



Maryland State Chapter health, safety and equity in education

Dr. Leana Wen
Baltimore City Commissioner of Health
1001 E. Fayette Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

December 12, 2016

Dear Dr. Wen,

I am writing to ask for your support in encouraging Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) to adjust their school hours to those healthy and safe for all students.

Contrary to the recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Medical Association (AMA), and a wealth of other public health groups, only 11 of Baltimore's 61 middle schools and 5 of the 17 high schools, start after 8:30 a.m. Most middle schools open at 7:30 or 7:45 a.m., with high schools usually opening closer to 8:00 a.m. The reason for the public health recommendations for school start times is directly correlated with the many adverse physical and psychological impacts and health and safety risks for adolescents with chronic sleep deprivation and early school start times. **Only 50% of Baltimore's middle school students and 24.6% of it high school students are getting a minimum of 8 hours of sleep each night, rendering them chronically sleep deprived** (2014 Youth Risk Behavior Survey).

Adolescents are subject to sleep deprivation as the result of changing/delayed sleep patterns and the early time at which they must catch buses/walk to school. Among the **public health risks** to teens from early school start times: obesity, eating disorders, diabetes, athletic injuries, substance abuse, depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Among the **safety risks** to the students with early school start times: drowsy driving (equivalent to drunk driving), risky behaviors, and a lack of visibility of students of all ages waiting for buses/walking to school before dawn on dark winter streets.

Making an adjustment to school hours sounds like a win-win situation doesn't it then, with well-documented health, safety, academic, and economic benefits? Though a few Maryland jurisdictions have developmentally appropriate school hours, most do not. As a 2014 joint study between the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) eloquently noted **"...in preserving the status quo whereby school start times are a matter for each local jurisdiction, the state risks letting local resistance trump a strong body of scientific evidence that sleep is critical to health and academic achievement."** The fear of change by both the public and educational institutions themselves stifles the conversation.

I am hopeful that starting a joint conversation between the Department of Health and BCPS regarding this public health issue uniquely governed by educational policy, can be a part of your department's efforts in 2017. I am available to discuss this more with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Lisa VanBuskirk

Chapter Leader

Start School Later Maryland

sslaaco@gmail.com

<http://www.startschoollater.net/md---statewide.html>