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## **Distance Learning An Opportunity To Let Teens Sleep** *COVID-19 not just pushing schools to open later in the Fall, but later in the morning*

(Annapolis, MD) Back-to-school and COVID-19 are colliding this year. Some schools are teaching online, some in-person, and some are using a hybrid model. Many middle and high schools especially are choosing to delay classes to 8:30 a.m. or later as [recommended](#) by healthcare professionals and scientists.

"Changes that once seemed unimaginable and impossible are suddenly imaginable and possible," says Terra Ziporyn Snider, PhD, Start School Later's Executive Director and Co-Founder. "We keep hearing about districts that are moving to schedules that give students a shot at healthy sleep, both during the pandemic and beyond."

During puberty, adolescents are biologically programmed to fall asleep 2-3 hours later than children and adults, and to wake later in the morning. Many find it difficult to fall asleep before 11 p.m. or to wake before 8 a.m.

"Even in typical years, [common excuses](#) for not starting class when teens are awake and ready to learn are almost always resolvable," says Snider. "But now these excuses--which include school buses and after-school activities--are gone."

Unfortunately, not all schools are taking advantage of this unique school year to schedule learning better aligned with adolescent biology. "If you see a 'teenage monster' return to your home when the school year starts," warns retired pediatrician Max Van Gilder, MD, Start School Later statewide coordinator for New York, "that monster is a normal teen who is sleep deprived, and the reason they are sleep deprived is because of early start times."

[Recent research from Seattle](#) aligns with dozens of [other studies](#) showing that when school start times move later in the morning, teens don't stay up later staring at their devices as some skeptics predicted; instead, they actually get more sleep. One 2020 [study](#) suggests students are sleeping more during the pandemic, and parents report that their kids are happier, more communicative, and less moody.

Because most U.S. students are not returning to in-person school full-time this year, there is a unique opportunity to let teens sleep according to their [unique circadian rhythms](#) (body clocks). The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [American Medical Association](#), [CDC](#) ([CDC infographic](#)), [National PTA](#) and [many other](#) medical and scientific and education experts agree that adolescents

aren't ready to learn at the early-morning hours required by most U.S. school districts, and that requiring attendance before 8:30 a.m. is unsafe and unhealthy.

“Adequate sleep – along with good nutrition and regular exercise – is the foundation of a healthy body and mind,” says Snider. “During this pandemic, helping ensure teens have strong immune systems and resilient emotional health is more important than ever.”

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Start School Later is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working to ensure school start times compatible with health, safety, education, and equity. Visit their website at: <http://www.startschoollater.net>.

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