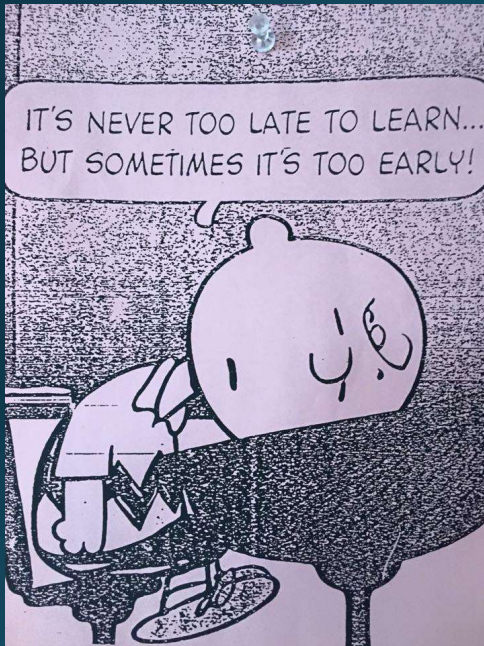




Getting it Done: Turning Sleep Research into School Policy

A presentation by

Terra Ziporyn, PhD
Executive Director and Co-Founder
Start School Later, Inc.

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Objectives

1. Explain why scientific evidence alone is insufficient to change school start time policy.
2. Identify key lessons from districts that have successfully implemented later start times.
3. Examine strategies for building political will and advancing healthy school hours through advocacy at multiple levels

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This is a fixable problem.
So, why aren't we fixing it?

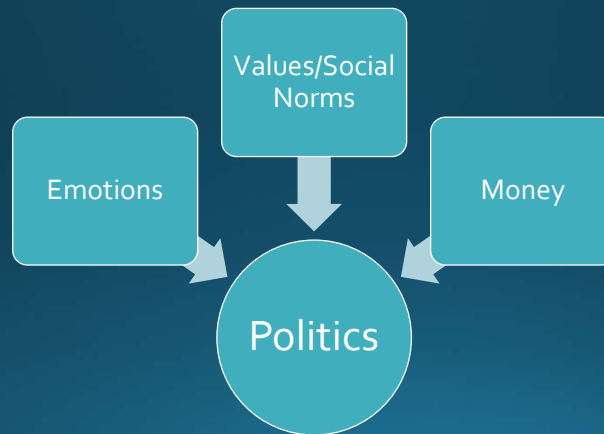
3

"All truth passes through three stages.
First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently
opposed. Third, it is accepted as being
self-evident."

--Arthur Schopenhauer

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It Isn't About the Science



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Sleep is for the weak and unmotivated (Besides, teenagers are lazy)

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Myths and Misconceptions

- It's too expensive to Start School Later.
- Aren't we coddling our kids by allowing them to Start School Later?
- Teenagers need to take responsibility. Early starts teach responsibility.
- If we start school later, students will just go to bed later.
- Kids just need to adhere to a good bedtime.
- It's safer to start high schools first instead of elementary schools.
- Extracurricular activities will suffer.
- Students won't be able to have after-school jobs.
- School start time is not a federal issue. It should be determined by local districts.
- There's nothing wrong with the way things are now. We did it and turned out just fine.
- Later starts will keep parents from getting to work.

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Fear and Intimidation

- Perceived “Obstacles”
 - After-school jobs
 - Sports and other extracurricular activities
 - Childcare
 - Traffic Patterns
 - Bus costs
 - Teacher commutes and commitments
 - Fears about safety of younger children
- Speculation/Extrapolation
- Fueled by fear of change and failure of imagination
- All turn out to unfounded or resolvable but politically powerful

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“Having been a superintendent, I know that one of the hardest things you can ever do is to begin to tinker with the bell schedule. People go absolutely bananas over that.”

— Deb Delisle, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

Source: 52nd Annual Cooperative Conference for School Administrators. Aug. 13, 2013.

8

A Political “Hot Potato”

- Communities adapt to public school hours and fear impact of change
- Pushback when anyone proposes a change to the status quo – a political “hot potato”
- Superintendents have even lost their jobs over this issue

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“It’s hard to get a man to understand evidence when his job depends on his not understanding it.” – Upton Sinclair

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Many schools have managed to change in response to research

1996: Edina, MN

1997: Minneapolis Public Schools

2003: Wilton, CT.

