



**To: Superintendent Entwistle, Scarborough School Board, Principal Creech, Principal Hathorn**

**From: Dr. Peter G Amann, MD**

**Date: February 28, 2016**

**Re: Physician recommendation to change middle and high school start times to 8:30 AM**

In the US, only 40 percent of all Middle and High Schools start school before 8:00am and 15 percent before 7:30am.<sup>1</sup> This early start time prevents many students from getting the 8.5-9.5 hours per night that most teenagers and young adults need.<sup>2</sup>

*Our local schools have some of the earliest starting bells in the United States. This means that students often wake between 5:30-6:00am to catch an early morning bus.*

The American Academy of Pediatrics and The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention recommend middle and high schools not start before 8:30am. The National Association of School Nurses, The Society of Pediatric Nurses, Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, and the National Education Association have all endorsed this policy with resolutions encouraging schools to follow the evidence when setting schedules. Earlier this month, the American Sleep Association (ASA) has released a position statement calling for healthier school start times and announcing a new partnership with the national non-profit Start School Later.

Citing research on the changes in sleep patterns during puberty, the ASA, a coalition of sleep physicians and scientists, stated: "The American Sleep Association position on school start times in that middle school and high school should not start before 08:00. A time closer to 09:00 or later would be preferable."

### **Health benefits of starting school later**

1. Sleep is critical for a child's mental and physical health, especially during adolescence when the brain develops more rapidly than at any other time in human development after the age of two. Puberty triggers a sleep-wake delay caused by a change in the brain's melatonin production. Biologically students at this age are programmed to fall asleep about two hours later than younger students, but still require the same 8.5-9.5 optimum sleep time. On a practical level this means most teens cannot fall asleep before 11pm and have trouble waking before 8am.
2. There is a wealth of evidence documenting the negative impact that early start times have on both academic achievement and behavioral and emotional wellbeing. Sleep deprivation is directly linked to obesity, diabetes, and behavioral and emotional health issues. Teens turn to increased caffeine and medication usage, which in turn can lead to long-term addiction and chemical dependency.

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<sup>1</sup> School Start Time Change: An In-Depth Examination of School Districts in the United States 4/15/2014

<sup>2</sup> "School Start Times for Adolescents," American Academy of Pediatrics, September 2014.



- 3. There is no scientific evidence that changing the start of school will make teens stay up later. However, there is a growing body of evidence that pushing back the school day by one hour to 8:30AM can positively impact physical and mental health, learning and performance, attendance, graduation rates, and tests scores.

**Common hurdles and myths associated with changing school schedules**

We are well aware that changing the starting bell has many implications and factors to consider. You are not alone in this challenge. We provide for the Board’s consideration, a recent *Blueprint for Change*, prepared by the Children’s National Medical Center’s change team.<sup>3</sup> They studied 1,000 schools throughout the United States who initiated a delayed start to the school day in their communities. Their findings show that in most cases, starting school later:

- 1) Dramatically increased daily attendance
- 2) Reduced tardiness rates
- 3) Improved standardized test scores**
- 4) In many cases actually reduced costs

Although there were initial concerns, none of the districts that delayed start times identified a loss of community support, changes in traffic patterns, or reduction in student involvement in extracurricular activities once the changes were made. The negative impact was largely perceived to be on family work schedules and in all communities, people adapted.

**What are other districts in our region doing?**

Here in Southern Maine, Greeley High School recently voted to move their start time to 8:00 AM. South Portland recently found that 85% of their middle and high school students are not getting 8 hours of sleep and nearly 20% are getting less than 6 hours. Saco, Biddeford, Old Orchard Beach and Dayton school boards will be voting in the coming weeks to move all middle and high school start times to 8:30 AM. This time change has been done with no cost impact to transportation and no child waiting for a bus in the dark before 7 AM. These communities were able to adjust elementary K-5 student schedules 15 minutes earlier, to a more age-appropriate starting time for younger children, whose circadian rhythms make them ready to learn earlier than their teenage counterparts.

If other communities can make this change, we believe Scarborough can too. As parents, residents and/or practicing physicians in the Scarborough community, we respectfully ask that you approve a plan this year to start school after 8:30 AM for our town’s middle and high school students. We thank you for your consideration and look forward to answering your questions.

Sincerely,

Start School Later Physicians and Clinician Supporters practicing and/or residing in Scarborough with children:

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|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Dr. Peter Amann, MD  | Dr. Kristen Scopaz, MD | Dr. Ben Farino, MD       |
| Dr. Donna Kim, MD    | Dr. Mark Bouchard, MD  | Amelia Sponsellar, FNP   |
| Dr. Michael Jung, MD | Dr. Brian Youth, MD    | Dr. Ian Bristol, MD      |
| Sarah Alvarez, MD    | Dr. Jane Ho, MD        | Dr. Lucien Ouellette, MD |
| Dr. Anna Furr, DO    | Dr. Joan Pelletier, DO | Dr. Margaret Bordeau, DO |

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<sup>3</sup> School Start Time Change: An In-Depth Examination of School Districts in the United States 4/15/2014



**Additional Materials Attached:**

**Blue Print for Change: An In-Depth Examination of School Districts in the United States**  
4/15/2014

**American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement**

**Common Questions (And Answers)**

**Regional Start and End Times** for local schools