work world includes a wide array of job options and work schedules and a corresponding array of start times.

**If kids know they can sleep later, won't they just stay up later?**

In fact, studies show that starting school later results in more sleep for teens. For example, one study of 9,000 students in 8 public high schools in 3 states found that the number of students who get 8 or more hours of sleep on school nights increased as the school start time moved later, showing that teens generally didn’t move their bedtimes later because their start times had changed.

**Don't social media, technology, and screen time contribute to sleep deprivation?**

* Although late night screen time should be discouraged, even teens with impeccable “sleep hygiene” have circadian rhythms that make it difficult for them to get enough sleep if school starts too early in the morning.
* The late-hour melatonin release that occurs during adolescence means that teens are biologically unable to fall asleep until close to 11 p.m.
* Conversely, when school starts later in the morning, teens overwhelmingly spend that additional time in the morning sleeping, not on their computers, texting, etc.