

## Later school starts would have many consequences

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
(MCT)**

For years, Americans have seen proposals come and go on starting classes later for students in high schools and middle schools.

In 1999, the California Legislature had a bill to delay school start times; it didn't pass. In 2005, Pittsburgh school officials floated the idea of beginning classes later at some high schools; the plan went nowhere. On Monday, the American Academy of Pediatrics called for an 8:30 a.m. or later start for the nation's middle schools and high schools, saying adolescents need 8-1/2 to 9-1/2 hours of sleep a night.

In theory, delaying the typical 7 a.m. start of school for teenagers is a good idea. Fewer students would show up bleary-eyed and more might perform better academically.

But there's a reason U.S. schools have been unable to change: it's impractical. Starting school later means ending school later, which would have a big impact on what students can do afterward, what parents can expect of their teens and perhaps what school districts pay for transportation.

While the pediatricians say teens need to get more sleep later, other researchers have highlighted the importance of extracurricular activities after school and the need for student involvement outside the classroom. That would be difficult for students to manage if classes ended 90 minutes later.

Student athletes would have to practice later into the evening and away games on school nights would be more difficult to manage. Working students might have a difficult time finding or holding jobs after school, and teens who babysit young children after school – or are needed by their parents to care for younger siblings – could be less available.

Catching a bus at 5:45 a.m. so that a student can be in homeroom at 7:10 may not be ideal, but it's hard to see how secondary schools can adopt later start times in the face of these consequences. If more adolescents were early to bed and early to rise, those early birds would still get the worm.

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