

Directions:

1. Circle any unfamiliar words
2. Use text coding symbols as you read the article.
3. Write a 7 sentence response following 7th grade writing expectations.

Start school later and let teens sleep, pediatricians say

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS - KC STAR

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Article of the week #2
Due: Sept. 5th

The American Academy of Pediatrics now recommends that middle schools and high schools start classes at 8:30 a.m. or later so that students can get more sleep. FILE PHOTO/THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Pediatricians have a new prescription for schools: later start times for teens.

Delaying the start of the school day until at least 8:30 a.m. would help curb their lack of sleep, which has been linked with poor health, bad grades, car crashes and other problems, the American Academy of Pediatrics (<http://www.aap.org/en-us/Pages/Default.aspx>) says in a new policy (<http://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/Let-Them-Sleep-AAP-Recommend-Delaying-Start-Times-of-Middle-and-High-Schools-to-Combat-Teen-Sleep-Deprivation.aspx>).

Studies have found that most U.S. students in middle school and high school don't get the recommended amount of sleep — 8 1/2 to 9 1/2 hours on school nights — and most high school seniors get an average of less than seven hours.

More than 40 percent of the nation's public high schools start classes before 8 a.m., according to government data cited in the policy. Even when the buzzer rings at 8 a.m., school bus pickup times typically mean kids have to get up before dawn if they want that ride.

But changing start times isn't easy for schools. The Kansas City school district knows.

The district tried switching its bell times in 2010, having elementary schools open first on the early bus run and moving high schools and middle schools to a later start.

But many parents objected throughout the school year, compelling the district to switch the schedule back. Too many families did not like it that in the winter months small children were out at bus stops while it was still dark.

Some families with working parents also had relied on a high-school-age child to get out of school first and be home when a younger sibling got out of elementary school.

Other districts in the area have talked about starting high school later but also find it hard to make the change, said Gayden Carruth, the executive director of the Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City (<http://www.csdgkc.org/>).

Carruth said the primary concern is setting small children at bus stops in the dark, but athletics and extracurricular programs and job responsibilities of high school students also make the switch hard.

One district or high school would have a hard time making the time switch on its own because it would be out of sync with the programs of other high schools, she said.

"It would be hard for one district to be out there unless the other dominoes were going to fall," Carruth said.

After-school sports are an often-cited obstacle because a later dismissal delays practices and games, said Kristen Amundson, the executive director of the National Association of State Boards of Education (<http://www.nasbe.org/>). The shift may also cut into time for homework and after-school jobs, Amundson said.

And then there are school bus runs. "The issue is really cost," Amundson said.

School buses often make multiple runs each morning for older and younger students. Adding bus drivers and rerouting buses is one of the biggest financial obstacles to later start times, Amundson said. Many of the school districts that have adopted later times tend to be smaller, she said.

The policy, aimed at middle schools and high schools, was published online Monday in the journal Pediatrics (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2014/08/19/peds.2014-1697>).

Evidence on potential dangers for teens who get too little sleep is “extremely compelling,” said Judith Owens (<http://childrensnational.org/choose-childrens/find-a-provider/judith-owens>), the policy’s lead author and the director of sleep medicine at Children’s National Medical Center (<http://childrensnational.org/>) in Washington, D.C. The risks include depression, suicidal thoughts, obesity, poor performance in school and on standardized tests and car accidents from drowsy driving, Owens said.

The new policy cites studies that show delaying start times can lead to more nighttime sleep and improve students’ motivation in class and mood. Whether there are broader, long-term benefits requires more research, the policy says.

Many administrators support the idea but haven’t resolved the challenges, said Amundson. She said the pediatricians’ new policy probably will have some influence.

Parents seeking a change “will come now armed with this report,” Amundson said.

The Associated Press and The Star’s Joe Robertson contributed to this report.

