



health, safety and equity in education

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Start School Later: Report on Economic Benefits Should Urge State-Level Action **August 30, 2017**

A newly released report by the RAND Corporation suggests an urgent need for states to take action to ensure healthy school start times, according to the nonprofit Start School Later.

The report, "[Later school start times in the U.S.](#)" explores the economic implications of school start time shifts to 8:30 a.m. In recent years the American Academy of Pediatrics and other health groups have recommended middle and high school start times after 8:30 a.m. due to changes in sleep that occur during puberty. These changes mean that waking early for their school commute deprives most teenagers of the sleep their growing brains and bodies need, and as a result it sets them up for car crashes, depression, substance abuse, and many academic and chronic health issues.

Using a "novel macroeconomic modelling approach" the report concluded that the benefits of later school start times outweigh any costs of changing bell times, with an estimated economic gain of \$8.6 billion to the national economy within just two years of changes, and a gain of \$83 billion within ten years. These cited outcomes are conservative and only measure benefits due to improved academic performance and reduced teen car crashes in 47 states. The authors clarify that they did not study the implications of likely reduced teen suicide rates, decreased obesity, and improved mental health—all of which have been empirically tied to sleep. This work expands on an earlier report by the Brookings Institution that showed a 9-to-1 benefit-to-cost ratio.

"The whole purpose of public education is to make an investment in our children," says Start School Later's Implementation Liaison Wheatleigh Dunham. "Schools often make budget decisions based on differentiating between what they must have, versus what they would like to have. This report by RAND, a highly respected and non-partisan think-tank, shows that evidence-based school start times is a 'must have.' We've known for years that later school start times are vital for the physical and emotional health of our adolescents, and now we know that later school start times are vital for the economic health of our nation."

The report examined state-level changes to school-day start times, which is a growing focus. "Because these findings show benefits to public health and the economy, they strongly suggest that states have an interest in ensuring healthy school hours," says Start School Later's Executive Director Terra Ziporyn Snider, PhD. "While specific nuances to school schedules need to be set at the local level, when states set 8:30 a.m. as a limit on the first bell they are acting to protect student health and boost the state's bottom line." In fact, California's Senate Bill 328, which would limit middle and high schools from starting before 8:30 a.m., has already been passed by the Senate and by the Assembly's Education Committee and will be considered by the Assembly's Appropriations Committee later this week.

Start School Later is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working to ensure school start times compatible with health, safety, education, and equity. Dunham is part of an Implementation Team that can provide assistance and consultation to schools and communities who wish to implement healthier school start times. For more information visit Start School Later's website at www.startschoolater.net.

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