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AT: Language and Composition

6 March 2024

Title Here

Each fall, groggy teenagers everywhere resume the cycle of snoozing their alarms, chugging coffee, and doing whatever it takes to wake themselves up and face the long school day ahead of them. The recommended amount of sleep for teenagers 13 to 18 is about 8 to 10 hours. However, despite these guidelines, a significant gap exists between the ideal and the reality: research indicates that merely 40% of middle school students and a concerning 30% of high school students manage to get enough sleep. Children ages 6-12 years old should be getting 9 to 12 hours of sleep each night, and teenagers 13-18 should be getting at least 8-10 hours per night (“Sleep in Middle and High School Students”), but this unfortunately is not the case. Studies done show that only 4 out of 10 middle school students receive the recommended amount of sleep on school nights, and only 3 out of 10 high schoolers (“Sleep in Middle and High School Students”). School start times across the United States vary, but reports have shown that the average school start times across the country vary anywhere from 7:30 to 8:34 am. This is too early! The current early start times of schools in the United States are detrimental to students’ academic success, mental and physical health, and road safety; therefore, implementing later start times is imperative for allowing students to get adequate sleep, ultimately enhancing their academic performance, reducing the risk of mental and physical health issues, and decreasing the risk of drowsy driving accidents among young drivers.

The correlation between early school start times and diminished student performance is an issue that deserves recognition. Many students find themselves trapped in a relentless cycle of staying up late to complete schoolwork, waking up early for school, and struggling to stay awake throughout the day, which interferes with their academic potential. Sleep, a critical component of cognitive function and development, plays a substantial role in academic success, and it is proven that “Sleep duration, consistency, and quality for the month and the week before an academic test correlated with better grades and accounted for nearly 25 percent of the variance in academic performance” (McNamara). This highlights the importance of sufficient sleep for students, and the benefits that come with it. Additionally, with a third of college students diagnosed with sleep disorders, the risk of significantly lower GPAs and the likelihood of dropping out increases (McNamara), further emphasizing the necessity to address the sleep crisis among students. Furthermore, “the American Academy of Sleep Medicine says that a lack of sleep impacts performance by reducing concentration, creating attention deficits, slowing reaction times, increasing distractibility, impairing decision-making skills and causing forgetfulness. AASM also says that sleep-deprived people are more prone to errors” (Morgan). This reduced concentration, increased risk of errors, and inability to pay attention result in poorer academic performance, and highlights the necessity for later start times, to allow students to get enough sleep and just be able to function properly. The potential benefits of later school start times were studied by the University of Minnesota, and it was confirmed that “later school start times can have a positive effect on academic performance. Investigators studied two school districts that changed their start times to 8:30 a.m. and 8:40 a.m. When compared with students attending schools with earlier start times, the students reported getting higher grades. They also had fewer depressive feelings, got more sleep on school nights and had less daytime sleepiness”

(Morgan). This evidence supports the notion that later start times could be a viable solution to the sleep deprivation crisis among students, thereby fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence and well being. This highlights the importance of recognizing the detrimental effects early school start times have on students, and consequently, their academic and cognitive performances. In a study of 2700 teenagers, the sleeping habits of teenagers were compared with their academic and emotional development, and the findings suggested that “younger students, aged 14-16, suffered both academically and emotionally [...] they had worse cumulative GPA’s at graduation and more emotional distress” (Russo). The findings advocate for a reevaluation of school schedules to accommodate the sleep needs of students, suggesting that such adjustments could lead to significant improvements in students’ performance.

Early school start times put students at risk of a variety of health issues, including cardiovascular issues. Getting enough sleep is essential to maintaining a healthy brain and heart, and poor sleep has been proven to increase the risk of experiencing obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes (“Sleep Disorders and Heart Health”).

School start times must be pushed later to reduce the risk of teenagers being involved in car crashes due to drowsy driving. Drowsy driving has been shown to be a direct and major cause of car crashes across the country, and in 2017, over 90,000 car crashes being a result of drowsy driving, and that  $\frac{1}{5}$  of fatal car crashes result from a drowsy driver (Rehman). Teenagers are apart of the group that are most likely to be drowsy driving, as they have the highest rates of sleep insufficiency and are new drivers. New drivers should not be allowed behind the wheel when they are waking up so early for school. This is the worst combination possible. “Alexandra Martiniuk and colleagues studied the driving records of more than 19,000 young men and women, aged 17 to 24, who had just received their driver’s licenses. These new drivers had filled

out questionnaires that included specific details about how many hours sleep they got each night in the previous month. Then the researchers went through police records on road crashes for the next two years after the drivers were licensed. “Those who reported sleeping six or fewer hours per night had an increased risk for crash compared with those who reported sleeping more than six hours,” they wrote. The people who slept the least were 21 percent more likely to have been involved in a crash than those who got more sleep, Martiniuk’s team found” (Fox). The AAA Foundation published a survey last year that found one in seven licensed drivers ages 16-24 admits they had fallen asleep at least once while driving in the past year and that 10 percent of all drivers say they’ve dozed off at the wheel” (Fox). Drowsy driving is dangerous even if a person doesn’t actually fall asleep. Research shows that sleep deprivation leads to mental impairment that is similar to drunkenness with 24 hours of sleep deprivation roughly equating to a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.10%” (Rehnis).

#### Conclusion:

As teenagers become the future generation, it is important to recognize and address the issues they are facing to promote their well being. In one study done in Minnesota to test the effectiveness of later start times, high school start times shifted from 7:20 am to 8:30 am, and the results concluded “Students reported feeling less depressed and less sleepy during the day and more empowered to succeed” (Richter). The American Academy of Pediatrics even recommended that middle and high school districts across the United States start school no earlier than 8:30 am, as it greatly benefits the alertness, grades, mental health, and physical health of students (Richter).