

The Early Bird Can Be Too Early

By Alex Taft

At what time should the school day start? This is a question that can receive a variety of answers depending on the person. A board of education director may say “7:30”, while a student may say “9:30”. So, how should one reach a reasonable conclusion on this subject when answers can be so wildly different? There are multiple aspects to consider in order to answer this question, such as the effects on student success which start times can have, the psychological effects of not getting enough sleep, and a school district's transportation capabilities. I firmly believe that the school start times across the Oak Hills School District must be tweaked. Here's why.

Later start times have been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement. In a study conducted by Finley Edwards, professor of economics at Baylor University, it was discovered that “delaying school start times by one hour, from roughly 7:30 to 8:30, increases standardized test scores by at least 2 percentile points in math and 1 percentile point in reading. The effect is largest for students with below-average test scores, suggesting that later start times would narrow gaps in student achievement.” This evidence reveals that later start times lead to better student performance, supposedly

caused by longer, healthier amounts of sleep. Further supporting Edward's research, assistant professor of the Graduate School of Defense Management Jennifer Heissel, and Samuel Norris, professor at the University of Chicago, state: “A one-hour delay in start times relative to sunrise increases math scores by 8 percent of a standard deviation for adolescents--the equivalent of roughly three months of student learning--but by only 1 percent of a standard deviation for younger children.” Akin to Edward's research, this discovery suggests that starting school at later times directly correlates with increased student achievement. What's the harm in starting school a little later, when it directly helps our Highlanders prosper from K-12?



According to a 2006 National Sleep Foundation poll, more than 87 percent of high school students in the United States get far less than the recommended eight to 10 hours due to early school start times. Experts say that this has an extremely negative impact on the mental well-being of students, especially high schoolers. In a 2014 report, the “American Academy of Pediatrics” even went as far as to call this a “public health

epidemic". William Dement, who has a Ph.D. in psychology and is the founder of the "Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic", expresses that a lack of sleep in teens "increases the likelihood teens will suffer myriad negative consequences, including an inability to concentrate, poor grades, drowsy-driving incidents, anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide and even suicide attempts." The biggest priority of a school district is to ensure that its students can learn in a safe environment. When early start times have the potential to cause negative mental effects on a statistically proven majority of its students, there is a problem. This problem should be handled carefully by school districts such as Oak Hills in order to create a brighter future for this generation and generations to come.

Though later school start times are favorable, bus transportation may interfere with the possibility of later start times. This is a primary, and very plausible reason used to back the current school start times in the Oak Hills school district and other start times across America. However, this is a problem with a perfectly practical solution; we just need to determine the amounts of time needed between sending out different school buses in order to avoid extra heavy traffic. The current start times for OH schools are 8:00 for highschool, 7:35 for middle school, and 9:00 for elementary school. As shown by the differences in high school and middle school start times, the buses require a minimum of a 25-minute starting difference to operate efficiently. Going off of this 25-minute rule, the district should be able to start high school at 9:00, middle school at 8:35, and elementary school at 8:10. It has been proven that teenagers are biologically wired to go to sleep around 11:00 pm, explains Ruthann Richter, director of media relations for the medical school's Office of Communication & Public Affairs at Stanford University. With this information, contrary to popular belief in the school board, it actually makes more sense to allow for high schoolers and middle schoolers to have later start times than elementary school students, who tend to go to sleep earlier in the night. These start times would allow for students to get reasonable, healthy amounts of sleep while allowing for the school transportation to run smoothly as usual. Yes, bus transportation times are a problem that comes with changing school start times, but just like the problem of school starting too early, it has a reasonable solution.

If a brighter future is to be paved for Oak Hills, we must come together to fix the system of inadequate start times. For our grades, our mental health, and our general well-being, Highlanders march on!