



Athletics and School Start Times:

At the 2012 American Academy of Pediatrics Conference Dr. Mathew Milewski reported research that showed that teens who obtain less than 8 hours of sleep each night experience 68% more sports injuries than students who obtain more sleep. This wasn't surprising considering that sleep deprivation is known to impair hand-eye coordination and peripheral vision. Because we engage in tissue repair and glycogen storage during sleep it is also not a surprise that chronic sleep deprivation is associated with decreased growth, slower healing, and less endurance – particularly among athletes. Studies on swimmers, football players, tennis players, and basketball players at Duke University showed improvements in speed and accuracy after obtaining more sleep each night.

Because of the links between early school start times and chronic sleep loss among teens, myriad national health groups recommend middle and high schools start after 8:30am. However the logistics of changing school day start (and end) times create a worry for many school athletics directors.

Sports and physical activity is an important part of child health and well-being, so to get input directly from the sidelines representatives from the national non-profit Start School Later, Inc contacted schools that changed start times to hear how the adjustments impacted athletics. ADs and coaches from Ohio to Kentucky to Rhode Island were positive about changes made in their schools (even though many admit that they were skeptical before the changes were made). Here are a few responses, shared with permission:

John R. Mackay, Director of Athletics and Head Football Coach - St. George's School in Newport, RI
St. George's School has 48 teams in 22 sports.

Most students in this school are required to play at least 2 sports per season.

The benefits of later start times for this school were cited in the Journal of the American Medical Association's Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine in July 2010 by Owens et al.

"We have found it (switching to 8:30 start) one of the best things our school has ever done. The impact on athletics is minimal. Coaches have given up 5 minutes per day of practice time, willingly (our varsity teams normally get 2 hours max, subvarsity 1.5 hours max per day). It all depends on when you end your academic day as well (we have classes 6 days a week, as a boarding school, with most athletic contests played on Wed. and Sat. when our academic day is shorter)."

(12/8/2011 email to Stacy Simera, SSL Communications Director)



Donald Adkins, Athletics Director - Fayette County Schools in Kentucky
In 1998 Fayette high schools changed start times from 7:30 to 8:30am.

Afterwards teen auto accidents decreased 24.3% according to Danner and Phillips, 2008

*"The time issue has never been a problem for us.
Our schools start time is 8:25 and practice after usually starts around 3:30 or 3:45."*
(1/12/12 email to Simera)



Lisa Bogan, School Start Time Specialist - Connecticut League of Women Voters
Wilton, CT schools changed times in 2003

"Wilton is a self-described 'sports town'. All sports organizations were tough opponents to change, insisting that a later start/end time would lead to expulsion of Wilton teams from the athletic conference. This has not happened – the other towns in the conference have accommodated Wilton's later arrival at games and many are looking at making the change themselves. Participation in school athletic programs has continued to rise. Even the upper elementary school... has experienced an increase in extra-curricular involvement."

(Excerpt from 2009 public statement)

