

Healthy Start Times: A Powerful Tactic to Support Student Health and Learning

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Submitted by the High School Parent Engagement Group (PEG), an independent, non-partisan, all volunteer parent organization

Proposal

We propose that San Juan Unified School District start 1st period at each of our high schools at or near 8:30 a.m. – a time that is proven to improve adolescent students' academic achievement, health and well-being, and conforms with the recommendations by The American Academy of Pediatrics, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Brookings Institution, and Harvard's Kennedy School, among other renowned institutions.

In the past our high school start times have not been driven by what is best for students. Because there is no perfectly convenient time for the many schedules, activities, and preferences of our diverse district community, we ask that the high school start time decision be an intentional and strategic one, benefiting the greater good of our students as a whole, based on scientific data, and driven by the educational objectives to improve students' academic performance and health, and to close the achievement gap. Conversely, we ask that our high schools' start times *not* be driven by bus schedules, inertia, adult conveniences, or individual interests.

Background

Over a decade of respected scientific research by educators, physicians, and economists from esteemed universities and institutions has proven that shifting a high school's start time from 30 to 60 minutes later yields measurable, significant benefits to students' psychological and physical health, safety, and academic achievement, especially for low income students. The data demonstrate that early high school start times are a key factor contributing to our national epidemic of teen sleep deprivation. Accordingly, in August of 2014, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement recommending that high schools start no earlier than 8:30 a.m. In August of 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention labeled teen sleep deprivation a public health concern and stated that starting high school later would be the most effective public health intervention. Consequently, more high schools across our nation, state, and region are successfully adjusting their start times to support student learning and health.

Current Situation

San Juan Unified's current high school start times were chosen primarily to support bus route efficiencies. (SJUSD currently provides only federally-mandated bus transportation to approximately 1,500 of our 40,000 students.) The start times do not conform to the American Academy of Pediatrics' policy recommendation and they are too early to support our students' academic achievement and health.

Therefore, they conflict with several components of our recently-updated District Strategic Plan and they undermine the California Department of Education's Local Control Accountability Plan priorities.

Current San Juan Unified High School Start Times:

<u>1st Period Starts</u>	<u>No. of High Schools</u>
7:45 a.m.	3
7:50 a.m.	2
8:00 a.m.	4

Five of our high schools have zero period classes beginning between 6:49 a.m and 7:00 a.m.

*SJUSD high school dismissal times vary between 2:45 p.m. and 3:11 p.m.

Why later high school start times improve student learning and health

Teens need more sleep than adults, but the growing demands on high school students, combined with their unique bio-rhythms, make getting enough sleep difficult. Upon entering adolescence, teenagers shift to a later sleep cycle, that is, they tend to fall asleep later at night and naturally wake up later in the morning than younger children or older adults. The brain chemical melatonin, which induces sleep, typically is not produced in teenagers until around 11:00 p.m., making it even more difficult for most high school students to go to sleep early enough to compensate for early school start times. Consequently, between 40% and 80% of American teens are not getting the recommended nine hours of sleep, and their learning and health suffer accordingly.

Effects of teen sleep deprivation

The effects of sleep deprivation can be serious: moodiness, depression, anxiety, ADHD-like symptoms, irritability, increased substance use, sleep during class, drowsy driving, reduced cognition, impeded memory, more absences, dependence on heavily-caffeinated beverages, obesity, and more TV and screen time. San Juan Unified School District parents report that sleep loss can cause profound and sometimes life altering effects on their kids' emotional health and educational path. Given teenagers' requirement for extra sleep and their biological later sleep cycle shift, scientists have concluded that the single most effective way to ensure that teens get more sleep for improved health and learning is to let them wake up later in the morning.

Research and Policy Statement Highlights

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Weekly Report (August 7, 2015)

Our nation's health protection agency, whose mission is to save lives and protect people from health threats, conducted a baseline study supporting public intervention to combat the national epidemic of adolescent sleep deprivation.

“The high prevalence of insufficient sleep among high school students is of substantial public health concern....Among the possible public health interventions for increasing sufficient sleep among adolescents, delaying school start times has the potential for the greatest population impact.”

From ["School Start Times for Middle School and High School Students – United States, 2011-12 School Year"](#)

The American Academy of Pediatrics, Policy Statement (August 2014)

The national organization of pediatricians issued a policy statement urging school districts to start high schools and middle schools no earlier than 8:30 a.m.

“The research is clear that adolescents who get enough sleep have a reduced risk of being overweight or suffering depression, are less likely to be involved in automobile accidents, and have better grades, higher standardized test scores and an overall better quality of life. Studies have shown that delaying early school start times is one key factor that can help adolescents get the sleep they need to grow and learn.”

