



General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Joint State Government Commission
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Report Summary in response to Senate Resolution 417 of 2018
Sleep Deprivation in Adolescents: The Case for Delaying Secondary School Start Times

Public health officials and the medical community at large have declared that a public health crisis of epidemic proportions is affecting American adolescents. Most adolescents do not get enough sleep, leading to a myriad of mental, behavioral, and physical effects, as well as public safety concerns. Adolescent sleep needs are driven by a temporary biological shift in sleep onset and wake times that occurs concurrently with the onset of puberty, and ends in early adulthood. Early school start times run counter to this biological condition, and can contribute substantially to adolescent sleep deprivation.

Insufficient sleep affects:

- adolescent school performance in terms of cognitive function and performance, graduation rates, attendance, and tardiness;
- the risk of adolescent motor vehicle accidents, athletic injuries, and other injuries;
- adolescent behavioral health in terms of poor self-esteem, and risky behavior, including crime and delinquency;
- adolescent mental health in terms of affect and mood, anxiety, depression, and suicidality; and
- adolescent physical health in terms of higher cardiometabolic disease risk and immune system compromise.

A number of ways to address insufficient sleep in adolescents exist, but the response that garners the most attention, has the greatest potential to impact large numbers of students at the same time, and has been endorsed by numerous professional organizations, is delaying secondary school start times. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association were among the first organizations to call for an 8:30 AM or later start time, and many others followed.

The majority of Pennsylvania's school districts have start times between 7:30 AM and 7:59 AM. A few of its 500 school districts have secondary start times of 8:30 AM or later. Overall, charter schools and nonpublic schools have slightly later secondary school start times, but few meet the 8:30 AM or later goal.

This report identifies 25 school districts that delayed their secondary school start times during the period 2011-2019. An additional 28 districts were found to be publicly engaged in researching the matter, and at least 15 more self-identified as having had informal discussions at the administrative level about the suitability of delaying school start times within their home districts. This report contains information about the timeline and process used by the districts that have already delayed their school start times and the current status of the 28 districts publicly engaged in exploring options.

This report reviews common perceived challenges that could be encountered in efforts to delay secondary school start times. Challenges include: are instructional school day requirements; transportation –including bus driver shortages, transportation mandates, coordination and logistics; athletics and other extracurricular activities; impact on elementary school students and families; impact on teachers and staff; and other perceived challenges. Relevant information about, and strategies to counter, these concerns have included. Appendix A provides advice for school districts considering a change in secondary school start times from advisory committee members who have successfully navigated the process.

Senate Resolution 417 of 2018 directed the Joint State Government Commission to appoint an Advisory Committee to assist the Commission in a study of the issues, benefits, and options relating to instituting a later school start time in Pennsylvania's secondary schools. The Advisory Committee's most salient recommendation is that Pennsylvania's school districts should consider studying the advisability of changing their secondary school start times to improve the health and welfare of their students.

The full report is available on our website, <http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/>