

19 Should School Start Later in the Morning Pros and Cons

Do your kids struggle to wake up in the morning? It may not be that they are lazy. They could be legitimately tired. For teens, anything less than 8.5 hours of sleep per night could be considered detrimental to their health, according to information released by the American Academy of Pediatrics. For younger children, even more sleep per night may be required.

Poor sleep has caused an increase in reliance on caffeine products. There is a direct link between sleep deprivations and a poor academic performance. Over time, poor sleep can increase the risk of developing an alcohol or tobacco dependency.

It isn't an issue of going to bed earlier for teens either. Even when kids are tired, they struggle to fall asleep earlier because their circadian rhythms are establishing their internal routine.

Just delaying school by 30 minutes may have a positive impact for a child's education. Here are some of the key pros and cons to consider when looking at the idea of starting school later.

List of the Pros of Starting School Later

1. It could reduce the amount of time kids are left alone.

Teens are often left alone at home at the end of the day because of the working schedules of their parents. That time alone invites the possibility of making decisions that are not necessarily healthy. Starting school later in the morning would create a later release time in the afternoon which could reduce the amount of time some teens are left on their own.

2. It would reduce health-related issues that come with a lack of sleep.

Sleep deprivation can cause a number of different bothersome symptoms in kids of any age. A loss of sleep disrupts the normal functioning of a child's attention span. They can struggle to focus on their environment, sensory inputs, and the classroom. A lack of sleep creates a delayed reaction time, irritability, depressed mood, forgetfulness, clumsiness, and trouble learning new concepts.

3. It could reduce caffeine dependence.

Depending on the type of coffee bean being used, a cup of brewed coffee in the morning may have up to 175mg of caffeine in it. That's more caffeine than some energy drinks provide. Long-term side effects of using caffeine may include severe dehydrations, chronic panic attacks, and high levels of adrenaline and cortisol. High levels of caffeine also prevent reabsorption of some nutrients which can lead to future medical issues. With a later start time and more sleep, some of the issues could begin to go away.

4. It could boost individual academic performance.

When there is adequate sleeping time available for children, then there is an associated rise in their student's grades. Not only does this improve the focus of the child, it gives them time to process the information around them in the classroom environment. By removing the stress stimulus from the environment, the cortisol levels can remain at normal levels for the student, reducing the risks of distraction and hyperactivity. In 1998, Dr. Amy Wolfson, Professor of Psychology at Loyola University in Maryland, and Dr. Mary Carskadon, Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, found that students with grade averages of C or under were getting 25 fewer minutes of sleep each night compared to students with higher grades.

5. It allows students to cope with their academic responsibilities.

The University of Minnesota discovered that students who have a later start time to their school day have better overall test scores, grades, and consistency in core subject areas compared to students who go to school on a traditional schedule. Students also have improved attendance rates, reduced truancy, and reduced dropout rates when their school responsibilities match better with their biological clocks.

6. It gives students a chance to eat breakfast.

One of the first things that goes away when students are in a rush to get to school is a healthy breakfast. By pushing the start time later in the day, there is a better chance to have time to eat something healthier than a prepackaged breakfast item. Reducing the prevalence of on-the-go eating options can promote a healthier weight and better personal nutrition, which further increases the chances of a positive individual learning experience.

7. It could reduce vehicular accidents for teens.

Many teens drive themselves to school. Waking up too early, without enough sleep the night before, creates an added risk to the driving experience. AAA reports that driver drowsiness is a leading cause of accidents.

responsible for an average of 100,000 vehicular accidents every year. Moving the start time school wouldn't resolve the issue of texting or talking while driving, but it would reduce the issues of driver drowsiness for many teens.

8. It would reduce the number of mood changes teens experience.

Teens are often criticized for their mood swings or moody behavior. Sometimes, these behaviors are associated with depression or some other psychological disorder. In reality, the teen may be suffering from ongoing sleep deprivation. When students (or anyone) gets enough sleep, their mood remains stabilized throughout the day, which encourages a higher level of overall motivation.

