

Dear Members of the Westport Board of Education:

As health professionals working in Connecticut who are concerned about the adverse effects of chronic sleep deficits in teenagers, we strongly endorse the policy statements of the American Academy of Pediatrics (“AAP”), American Medical Association (“AMA”), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”), which provide that middle and high schools should start at 8:30 a.m. or later. These policy statements are grounded in a broad medical and scientific consensus about the importance of sleep to adolescents and the biological changes that occur to adolescent sleep cycles when children enter puberty. At this time, adolescents’ biological clocks shift later so that it is difficult to fall asleep before 11:00 p.m., even with the best sleep hygiene.

The AAP describes a school start time of no earlier than 8:30 a.m. for adolescents as “an effective countermeasure to chronic sleep loss” that “has a wide range of potential benefits to students with regard to physical and mental health, safety, and academic achievement.” Data shows that starting school at 8:30 a.m. or later leads to better academic performance, better sports performance, better mental and physical health, fewer motor vehicle accidents, and fewer sports injuries. The academy notes in an accompanying technical report a nearly threefold increase in the risk of suicide attempts among adolescents who sleep less than eight hours per night, even when controlling for confounding factors. This data underscores the potential seriousness of this issue. The policy statement concludes that “both the urgency and the magnitude of the problem of sleep loss in adolescents and the availability of an intervention that has the potential to have broad and immediate effects are highly compelling.”

We would also point out that the CDC policy statement in support of later start times explains that, “among the possible public health interventions for increasing sufficient sleep among adolescents, delaying school start times has the potential for the greatest population impact (emphasis added) by changing the environmental context for students in entire school districts.”

We agree with these conclusions and endorse the AAP, AMA, and CDC’s recommendations. We view moving secondary school start times to 8:30 a.m. or later to be a practical and necessary public health measure.

Very truly yours:

Signatures as of July 20, 2017

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