

Later Start Leads to Smarter Students

The alarm goes off. You hear it and hit snooze, as the sun hasn't even come up yet, and it's still dark outside. Your eyelids are as heavy as lead, so you disregard the alarm and roll over once more. This may happen once or numerous times depending on the morning. If you are a student, or were a student some time ago, I'm sure that this all sounds familiar. The restless mornings rushing out the door, wondering if you have even completed all of your homework. You try to make sure you don't forget anything at home before you leave for seven hours of confinement, maybe longer if you have extracurriculars, in the place that is called school. Students are expected to do well in school so that they can get into a good college, which will set them up for a career later on. However, is the current schooling system, particularly the ridiculously long school day, the most effective way for students to learn and grow in their education, but also as individuals? No, it is not, and this is why Buffalo Seminary and all other schools should reduce the number of hours spent sitting in classrooms every day by shortening the school day and starting later.

Starting at a later time would allow students to have more time to sleep in and be well rested. Everyone knows that people need sleep in order for the body and the brain to function at its highest level. Well, students of any age are people. Therefore, students need sleep. Many students spend hours doing sports or other activities after school, and when they get home they have to finish all of their homework. There are some days that I personally wake up at 6:00 a.m. to get to school on time and don't get home until 8:15 p.m. because I have sports and Semachords. I then have to eat dinner, shower, do all of my homework, and more. On these busiest days, I usually go to bed at 11:00 p.m. at the earliest. This means that I am getting seven hours of sleep or less. According to the SleepFoundation.org, the National Sleep Foundation which has studied sleep science and health for almost thirty years, "Teens need about eight to ten

hours of sleep each night to function best.” This means that I am not even getting enough sleep each night, and I know that I am not the only person my age with this problem. One study found that only 15% of teens reported getting eight and a half hours of sleep each day during the school week (“Teens and Sleep”). With the school day starting later, students would be able to get the sleep that their bodies and brains require. This would lead to happier students who are able to do better on tests or assignments and be more attentive during class time.

Giving students more time in the morning will allow them to have time for breakfast. After all, it is the most important meal of the day (“6 Reasons”). Students who are rushing out the door will often skip breakfast entirely, but the hunger follows you to each class until lunch. However, even eating something small like fruit in the morning will prevent hunger (a distraction of its own) and provide the brain with stable levels of sugar that increase focus and your ability to process information (“6 Reasons”). Both of these functions are crucial for doing well in school. Teachers will also have more time to rest, eat, and prepare for the day which will benefit the students.

A later start time could literally save lives. Many students drive themselves to school in their junior or senior years of high school and later on in college. As stated earlier, many students aren’t getting enough hours of sleep during the week, which means that they are driving to school while tired. The National Safety Council found that, “those under age 25 make up an estimated 50% or more of drowsy driving crashes” (Drivers). Schools could help lower the number of crashes and fatalities from drowsy driving incidents by making the school day start later, thus allowing parents, bus drivers, and students to get more sleep and into less accidents.

In Seattle, Washington public schools implemented a later start time in 2016. Researchers from Washington State University worked with Franklin High and Roosevelt High to measure the effects that starting later had on the students. Both schools pushed the start time back by almost one hour from 7:50 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. and saw improvements in their students’ grades,

participation, alertness, and attendance. Grades increased by a median of 4.5%. They also found a “decrease in the achievement gap between students from low and high socioeconomic backgrounds” (Andersen). Some teachers and parents were concerned with the challenges that a later start time would bring due to changes in transportation, later ending times for sports, and children walking home in the dark after activities. However, they realized that schools would be able to save money on programs like counseling, class failures, and discipline because students who got more sleep wouldn’t need to use them. The study concluded that the benefits to schools and their students outweighed the possible risks that could accompany a later start time.

There are many benefits that would come with starting the school day later for not only the students, but the faculty, atmosphere, and school community as well. Students will have more energy for activities during and after school if they weren’t forced to get up so early. The attitudes and grades of students would also improve with one simple adjustment to the schedule. These benefits would contribute to making not only SEM, but schools everywhere better. Schools can show their support for the safety and health of their students by making the school day start even just a little later.

Works Cited

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