2015: Approximately 70 individual school districts

2026: Over 500 individual school districts across the USA

Wahlstrom, 2014; Owens et al., 2014; Weir K. Schools shift as evidence mounts that later start times improve teens' learning and well-being. Updated August 22. Accessed May 6, 2026, <https://www.apa.org/topics/children/school-start-times>

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The screenshot shows the homepage of Start School Later.net. The header includes the logo, tagline 'Healthy Hours health, safety and equity in education', and a search bar. A navigation menu lists: HOME, GET INVOLVED, IN THE NEWS, SUCCESS STORIES, MORE INFO, CONTACT US, LOCAL CHAPTERS, and DONATE. The main content area is titled 'Success Stories' and contains three paragraphs of text. The first paragraph states that 43 states have implemented or plan to implement later start times. The second paragraph mentions that hundreds of communities across the USA have found ways to make this happen by prioritizing health and learning. The third paragraph invites users to share their success stories. Below the text, there are links to success stories from Alabama (Phenix City), Arizona (Mesa Union High School), Mississippi (Hattiesburg Public School District, Oxford School District, Vicksburg Warren School District), and Missouri (Columbia Public Schools). A sidebar on the right titled 'How did they do it? Check out these CASE STUDIES' is partially visible.

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Success Stories

If you think it's too hard to return schools to later, healthier hours, here's a sampling of schools in 43 states that have done it already or are doing it in the next school year. While some of these schedules aren't ideal, they all give students a chance for healthier sleep than the typical American middle or high school.

Hundreds of communities across the USA - and beyond - have found ways to make this happen by prioritizing health and learning. Below we feature schools that have come to our attention.

If you have a success story to share, please **LET US KNOW!** And if you see our information is out-of-date or inaccurate, please let us know as well.

Alabama
Phenix City
Sending the early grades to school 45 minutes earlier and middle and high school students an hour and 15 minutes later starting in fall 2014. Superintendent Wilkes says the later start time for older students is an effort to increase student success.

Arizona
Mesa Union High School (Cottonwood)

Mississippi
Hattiesburg Public School District
Oxford School District
Vicksburg Warren School District

Missouri
Columbia Public Schools
Using Start School Later materials, students led a campaign to get their school board to reverse a proposal to start high schools earlier - and then turned it into a plan to start them later (9 am for 2013-14)

How did they do it? Check out these CASE STUDIES

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Key Lessons Learned

- One size does not fit all
- Reiterate why this is being done (and why it matters) throughout the process
- Leadership from within is often necessary but not sufficient
- Transportation and cost challenges are routinely overestimated
- Most perceived obstacles are just that: perceived
- Community education and authentic engagement with all stakeholders builds trust, reduces fear, and fosters shared problem-solving
- Sustained grassroots advocacy is often critical to initiating and sustaining change
- Adjustments take time
- Prioritizing sleep goes hand-in-hand with school start time change
- Monitor outcomes, adjust for unintended impacts, and communicate changes

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WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY

School communities that have prioritized health and learning have found creative, affordable ways to run schools at safe, healthy hours

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What Is To Be Done?



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The REAL reasons most schools aren't changing to later, healthier start times

- Change is hard
- Imaginations are limited
- Sleep gets no respect



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Goal: Building Political Will

Strategy

- Reframe sleep and school hours as public health problems, not negotiable school budget items

Tactics

- Multi-level, push-pull approach including grassroots activism, education, research, position statements, legislation, and litigation at local, state, and federal levels

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A Matter of Public Health

Sleep and school hours are negotiable school budget items



Forces local school officials to balance them with other pressing needs like instructional materials and teacher salaries.

Sleep and school hours are matters of public health



Moves decisions into other hands and clarifies priorities.

