

New Jersey Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics
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POSITION STATEMENT: Recommendation for Starting Schools after 8:30 a.m. in Alignment with National AAP Policy Statement

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Subject:

Adolescents' brains continue to develop through age 25 and, after infancy, adolescence is the second most critical time period for brain growth. Despite the known importance of sleep for brain development, early school start times coupled with natural changes in sleep patterns during adolescence, may put students at greater risk for insufficient sleep. Inadequate sleep patterns among adolescents yield negative impacts on academic achievement, as well as physical and mental health concerns. Evidence suggests that adolescents require 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night in order to maintain an optimal level of physical and mental health. Due to hormonal changes during puberty, this is difficult to achieve for adolescents. School start times must work to optimize the health and well-being of all adolescents.

Background:

School start times shifted to earlier times from the mid 1980's to the early 2000s to solve transportation issues. Conflicting this shift to earlier school start times, research states that almost all adolescents experience a physiologic change in circadian rhythms, making it difficult to fall asleep before 10:45pm.

Between 2007 and 2017, the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) found a significant decrease in the prevalence of teens getting 8 or more hours of sleep. On average, 3 in 4 high school students sleep less than 8 hours per night. Evidence strongly indicates that lack of sleep has harmful effects on adolescents, including negative impacts on mental health issues, learning capacity, and safety; increased risk of obesity, heart disease, and growth suppression; increased risk of impulsive behaviors, including substance abuse and sexual risk taking; and greater risk of sports injuries. Additional evidence reveals that increased sleep has positive effects on adolescents, such as improved academic and athletic performance, and better mood. A decrease in mental health issues, absenteeism, and tardiness are also correlated with longer sleep time.

In-depth analyses of sleep patterns among adolescents demonstrate that later school start times are associated with longer sleep duration. When school start times were delayed 25-60 min, correspondingly, total sleep time increased from 25 to 77 min per weeknight.

Many recent studies demonstrate that districts who delayed school start times saw several student benefits, including improved grades, attendance, graduation rates and feelings of greater efficacy. Other findings display a decline in tardiness, disciplinary incidents, mental health issues, substance abuse, and automobile accidents.

Position:

The New Jersey Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (NJAAP) supports policy changes to promote the physical and mental health and well-being of students. NJAAP supports efforts to delay middle and high school start times to 8:30am or later in alignment with the National AAP Policy Statement, *School Start Times for Adolescents*.

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