

## Are other schools changing their start times to address adolescent sleep issues?

Many school districts around the country are moving secondary school start times later to allow their adolescent students to get more sleep. In some districts the change is also seen as a way to eliminate transportation costs. In districts where the benefits have been clearly articulated, the scheduling concerns of parents and coaches haven't been seen as overwhelming. However, in districts that have considered the change but decided to keep start times the same, transportation costs and the perceived inconveniences to family and extra-curricular activities were more powerful than the perceived benefits of more sleep for students.

### Timeline of decisions

In 1996 and 1998, **Edina**<sup>1</sup> and then the **Minneapolis, Minnesota** school district adopted later high school start times in line with "research from the state medical association about sleep deprivation and sleeping patterns."<sup>2</sup> Edina High School moved from 7:25 to 8:30 am. The Minneapolis district adjusted start times at all levels: Elementary staggered start times between 7:40 and 9:40; Middle School start times of 9:40 and High School start times moved from 7:25 to 8:30 am.

The research of Kyla Wahlstrom at the University of Minnesota found that ninth-grade attendance improved, and that students were exhibiting fewer behavioral problems and signs of depression after they were able to sleep later. The change did not cost the Edina school district any money.<sup>3</sup>

In the Fall of 2000, **DeKalb, Georgia** launched a pilot program, moving **Cedar Grove High School's** start time to 8:55, while the Elementary School moved back to 7:30 and the Middle School to 8:10 am. DeKalb was responding to sleep research, but also to avoid transportation problems associated with having an entire school system begin school at the same time.<sup>4</sup> Concerns among parents have been children waiting for the bus in the dark, and a need to adjust childcare and extracurricular activities.<sup>5</sup>

In the Fall of 2000, **Wheeler High School**, in **Valpraiso**, Indiana changed its start times from 7:30 to 8:00 am. "The change was initially

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<sup>1</sup> Please see "Edina High School Start Time Decision Process" for more information on how this decision was made.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.districtadministration.com/page.cfm?p=83>

<sup>3</sup> Chambers. Detroit News 2001

<sup>4</sup> As of 2005-2006 start times has changed slightly. Please see the DeKalb County Schools website (<http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/~transportation/3tier.htm>).

<sup>5</sup> Ghezzi. Atlanta Journal-Constitution 2001.

controversial.... While school officials can't prove achievement has increased, they do know attendance has improved." <sup>6</sup>

In December of 2000, the School Board in **Arlington, Virginia** moved the high school start time from 7:30 to 8:15 am. This required adjusting elementary and middle school start times. <sup>7</sup>

Public schools in the **Albuquerque** and **Manzano, New Mexico** School Districts decided in April of 2001 not to change start times. Principals at both the elementary and secondary level found merit in the idea of moving elementary start times earlier, and high school start times later to improve instruction and student learning, but the current transportation system meant that all schools would need to make the change for it to work. <sup>8</sup>

In March 2003, after approximately one year of discussing and debating the merits of changing high school start times, *The School Start Time Task Force* in **Norfolk, Virginia** recommended that school start times remain the same. They concluded that there was little public support and that the changes envisioned could cost the district "millions of dollars in extra transportation costs." They also cite research likening a change to a later start time to "such traumatic shifts as closing a school or changing the attendance zones of a school." The Task Force suggests that parents be firm, and help shift children's biological clock by lightening the room while children dress in the morning. <sup>9</sup>

In the Fall of 2003, Seattle area schools adjusted start times to give students more sleep time. **Nathan Hale High School** moved its start times from 7:45 to 8:45 am. The **Bainbridge Island School District** has a new high school start time of 8:45 am; the **Mercer Island High School** changed its start time from 7:20 to 8:00 am; and the **Center School** and **Summit High Schools** both begin at 9:00 am. Other area schools have not made the change due to transportation and after-school activity issues.

**Nathan Hale High School** is considering ideas such as buying Metro bus passes for students, and using the last period of the day as a prep period for athletes to address some complications that have arisen. <sup>10</sup>

In January 2004, after approximately nine months studying school start times and the sleep needs of adolescents, the **Shrewsbury (Massachusetts)** School Committee recommended a start time of 8:00 am for Shrewsbury High School and start times no later than 9:00 am for elementary and middle schools. It was noted that **Lynnfield High School**

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<sup>6</sup> Carlson. Post-Tribune 2003.

<sup>7</sup> DeVise. Washington Post 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Chavez. Albuquerque Public Schools News Release 2001.

<sup>9</sup> School Start Time Task Force report to the Board. March 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Everett-Haynes. Seattle Post-Intelligencer March 2003.

and **Hingham High School** had both recently switched to an 8:00 am start time and had reported positive results.<sup>11</sup>

In February 2004 **Northville Public Schools**, in **Detroit Michigan** decided not to change starting times despite the research that prompted its consideration. It was determined that the district would need to purchase new busses to accommodate a time change and this was not feasible given state budget cuts.<sup>12</sup>

The **McKinney (Texas)** Independent School District adjusted its school start times for the 2004-2005 school year, primarily to save transportation expenditures. It adopted a "Three Tier Bell Schedule," with Elementary School starting at 8:30 am, Middle School starting at 7:45, and High School starting at 9:00 am. It was explained that High School was starting later than the Middle School because "virtually all adolescents are in the developmental stage requiring additional sleep."<sup>13</sup>

This year, several districts in the Washington, D.C. area decided not to make changes. In **Fairfax County, Virginia** it was decided that changing high the school start time (now 7:20) was not economical due to the new busses required, and there was no way to make the change without affecting the elementary and middle schools. In **Montgomery County, Maryland** the school board could not reach a consensus on changing start times. They were open to individual high schools in the district experimenting with their own start times, but none took the opportunity.<sup>14</sup>

The **Anne Arundel (Maryland)** School Board has considered three options, delaying start times by 15 minutes, by 45 minutes, or placing high school at the end of the bus schedule with a 9:30-4:10 schedule. There has been no consensus or decision made.<sup>15</sup>

**Topsham (Maine) Administrative District 75** is moving its middle and high school start times from 7:20 and 7:30 to 8:00 am. The middle and high schools are close to each other and will be able to share busses.<sup>16</sup>

In August 2005 the **Holyoke (Massachusetts)** School Board voted unanimously to move back high school and middle school start times from 7:15 to 8:15 am. School officials hope the move will improve tardiness and allow students to get the sleep they need.<sup>17</sup>

The **Milwaukee (Wisconsin)** School Board voted to overhaul school starting times for the 2005-2006 school year. The decision was made primarily to create a more efficient bus system and save an estimated

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<sup>11</sup> Shrewsbury School Time Start Committee 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Feighan. Detroit News 2004.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.mckinneyisd.net/school\\_times.htm](http://www.mckinneyisd.net/school_times.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Covino. <http://www.districtadministration.com/page.cfm?83>

<sup>15</sup> deVise

<sup>16</sup> Covino

<sup>17</sup> Atkins. Boston Herald 2005.

\$2.7 million a year. However, accommodating adolescent sleep needs was also seen as a positive outcome of the change. High schools start times will move from 7:30 to 8:35 am. Elementary schools will start at 7:45.<sup>18</sup>

**Issaquah (Washington)** secondary schools will revert to a 7:40 am start time in 2005. Secondary school start times had been moved to 7:25 am in 2003 to save money. It is estimated that this time change will cost the district \$240,000, but the *Bell Times Study Committee* felt the move was necessary to give students 15 minutes more sleep. A later start time, though preferable, is seen as too expensive.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Borsuk. Journal-Sentinel 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Solomon. Seattle Times 2005.