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## Time Shift: Is your school jet-lagged?

March 14th, 2011 by Mel Riddile

I was in my local gym over the weekend when I glanced at an overhead monitor just as [MSNBC was running a feature](#) on the lingering effects of the shift to daylight savings time. The point being made was that the seemingly innocuous one-hour shift could send many into a "jet-laggy tailspin" for days afterwards.

There is an extensive body of [research](#) to support the idea that even mild sleep loss can adversely affect us both mentally and physically. The fact is that every Monday our students came into school jet-lagged, the effects of which were compounded by our 7:20 a.m. start time. Ask your students about their sleep patterns on weekends and they will probably indicate that they go to bed late and sleep late. In effect, our students were on west coast time every Monday and the impact probably carried on into Tuesday or Wednesday.

### Student Achievement or Adult Convenience

You know a school or a school district is in trouble when the strategic plan follows the principles of the ABC School of Management—Administration By Convenience. One of the best indicators of an adult-focused environment, one that is practicing the principles of ABC, is when research is blatantly ignored in favor of current practice. Last year I [wrote](#), "At a time when the focus is on firing principals and teachers, [here](#) is an easy way to raise student performance by as much as 10%. School start times dramatically impacts academic achievement, behavior, motivation, and student engagement. I pointed to a student-developed [video](#) that continues to be true "conversation starter."

### A Testimonial

A reader wrote me saying, "When my family moved out of the area, we went from a 7:20 high school start time to an 8:20 high school start time. My older kids had a VERY hard time with 7:20; my son, in particular, had a body clock that just wouldn't let him sleep before midnight. Now, my younger kids handle the 8:20 high school start time with no trouble at all. That hour has made all the difference in the world. If school bus routes are truly running these start-time decisions, then flipping elementary and high school times is perfect. Of course, those parents who use elementary school as a convenient day care would have trouble with the switch—but those problems should not be allowed to override brain science."

### Research: Science says, "Let them sleep."

Today, so-called experts insist that schools use research-based strategies to teach students. Those same experts consciously turn their backs on research that would be inconvenient for them to implement.

The consensus in the field — informed by a large [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) survey of American teens — is that adolescents need about nine hours and 15 minutes of sleep a night. Most get less. "Teens are caught in a tug of war between their biology and rules and schedules put in place by adults. Biology is losing."

In [Nurtureshock: New Thinking About Children](#), author Po Bronson points out a number of key scientific facts relating to teens, sleep, and achievement:

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