From ["Pediatrics: Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics"](#)

Harvard's Kennedy School, Education Next (Summer 2012)

Comprehensive scientific analysis of one of the nation's largest school districts (146,687 students) quantified the academic achievement gains from starting middle and high schools up to one hour later. With all other variables considered, students in that district who started school later scored almost four percentile points higher in math and three percentile points higher in reading. Absences were reduced 25%.

“Test scores rise for students attending schools that move their start times later. The effect is largest for students with below-average test scores.”

From ["Do Schools Begin Too Early? The Effect of Start Times on Student Achievement"](#)

Brookings Institution (September 2011)

The world-renowned policy institute concluded that starting middle schools and high schools later in the morning is a cost-effective way of improving student achievement, with benefits outweighing costs 9:1, or even more.

“Recent studies provide compelling evidence that later school starting times could substantially improve the academic achievement of adolescents.”

From ["Organizing Schools to Improve Student Achievement: Start Times, Grade Configurations, and Teacher Assignments"](#)

American Economic Journal (August 2011)

Two researchers from UC Davis extensively studied the impact of start times on US Air Force Academy freshmen who were randomly placed in the same classes with the same instructors, but at different times in the morning.

“Results show that starting the school day 50 minutes later has a significant positive effect on student achievement, which is roughly equivalent to raising teacher quality by one standard deviation.”

From "[A's from Zzzz's? The Causal Effect of School Start Time on Academic Achievement of Adolescents](#)"

Psychology Today (May 2011)

A large Virginia study concluded that later high school start times reduced teen crashes.

“This study supports the recommendation for a later school starting time as it relates to the physical safety of our young people and other drivers.”

From "[Sleepless in America](#)"

In addition, studies from the University of Minnesota, Brown University, the University of Chicago, and Stanford University are among the many that recommend starting high school later in the morning in order to improve well-being, academic achievement, and even athletic performance.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will starting approximately 30 minutes later really make a difference?

The research confirms that no matter how early a school currently starts, if it's before 8:30 a.m., students will receive health and learning benefits by delaying it as few as 30 minutes. Although start times nearer to 9:00 a.m. would yield even greater academic and health gains, starting our SJUSD high schools at 8:30 a.m would conform with the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendation for healthier start times, is beneficial to students, requires only reasonable scheduling adjustments, and is achievable.

How late would our high schools get out?

Shifting a start time approximately 30 minutes later would necessitate that school get out later, but not necessarily 30 minutes later, as there is some scheduling flexibility to the day and school calendar year. If our high schools started at or near 8:30 a.m. they would probably dismiss between 3:10 p.m. and 3:20 p.m. (Some Sacramento city high schools already dismiss around 3:20 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.)

Will a later start time hurt athletics?

High school athletes are some of the biggest beneficiaries of later starts because adolescent athletes need even more sleep for optimal health, academic achievement, and even athletic performance. Indeed, some of the biggest proponents of starting high schools later are parents of student athletes. Furthermore, recent Stanford and University of Chicago studies confirm that athletes perform better and heal faster from injuries if they get more sleep than the average teenager.

At high schools that have already shifted to later start times, sports teams have not reported any detrimental effects to student participation or team performance. Just

as many other high schools across the country have demonstrated, we can have a later start time and thriving athletics and extracurricular activities at the same time.

Informal sports survey conclusions

Three years ago, a sports team impact questionnaire was given to coaches at a SJUSD high school. The results of the unscientific survey showed that when the broad term “athletics” is broken down into specific teams, levels, etc., the identifiable drawbacks to athletes and athletic teams were very limited. Indeed, some coaches who work off-site during the school day responded that a later start time would actually benefit them because they have to leave work early in order to coach, and currently some athletes have to wait after school for practice until their coach arrives. Some teams are virtually not affected by a later start time and many teams are only minimally impacted. The survey revealed that baseball may be the most inconvenienced team for a few weeks in the winter, until the time change in early March, and because of the number and length of games.

As other high schools with later start times have shown, where inconveniences arise, scheduling adjustments by our athletic departments, open communication, and good faith problem-solving can help resolve the concerns. Finally, the minimal temporary drawbacks for a handful of students are outweighed by the additional health and educational benefits for all of the student body, including those athletes themselves, for the entire year.

If school gets out later, won't my child miss more class time on early dismissal days for sports or other extracurricular activities?

Prioritizing P.E. or elective classes for the last period of the day for students who participate in extracurricular activities requiring the most early dismissals will reduce academic instruction time loss. Some teams have almost no early dismissals while most have just a few during the season.

If kids know they don't have to get up so early won't they just stay up later?

Because of the natural late-night production of melatonin, over which they have no control, most teens stay up late, regardless of what time school starts in the morning. Starting high school later in the morning accommodates teens' natural biological rhythms and results in more sleep.

Don't social media, technology, and screen time contribute to sleep deprivation?

