



Health, Safety and Equity in Education

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START TIME CHANGE HARMFUL TO PROVIDENCE STUDENTS, ORGANIZATION SAYS School Department Plan Made Behind Closed Doors, Ignores Research and Student Health

PROVIDENCE – Students will be heading to school extra early next year despite research showing that the change could negatively impact student attendance, academic performance, and health.

The earlier bell schedule, constructed by the School Department, was announced to the surprise of many school families on Friday, who weren't told about the possibility of a change, and who had no opportunity for public comment. The scheme is intended to save the department between \$2.3 - \$2.5 million in transportation costs, but comes at a cost to middle school and high school students, who need more sleep than their peers but are biologically wired to fall asleep and wake later. The plan overlooks many well-researched problems associated with earlier start times, including lower attendance rates, academic performance, and classroom attentiveness, says Start School Later, a national organization pushing for research-supported school start times associated with improved student learning and safety.

“When schools start at a healthy time, students really respond. Attendance improves, tardiness dips, students are less likely to nod off in class, and are even less likely to get into car accidents,” said Dr. Terra Ziporyn Snider, Executive Director of Start School Later. “When schools start too early, rates of depression, irritability, and drug abuse go up. Students are even more likely to visit school nurses and guidance counselors. New research suggests that sleep loss may increase risk for obesity and diabetes, though the full long-term impacts are unknown.”

Max Binder, a junior at Classical High School, said he worried that the sleeplessness he and many of his peers experience will be getting much worse. “Right now, I stay up past midnight trying to get my homework done, and I have to wake up at six o'clock the next morning. The earlier start will make it nearly impossible for me to get enough sleep next year.”

Letters announcing the School Department's decision were sent home with students on Friday to the dismay of many families. “This is an unfortunate decision that I would have opposed had I any input,” said Rebekah Greenwald Speck, who has a daughter in the Providence Public Schools. “Particularly at the high school level, where few are provided any transportation through district funding, I think we have a right to at least comment on a change as important as this before any decisions are made.”

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Start School Later, Inc. is a non-profit organization committed to ensuring healthy school hours for all students. For more information, visit: www.StartSchoolLater.net