



School Start Times Affect Adolescent Health & Well-being

Policy Brief | March 2026

Elijah Morrow, Kathleen Howe, MPH, Cathy Goldstein, MD, MS, Daniel Connochie, MPH, Amy Bohnert, PhD, MHS, Srijan Sen, MD, PhD

More than 3/4 of U.S. high school students, and **over 80% of Michigan high school students, do not get sufficient sleep on school nights.**¹

Sleep deprivation among youth is a widespread public health issue, largely driven by early school start times that conflict with developing circadian rhythms. During adolescence, a normal delay in the circadian timekeeping system shifts the release of melatonin to approximately 10-11 p.m., making it difficult for youth to fall asleep before 11:00 p.m.² In order to achieve the 8-10 hours of sleep recommended by the National Sleep Foundation, adolescents should wake no earlier than 8:00 a.m.³

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends all U.S. middle and high schools “aim for a starting time no earlier than 8:30 a.m.”,⁴ yet as of 2020-2021, 72% of U.S. high schools began earlier.⁵ Michigan’s average school start time of 7:49 a.m.⁶ is among the earliest in the nation. Start times this early overlap substantially with adolescents’ natural sleep period, resulting in chronic sleep loss and exacerbating “social jet lag”, a phenomenon in which teens stay up and wake later on weekends, then struggle to reset to earlier schedules during the school week.⁷ This persistent sleep disruption among adolescents is associated with depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, reduced academic performance, excessive fatigue, motor vehicle crashes, cardiometabolic risk, and substance use,⁷⁻¹⁵ all of which underscore the substantial health and safety improvements that could be made from delaying school start times statewide. Delayed school start times have observed benefits on school-aged adolescents, including longer and better quality sleep, reduced depressive symptoms, improved alertness in the classroom, reduced absentee and lateness rates, and reduced risk of automobile accidents.¹⁶⁻²² There is also evidence that later school start times can support other behavioral interventions such as weight loss programs.²³ Multiple policy options are available to state and local lawmakers that align with expert scientific recommendations and an abundance of evidence, providing lasting benefits to students.

Later school start times lead to:

- Longer and better quality **sleep**¹⁷
- Improved **mental health** and **emotional regulation**^{18, 24}
- Improved **alertness** and **behavior** at school²⁵
- Decreased **substance use**²⁶
- Higher **test scores** and **grade point averages**^{27, 28}
- Increased **attendance** and **graduation rates**²⁰
- Reductions in **car accidents**²¹
- Improved **quality of life**²⁹
- Long-term **economic benefits** as a result of higher **educational achievement** and increased **productivity**³⁰



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Existing Legislation

Pending legislation in 26 other states!



California's SB 328 (2019)

The first bill in the U.S. to mandate school start times no earlier than 8:30 a.m. statewide, for both high schools and middle schools.³¹ Almost all districts successfully adopted the later school start times, resulting in significant **improvements in teen sleep, mental health, and academic achievement.**³²



Florida's SB 296 (2023)

Mandated start times no earlier than 8:30 a.m. In an effort to support school districts struggling to comply due to budget and scheduling issues, it was **amended to mandate an analysis** of later start times, meaning each school district must submit an **annual report of their evaluation and attempts** at changing school start times to be in compliance with the law.³³

Policy Options

These state actions may support adoption of later school start times. Combinations or hybrids of these options should be considered.

Statewide Mandate

Modeled after California's bill; all high schools must start no earlier than 8:30 a.m., and all middle schools no earlier than 8:00 a.m. While districts may need to adjust to scheduling and budget changes, a mandate ensures change immediately.

State Funding Incentives

The state offers short term or long term funding incentives for later school start times. This enables local control and would likely accelerate adoption, though it could be costly for the state.

Mandate of Analysis

All districts must evaluate and attempt to implement later start times, similar to Florida's amended bill. The mandate could require annual reporting until districts meet the later start times. This forces adoption while preserving a degree of local control.

State Assistance (non monetary)

The state provides resources such as transportation modeling, implementation guides, communication materials, and expert consultation. These resources would help enable district-led initiatives to succeed.

Local Strategies

School districts could pursue several strategies to implement delayed school start times regardless of the status of state legislation.

- Design alternative schedule options
- Create advisory groups
- Survey community & host discussions
- Adjust start times incrementally
- Learn from successful districts



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