9. It would reduce common safety issues for students.

One of the biggest safety issues students face is one that most people don't think about too often. Early start times for a school, sometimes before 8am, require children to get to school in the dark. They might be waiting at a bus stop in the dark. For younger children, they also have the threat of being home alone after school if there are no daycare or after school options. Starting school at a later time reduces all of these issues, even if it does put more pressure on the morning routine for parents.

10. It would provide more recovery time for students.

Many extracurricular activities occur after the regular school day, such as a sporting event. Giving students a later start time would allow them to still participate in these activities, while giving them more recovery time each overnight for rest and healing. Students engaged in after school activities typically require more time to wind down to reach a state of sleep as well, so this schedule change would accommodate their needs.

List of the Cons of Starting School Later

1. It would impact the schedules of working families.

Many junior high and high schools have a start time of 8am in the United States. Most working parents are required to report to work by 8am as well. That allows a small window of time to either drive the student to the school or have them get on the bus. Advancing the time by 30 minutes as proposed, to 8:30am, would make it difficult for many parents to get to work on time.

2. It could create transportation issues for the school district.

Many elementary schools in the United States offer a start time of 9am. That is done to provide younger students with enough time to sleep each night and ease transportation congestion within the district. By moving the start time of the junior high and high schools to a later time, the only solution that doesn't involve more transportation investments is to move the elementary school start time backward by the same amount of time, creating new learning issues.

3. It would alter the release time for schools within the district.

Many teens have after-school jobs which require them to report by a specific time. Many families depend upon their teens to watch younger children while the parents finish out their work day. Pushing the release time for a school district later in the morning would require students to arrive later in the afternoon, which could create even more difficulties for families and the students themselves.

4. It would eliminate the ability to do some homework.

If schools push their start time to later in the morning, then they are eliminating time for students to do homework. Students who are involved in sports or extracurricular school-sponsored activities may find themselves with a limited amount of time to complete their work each day. That would force them to stay up later to get their work done, which would then negate the benefits that having a later start time would be able to create.

5. It could encourage some teens to stay up later.

Even if there are not any extracurricular activities for some teens after school, there would still be the temptation to stay up later each night because they could sleep in later the next morning. A change in the school schedule would require a buy-in from parents and guardians to help realize the benefits of extra sleep for their children. At the end of the day, however, you really can't force anyone to fall asleep, even if you require them to be in their room by a certain time.

6. It reduces tutoring opportunities.

With a later release time from starting school later, students have fewer chances to access tutoring resources they may need for difficult subjects. Many after school tutoring programs are operated by volunteers that have finite time resources. Changing the school schedule will change their schedule, which may make it difficult to continue providing services during the week. This would push tutoring needs to the weekend, where more students may be less likely to engage with the service.

7. It requires changes to personal habits to be effective.

The benefits of a later school start time complement how the circadian rhythms of teens develop. If teens are not making healthy decisions that support this development, then there are no benefits to starting school times later. Teens would need to limit their exposure to artificial light resources to encourage melatonin development. They would need to eat healthy foods at appropriate times to encourage sleep. They would need to avoid caffeine products after lunch to prevent sleep delays. Otherwise, the circadian rhythms would just be delayed, and the same issues seen today with earlier school start times would still be present.

8. It would reduce resource access.

Most community resources do not open until 9am or later. Even if schools push a start time from 8am to 9am, there would be no added benefit to accessing the local library, for example, or similar resource. That 60 minutes would be made up at the end of the day, which would actually reduce the amount of time students would have. That, in turn, would reduce opportunities for extracurricular learning or activities that enrich the lives of many students under the current schedule.

9. It would alter teacher schedules as well.

Teachers already work an extended day before and after their students arrive. Shifting the start time forward by an hour could alter their family schedules in a negative way as well.

These pros and cons of starting the school day at a later time have passionate defenders on both sides of the debate. There are clearly some benefits that would become possible with a later starting time. There are also some clear challenges that families, teens, and school districts would face when deciding to pursue this idea. It may not be right for every district, family, or student, but it may also be the perfect solution for those who are struggling with their education.

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Crystal is the chief editor of the Vittana blog. Our goal is to publish high quality content on some of the biggest issues that our world faces. If you would like to contact Crystal, then go [here to send her a message](#).
