



Anne Arundel County Maryland Chapter  
health, safety and equity in education

# Orlando Sentinel

Change a few local details and this *Orlando Sentinel* editorial could be about Anne Arundel County Public Schools — and every other district in the nation with dangerously early school start times.

## For kids' sake, start ~~Orange~~ schools later

**For the health and educational achievement of students, high schools need to start later in ~~Orange~~ County.**

High school starts too early in ~~Orange~~ County, threatening the health and educational achievement of young people.

Too many students stand at bus stops in the dark, half awake, hoping to beat their school's morning bell at 7:30 or earlier. Anyone familiar with the sleep needs of teenagers knows that is a bad situation.

Warnings are plentiful. Insufficient sleep is an "important public-health issue that significantly affects the health and safety, as well as the academic success, of our nation's middle- and high-school students," concluded the American Academy of Pediatrics, which recommends a start time no earlier than 8:30 a.m. By that time, Orange County high-schoolers have been in class an hour.

Adolescents who don't get enough sleep are more likely to perform poorly in school, engage in risky behavior involving drug and alcohol abuse, and be overweight and sedentary, researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found. Earlier bed times don't work because teens get sleepy later than younger children.

The ~~Orange~~ County School Board and administrators have been wringing their hands over this problem for nearly a year with little to show for it. Why is it taking so long to address a known risk to student health and achievement?

The short answer is money and politics. The school system spends less on buses by using the same vehicles for elementary-, middle- and high-school students, and so must stagger starting times. High schools drew the short straw and start the day first despite the well-documented risk. So cost is a factor...

[Under the current proposal] high schools would start about ~~45 minutes~~ later, with a first bell at 8:15 a.m. for many students. Meanwhile, middle and elementary schools wouldn't have to make disruptive changes. Their schedules would be altered by 45 minutes or less.

Still, there are skeptics who worry such a change would cost too much. The latest estimates are for a ~~one-time~~ cost for extra buses of \$3.8 million and ~~annual operating expenses~~ of \$2.5 million. Considering an overall school system budget of \$1.6 billion, the added operating cost would be manageable, less than ~~two-tenths~~ of 1 percent of the budget....

Really, it comes down to this: Any school official who has closed his or her mind to solving this problem merely because of cost or fear of political backlash may want to find a different line of work.

Board members and school administrators aren't just bean counters or bus-route planners, although that is part of the job. Rather, their main responsibility is to ensure the healthy development of young minds and to prepare the next generation to be productive members of the ~~Central Florida~~ community.

That can't be accomplished when the students closest to adulthood spend their days, as one researcher put it, "pathologically sleepy."

— January 23, 2016

Anne Arundel

Anne Arundel

7:17

For more than

more than a decade

1 hour 15 minutes

8:30 a.m.

shouldn't

should

8:1

1.17



Annapolis-area