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A Multilevel, Multipronged Approach

Diverse players (Community advocates, educators, health professionals, sleep researchers, policymakers)

National

- Legislation (e.g., ZZZs to As Act)
- Position Statements (e.g., AAP, CDC, DOE)
- Litigation (?)
- Grassroots Activism
- Education

State

- Legislation
- Position Statements (e.g., state medical society)
- Litigation (?)
- Grassroots Activism
- Education

Local

- Legislation
- Position Statements (e.g., local board of health)
- Litigation (?)
- Grassroots Activism
- Education

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Education and Advocacy



**ADOLESCENT SLEEP, HEALTH, AND SCHOOL START TIMES
THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**An Interactive Conference
Bringing Together:**

- Education Policy Makers
- Leading Sleep Experts
- Administrators/Teachers/Staff
- Health Care Professionals
- Community Advocates
- Transportation Experts

Networking, State-of-the-Science, Implementation Strategies

REGISTER NOW!

Space is Limited

WASHINGTON DC
APRIL 27-28, 2017

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
www.schoolstarttimeconference.org

SPONSORED BY:

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Position Statements

2021	2015
National Sleep Foundation	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
The U.S. Surgeon General	
2019	2014
American Association of Sleep Technologists	American Psychological Association
	National Association of School Nurses/Society of Pediatric Nurses
2017	American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
National Parent Teacher Association	American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Sleep Medicine	
Society of Behavioral Medicine	2011
	National Education Association - Resolution C-5 (Adequate Rest)
2016	
American Medical Association	

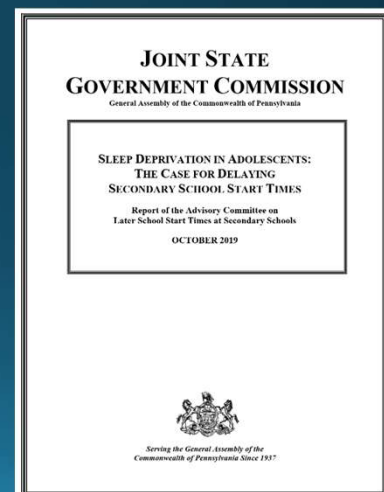
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Legislation: Studies, Incentive Programs, and ...Regulations?

PA SR417 | 2017-2018 | Regular Session

A Resolution directing the Joint State Government Commission to establish an advisory committee to conduct a study on secondary school start time in this Commonwealth.

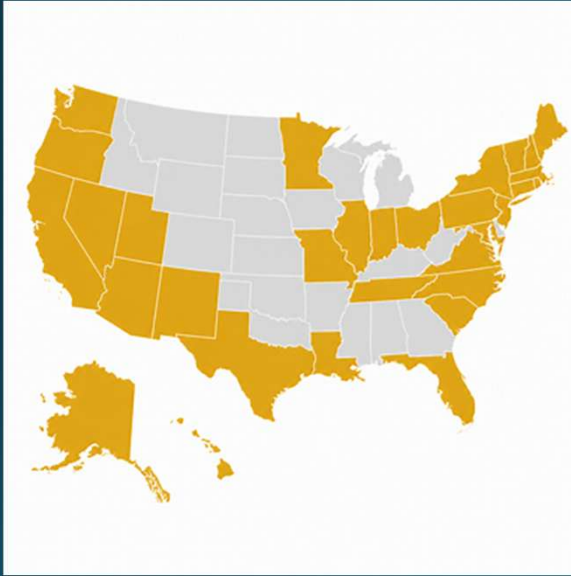
- A token measure?
- Or a key battle in a long war?



October 2019

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SST Legislation Introduced in at Least 30 U.S. States



- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| • Alaska | • New Jersey* |
| • California* | • New Mexico* |
| • Connecticut* | • New York |
| • Florida* | • Ohio |
| • Hawaii | • Oregon |
| • Illinois | • Pennsylvania* |
| • Indiana* | • Rhode Island |
| • Louisiana* | • South Carolina |
| • Maine | • Tennessee |
| • Maryland* | • Texas |
| • Massachusetts | • Utah* |
| • Minnesota | • Vermont |
| • Missouri | • Virginia |
| • Nevada | • Washington |
| • New Hampshire | • West Virginia |

*=Bill(s) passed

23

Maryland's Orange Ribbon Bill – An Incentive Program



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Pennsylvania
General Assembly

Home » Legislation » Bills & Resolutions » Bill Information

House Bill 2152

2025-2026 REGULAR SESSION

An Act amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, in school safety and security, further providing for School Safety and Security Grant Program; and, in terms and courses of study, providing for secondary school start times.

