

School Start Times for Adolescents

Policy Statement Summary
American Academy of Pediatrics
Released August 25, 2014

“Recognizing that insufficient sleep in adolescents is an important public health issue that significantly affects the health and safety, as well as academic success, the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly supports efforts of school districts to optimize sleep in students and urges high schools and middle schools to aim for start times no earlier than 8:30 a.m. to allow students the opportunity to achieve optimal levels of sleep (8.5–9.5 hours) and to improve physical and mental health, safety, academic performance, and quality of life.”

“Although the AAP acknowledges that numerous factors may impair the amount and/or quality of sleep in adolescents - among them, biological changes in sleep associated with puberty, lifestyle choices, and academic demands - it considers school start times before 8:30 a.m. (earlier school start times) to be a key modifiable contributor to insufficient sleep, together with circadian rhythm disruption.” “

“It also recognizes that a substantial body of research has demonstrated that delaying the start of the school day is an effective countermeasure to chronic sleep loss and has a wide range of potential benefits to the physical and mental health, safety, and academic achievement of students - including reduced obesity risk, rates of depression, and drowsy driving crashes as well as improved academic performance and quality of life.”

Note: Indiana’s original, longitudinally correct, time zone is the Central Time Zone. AAP’s school start time recommendations are based on the effects of the natural sunlight schedule within time zones. Because Indiana’s Eastern Time Zone civil clocks are one-hour ahead of their correct Central Time sunlight schedule, for Indiana’s Eastern Time Zone school districts to meet AAP’s recommendation schools would need to start no earlier than 9:30 a.m.

A school start time of 9:30 a.m. is impractical for many reasons, after-school activities being only one of those reasons. Therefore, as long as Eastern Time is observed in Indiana, schools will never be able to start at a time that is ideal for students’ learning. However, by restoring Indiana to its Central Time Zone’s natural sunlight schedule, all students and teachers would benefit by having one more hour of sunlight in the morning, no matter their age. The majority of travel to and from school would be in daylight, and students would be awake and alert when school begins.