

Need for Sleep

Historical Context

A century ago, school began around 9 am for American students. But, according to Start School Later, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to healthy and safe school hours, school start times were moved to 7:25 or earlier in most places during the 1970s and '80s. The new school start and end times are much earlier than most parents' occupational start and end times, making it more difficult to drop-off and pick-up their children. The student boards and leaders only chose this option to save money. Maximizing the students' benefits, specifically their amount of sleep, was not even considered ("Why We Must - and Can - Restore Safe & Healthy School Hours"). The decision can be excused for the officials in that time period because the science explaining teenage circadian rhythms and sleep cycles was only in its early stages. However, that excuse does not hold true for the public officials of today. Since the scientific support is strong and many groups are pushing for the change, school start times need to be moved later to complement teenage sleeping patterns.

Negative Effects of Sleep Deprivation

According to pediatric experts, teens are not going to sleep early enough in the night for them to sleep a healthy number of hours. Researchers suggest teens need between 8.5 and 9.5 hours of sleep, but according to Julie Boergers, who received her Ph. D. in child clinical psychology at the University of Denver, "only 14% achieve this goal, and approximately 70% of adolescents obtain less than 8 hours of sleep on a typical weeknight" (Boergers). According to Kathryn Walsh, an experienced, health-related journalist, this can have detrimental effects on the student's ability to focus in class, stay awake, and learn new concepts, causing even naturally bright students to fall behind in their classes. Lack of sleep significantly raises the risk of an automobile related incident, putting students in physical danger. Sleep deprived students

are likely to experience serious levels of emotional and behavioral disturbances, as well as a heightened risk of automobile related incidents (Walsh). With side effects like these affecting the majority of students today, something needs to be changed.

Scientific Perspective

One of the reasons children are losing sleep is what is known as a “circadian rhythm” (“Sleep and Teens”). According to UCLA, a prestigious and credible university, circadian rhythms are 24-hour cycles in people’s bodies that tell them when to go to sleep and when to wake up. When a person feels sleepy, it is their circadian rhythm telling them that it is time to sleep. Before students go through puberty, their circadian rhythm makes them sleepy around 7 or 8 pm. The combination of their circadian rhythm and parental supervision account for the absence of sleep deprivation in children. However, when students begin to go through puberty, their circadian rhythms can be set back as much as 3 to 4 hours, meaning students are getting sleepy around 11 or 12 pm (“Sleep and Teens”). When this is paired with a school start time of 7:20, the effects are detrimental. After factoring in an hour for a student to wake up and get ready for school, the student will only get 6-7 hours of sleep before they wake up at 6:20, which is much less than the 8.5 to 9.5 hours recommended for teens.

Social Perspective

Busy schedules make it even harder for students to obtain the recommended hours of sleep. Boodman, an experienced reporter from the Washington post, interviewed Jessica Huey who feels the pressure get to her as she regularly takes on three AP classes, a regular babysitting job, participation in a musical (whose practices stretch to 10 pm), and many more activities (Boodman). Huey suffers from sudden anxiety attacks that doctors say are related to

her lack of sleep and crazy schedule. Huey isn't the exception either; she claims that all her friends live like this. With the pressure of getting accepted into the best college, many students feel forced to jam pack their schedules with as many resume-fillers as they can, resulting in sleeping significantly less than they should each night.

Counterargument

The best method to counteract the sleep deficiency prevalent in teens today is for schools to alter their schedules in order to achieve later starting times. However, just as with any push for change, there are many who are opposed to the change. According to a well-researched, credible web page that includes many doctoral studies, one negative effect of the change is the bus logistics will end up being more expensive for the school (Morgan). Since many districts use the same buses for the high schools as they do for the elementary schools, they may need to shift elementary school start times to fit with these new bus logistics. Though inconvenient for the first year, the problem will be irrelevant after a couple years. The strongest opposing argument is that the later start times will push extra curricular activities later as well, causing the students to get to bed at a much later hour. This should not affect the amount of sleep they get because, just as the student's practices are shifted to a later time, their sleeping times will be shifted later in the same way.

Recent Success

Again, in order to allow circadian-rhythm-following teens to experience enough sleep each night, schools should alter their schedules to achieve later starting times. A study was done by Dr. Gail Gross, a doctor in human behavior at the Bradley Hasbro Children's Research Center, in which they delayed school start times by 25 minutes and examined the effect (Gross).

Even this small shift in schedule made a world of difference as students' average sleep duration went up 29 minutes, the percentage of students getting 8 hours of sleep or more doubled from 18% to 44%. Students also experienced improvements to mood and focus, as well as significant reduction in daytime drowsiness (Gross). With results like these, it's a wonder why everyone is not shifting their start times as fast as possible.

Call to Action

Though there are a few cons to pushing the school start times later, the city must contemplate what the ultimate goal of their school system is. Do they care more about throwing a slight disruption in the parents' daily lives? Do they care more about the small increase in city costs of creating a new bus schedule? Or do they care about the student's education, which directly impacts their future success? Once a city's education is correctly treated as a top priority, deciding to make any sacrifice for the children and teens of this nation becomes second nature. If pushing school start times back is resulting in more sleep and optimal learning conditions, then school boards across the nation owe it to their students to make the change. Schools should attempt to provide the best education possible for their students, and not only is this action possible, it has already begun to take place in school systems across the nation.

Works Cited

- Boergers, Julie. "Benefits Of Later School Start Times." Brown University Child & Adolescent Behavior Letter 31.1 (2015): 1-6. Academic Search Complete. Web. 17 Jan. 2017.
- Boodman, Sandra G. "Too-Busy Teens Feel Health Toll." The Washington Post. WP Company, 15 July 2008. Web. 23 Jan. 2017.
- <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/07/14/ST2008071401579.html>>.
- Gross, Dr. Gail. "Sleep for Success: Why Teens Need to Start School Later." The Huffington Post. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 11 Apr. 2014. Web. 18 Jan. 2017.
- <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-gail-gross/teens-sleep_b_5127547.html>.
- Morgan, Leigh Ann. "Pros and Cons of Later School Start Times." Sleeping Resources. Sleeping Resources, 17 Jan. 2012. Web. 19 Jan. 2017.
- <<http://sleepingresources.com/pros-and-cons-of-later-school-start-times/>>.
- "Sleep and Teens." UCLA Health. UCLA, 5 May 2016. Web. 01 Feb. 2017.
- <<http://sleepcenter.ucla.edu/sleep-and-teens>>.
- Walsh, Kathryn. "Pros & Cons of School Starting Later for Teens." How To Adult. N.p., 10 Jan. 2017. Web. 24 Jan. 2017.
- <<http://howtoadult.com/pros-school-starting-later-teens-5516430.html>>.
- "Why We Must - and Can - Restore Safe & Healthy School Hours." Start School Later. N.p., 3 July 2014. Web. 19 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.startschoollater.net/why-change.html>>.