Scientists report that although technology and late-night screen time may make it harder for some teens to fall asleep, screen time is not the main culprit in teen sleep deprivation; it's their late-hour melatonin production and early-hour start times that are mostly to blame. Our teenagers have the same technology and social media habits as the hundreds of thousands of teens who have been studied and benefited from later start times. While late-night technology use should be discouraged, technology is here to stay. Educators can't control what goes on at home, or social

and technological trends, but they can control what time school starts. When school starts later, teens overwhelmingly spend that additional time in the morning sleeping, not on their computers, texting, etc., and they improve academically.

My child does fine with the current schedule.

Some lucky teens are the early-to-bed, early-to-rise type (if their schedule and obligations allow the early-to-bed part), and so those kids get the benefits of enough sleep. It won't hurt those natural early-risers to have a bell schedule that gives the majority of other teens the chance to get the same sleep, health, and learning benefits that they enjoy. Furthermore, people who like getting up in the morning have reported enjoying the extra time to prepare for school, exercise, eat breakfast, etc.

What about parents who have to drop off their student earlier because of their work schedule?

Just as the current start time is not convenient for all adult schedules, a later start time may be inconvenient for some as well. Opening a library, cafeteria, or a couple of classrooms early would accommodate students that need to be dropped off early. Additionally, opportunities for more convenient before-school tutoring, interventions, or enrichment will arise. Furthermore, many students ride, walk, carpool, drive themselves, or take the city bus to school, so they are not restricted by their parents' work schedule. Finally, according to the Bureau of the Census, roughly 30% of workers leave their house for work *after* 8:00 a.m. It should be accepted that no start time will be perfectly convenient for 100% of our families, so a time that has been proven to boost academic achievement and well-being for students as a whole is the best choice.

What time do some other high schools in our area start?

Some other area high school start times include McClatchy, Kennedy, and Hiram Johnson starting at 8:20 a.m.; Jesuit starting at 8:15 a.m. (with one or two or late morning starts); St. Francis and Christian Brothers starting at 8:00 a.m. (with two late morning starts); Country Day at 8:20 a.m. Currently, Davis High School and Folsom Cordova District are actively exploring later high school start times.

Who is responsible for start time decisions?

Ultimately, our elected school board and Superintendent are responsible. According to the current district contract, any proposed change of five minutes or more to a school's start time must be approved by the San Juan Teachers Association. Our teachers' union start time approval provision is not common among other school districts, however, we hope that our district's high school teachers and their association will use their unique opportunity to prioritize our students' health, well-being, and achievement through the implementation of later high school start times.

It may be tough to get to my student's after-school crew team, guitar lessons, tennis academy, internship, or job, etc.

The education and health of our students should be the first priority of our education community. Adjustments to after-school schedules will take place, as they have for years, as club coaches, parents, and employers are accustomed to accommodating students' school schedules.

Have you asked the students what they think?

Unscientific surveys of our district's high school students confirm that they do not get enough sleep. Nationally, most students want more sleep, and starting school later is popular, but enthusiasm diminishes somewhat when students realize they will get out of school later. However, based on published research, media accounts, and anecdotal information from high school principals, once the change is made, better-rested students and their parents and teachers like the later start time and do not want to go back to an earlier start time.

What about middle schools?

Most of our middle schools start too early to support adolescent health and learning, with many starting around 7:40 a.m. Although the extracurricular demands on middle school students are generally not as great as those imposed on high school students, a large percentage of middle school students are transitioning into adolescence and would benefit from later starts.

What about zero period?

The district students who have to take zero period will benefit greatly from a later start time. A few hundred of our teenagers must awake long before sunrise in order to arrive zero period on time. Some of our successful district programs rely on zero period availability, so making a few specialized, P.E., or co-curricular classes start later will help students.

Conclusion

The health of our children is too important, the educational stakes are too high, and the overwhelming research is too compelling to reject later high school start times as a cost-effective and proven tactic to improve the health, learning, and safety of our San Juan Unified School District students, and to narrow the achievement gap. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics and the abundant, compelling, scientific evidence, shifting to later high school start times will improve our kids' achievement and well being. According to **our own** data and LCAP and strategic priorities, our district needs to improve our kids' achievement and well-being. The research demonstrates that the significant, measurable academic gains are nearly double for low-income students. **Our own** research demonstrates that we need to do a much better job educating our low income students.

Economists and educators have proven that starting high school later is the single most cost-effective way to raise achievement, even if a district has to increase

spending on its own bus transportation to accommodate it. **Our own** district's elimination of non-federally mandated bus suggests that the change would cost our district very little compared to districts that have not eliminated most of their bus transportation.

Although our entire district community shares a mutual interest in raising student achievement, improving student health and well-being, and closing the achievement gap, not all members of our education community have the power to effect change. We ask our board, administration, and teachers to champion the mutual interest of later high school start times to improve the learning and health of those who need the change – our students.

Thank you!

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