



Report: Most schools aren't considering later start times

Hannan Adely, Staff Writer, @AdelyReporter Published 8:03 p.m. ET April 25, 2017 | Updated 8:46 p.m. ET April 25, 2017



(Photo: Tarq Zahawi/NorthJersey.com)

CONNECT TWEET LINKEDIN COMMENT EMAIL MORE

After months of hearings, surveys and a review of research, a state-appointed study group has concluded that school start times should continue to be set by local districts and not by any state authority.

Gov. Chris Christie signed a law in August 2015 ordering the study of the benefits of later start times in middle and high schools amid growing concern from health professionals that teens are getting too little sleep, affecting their health and their grades. The state Department of Education released the report Tuesday.

The vast majority of schools in New Jersey — 86 percent — start their days before 8:30 a.m., according to a survey in the study. The average start time is 8 a.m.

Experts say that's too early. The American Academy of Pediatrics claims that later start times are more in line with teens' biological sleep patterns and would be better for their grades, personal safety and health.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also has linked a lack of sleep to health risks such as being overweight, drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, and using drugs — as well as poor grades.

The group's report noted those health benefits, but also highlighted the many potential problems that could arise if school started later.

School leaders said it could be difficult and costly to rearrange transportation and that delays could interfere with family schedules and extracurricular activities. The delay in release time could also hurt students who need to be at after-school jobs by a certain time.

"Given the myriad of characteristics, factors, and variables that distinguish school districts and schools from one another, communities should not be confronted with a 'one size fits all' school start time mandate," the group wrote. It also recommended that school districts carefully review the issue.

Despite the reported health benefits, few school districts have changed their start times. The state surveyed superintendents in 428 districts with at least one middle or high school. Among districts that do not have later start times, 91 percent said they are not considering any change.

In Tenafly, an exception to the norm, the school board voted several months ago to change start times in the 2017-18 school year. Under the new system, the high school will open at 8:10 instead of 7:55 for four days out of five, and at 8:30 a.m. on the fifth day.

"More sleep spells greater academic success and improved social and emotional health," said Superintendent Lynn Trager, adding that the research was clear on the health benefits.

Trager said she would have liked 8:30 start times every day, but that it was too difficult because of conflicts with after-school programs, especially sports.

"Part of the problem we ran into is that other district aren't necessarily doing it," Trager said. "For after-school programs like athletics, it makes it harder for schools that do want to change their start time to have their athletes compete."

The study group said there needs to be an information campaign about the impact of chronic lack of sleep, but rejected the idea of a pilot program to test later start times.

The review included three public hearings, meetings and input from groups representing teachers, administrators and school psychologists and counselors. Members of the public, including parents and students, were invited to comment at hearings and online.

The report can be found online at www.nj.gov/education/students/safety/health/StartTimes.pdf

Survey findings in the report on later school start times:

- Of the 343 districts that reported they did not have a start time of 8:30 a.m. or later in their middle schools or high schools, most (91%) are not currently considering any

Share your feedback to help improve our site experience!

HEALTH



Advocates want Superfund status for DuPont site
Scott Fallon



Letter: On the value of higher education in America



Path Forward assists professionals returning to workforce
Deirdre Ward



Older rowers flock to Passaic River boat clubs
Kelly Nicholasides



Faulty Tanaka takes blame for Yankees' defeat in Texas
PETE CALDERA



Kelly: We cannot forget the unnamed dead of 9/11
Mike Kelly

f 30
t
in
1



changes in start times.

- Half of the districts have not discussed the change recently, and nearly half (43%) see no need to change.

- Respondents identified the following issues preventing them from having later start times: transportation coordination/cost (60%), athletic event conflicts (56%), child care issues (26%), general parent concerns (14%) and other concerns (13%)