[Read Less](#)

Co-Sponsorship Memo

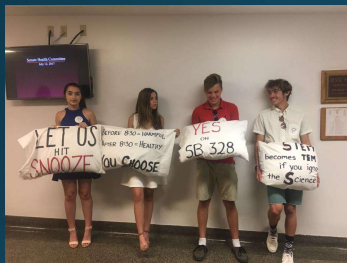
[Delaying Secondary School Start Times](#)

Prime Sponsor

 **Representative Jill Cooper**
House District 55

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Statewide Regulations



The New York Times

California Becomes First State to Move Back School Start Times

The state is rolling out a first-of-its kind law that delays when middle and high school classes begin.

[Share full article](#) [Print](#) [Bookmark](#)

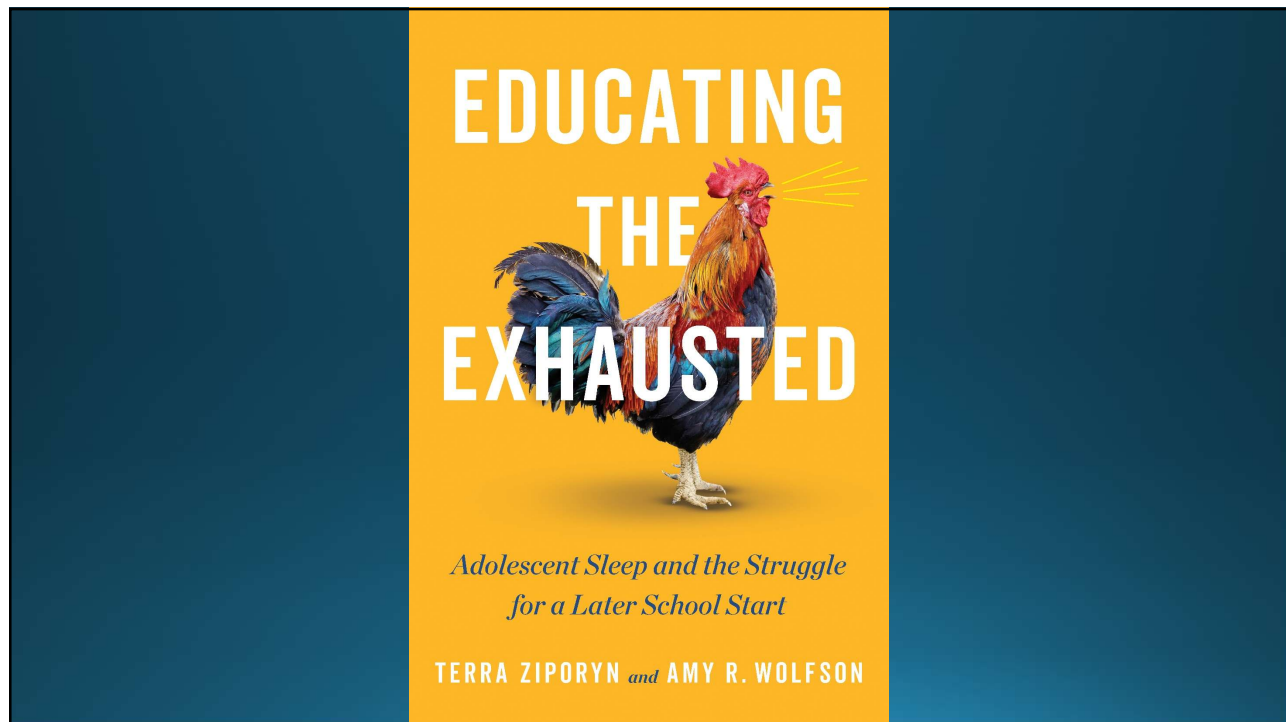
 **By Soumya Karamangla**

July 13, 2022



Picking up students in Sacramento in 2019. Max Whittaker for The New York Times

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**CREATING A CLIMATE THAT ALLOWS FOR HEALTHY
SCHOOL HOURS: A CALL TO ACTION**

**Too-early school start times
have been shown over and
over to harm teen wellbeing.**

**The first thing to do
to help students'
mental health is to
stop hurting it.**

#StartSchoolLater
www.StartSchoolLater.net

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Thank you!
(and how to get involved)

Start School Later, Inc. (startschoollater.net)

