



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the problem with current start times and why do groups such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, Centers for Disease Control, Society of Pediatric Nurses, National Association of School Nurses, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and National Sleep Foundation all recommend a start time no earlier than 8:30 for adolescents?

Adolescents require 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep per night for optimum health. Sleep experts recommend natural sleep times of 11 p.m. to 8 a.m. for adolescents, yet many middle- and high-school students must wake by 6 a.m. to reach school on time.

Chronic sleep deprivation is associated with a host of medical, mental health, safety and behavioral issues:

- Depression and anxiety (Bates, 2002; [Chorney et al, 2008](#); Gibson et al, 2006; Kahn, 2006)
- Obesity (Mitchell et al, 2013; [Must and Parisi, 2009](#); Taheri et al, 2004), increased insulin resistance ([Mathews et al, 2012](#)) and poor dietary choices (Hale, 2013)
- Increased automobile accidents (Danner and Phillips, 2008; NCSDR, 1997; [Wahlstrom, 2014](#))
- Increased risk-taking and unsafe behaviors ([O'Brien, 2005](#))
- Increased sports injuries ([Milewski et al, 2012](#))
- Declines in academic performance (Kahn et al, 1989; [Wahlstrom, 2014](#)), attention and problem solving (Gibson et al, 2006; Kilgore et al, 2007)
- Suicide ([Bernert and Joiner, 2007](#))

Just as society protects young people through measures like seat belt laws and helmet policies, schools need to structure their schedules in ways that allow students adequate sleep.

Why make elementary school starts earlier than those of middle and high schools?

All three districts have two bus runs, one for high schools and middle schools and one for elementary schools. Districts would have to double their bus and driver fleets to accommodate a single start and that is not practical or realistic. Elementary-age children are biologically programmed to awaken and be alert earlier than teens.

All three districts have created schedules that seek to minimize bus pick-ups before 7 a.m. as those are difficult for students of any age. The proposed start times address safety concerns, minimizing the risks of students waiting for buses or walking to school in pre-dawn winter darkness.

Why is a regional approach critical?

All three districts (RSU 13, SAD 40 and Five Towns CSD) send students to the Midcoast School of Technology in Rockland, along with several island schools (all of which favor a later school start due to their dependence on the ferry schedule). The MCST can adjust its schedule if the three districts concurrently adopt a later school start time of around 8:30 a.m. Synchronized adoption of a later school start will also facilitate local event scheduling and afternoon programming.



Won't later start times disrupt extracurricular activities?

Schools that have adopted later start times have found extracurricular activity participation remains largely unchanged. Athletics Directors report that the logistics work out better than anticipated, and research confirms that students experience fewer sports injuries when well-rested.

Won't teens just stay up later if school starts later?

In schools that have adopted later school start times, adolescent bedtimes remain largely unchanged and total sleep time increases.

Have other communities changed their school start times?

Westbrook, Topsham, Brunswick, Biddeford, South Portland, Scarborough, Old Orchard Beach, Yarmouth, Cape Elizabeth, and Cumberland have adopted later school start times.

Many colleges have also begun to alter schedules due to sleep research, starting the first classes at 8:30 a.m. or later.

Does it cost anything to move school start times?

Not necessarily: it depends on how schools choose to alter bus schedules. Any investment is minimal compared to the high costs for adolescents associated with chronic sleep deprivation (see the first question).

Isn't it the parents' responsibility to make sure kids get enough sleep? Don't we need to prepare teens for the real world—rather than coddling them?

Parents and teens are responsible for healthy bedtimes, and schools are responsible for healthy wake times. The changes in sleep that occur during puberty are temporary (ending by the time young people reach their mid-twenties). The early school start times that many schools now have were adopted before experts recognized the shift in sleep cycle that occurs during puberty.

What if the new schedule complicates before-school and afterschool child care?

The proposed schedule will make it easier for parents to get younger children out the door to school, allowing older ones to get themselves off if parents need to leave for work. Check with your district for details but schools are working with local afterschool programs to minimize this impact.