

# Should School Start Later?

Teens are more sleep-deprived than ever. Would a few more minutes to snooze in the morning make a difference? **By Justin O'Neill**

**Y**our alarm shrieks. You open your eyes, confused and groggy. Surely it isn't time to get up already? You smack the snooze button and sink back into dreamland—until your mom knocks on the door. "Get up, hon! You'll miss the bus!"

You groan. *Five minutes more. Please, please, please!*

Sound familiar? Across America, nearly 70 percent of teens are not getting enough sleep, according to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These teens arrive to school tired, and now some experts are saying middle and high schools should start later so teens can sleep in.

Are they right?

## Get Some Sleep

When teenager Jilly Dos Santos heard that the school board in her town of Columbia, Missouri, might change her high school's start time from 7:50 to 7:20 a.m., she launched a campaign to stop them. She researched the benefits of later



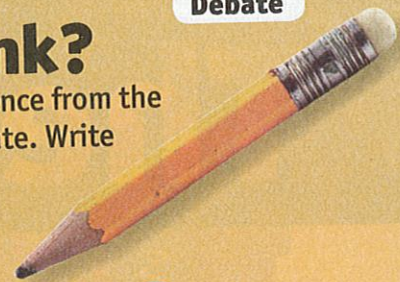
start times. She took to Facebook and Twitter with hashtags #StartTimes and #StudentsSay. She sent e-mails and put up posters around school.

What Jilly found is that teens need at least 8.5 hours of sleep a night. But getting that much snooze time can be a challenge. Homework, after-school jobs, and extracurricular activities keep teens up late. Plus, the body's circadian rhythm—that is, its natural sense of time—shifts during adolescence. It becomes physically harder to go to sleep early. Yet many schools start

as early as 7 a.m. As a result, many teens are exhausted all the time—and that takes a toll. Studies show that tired teens have an increased risk of depression, anxiety, obesity, and illness.

## Good Timing?

Schools that have pushed start times to 8 a.m. or later have seen promising results: Students are more alert and there are fewer incidents of tardiness. One 2012 study found that middle schoolers' test scores rose in reading and math. "Well-rested kids learn



# What Do You Think?

**Should school start later?** Use evidence from the article to support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.

## YES

**KIDS NEED THEIR ZZZZZs!**

1 Seventy percent of teens aren't getting enough sleep.

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

## NO

**KIDS NEED TO WAKE UP.**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS**—and decide if school should start later. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become the thesis statement for an argument essay.



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better,” says Heather Macintosh, of Start School Later, a nonprofit organization. “They’re happier, they get better grades, and their bodies are healthier.”

So if there are so many benefits to starting later, why doesn't every school just change its schedule?

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. For one thing, starting school later means dismissing school later, which leaves fewer daylight hours for after-school activities like sports. It could also cut into family dinnertime.

Transportation is another obstacle. School bus schedules are arranged to meet the needs of not just one school but all the schools in a district—elementary, middle, and high schools. Later start times would mean some districts might have to invest in additional buses and drivers, which can be expensive. And many parents would no longer have time before work to drive their kids to school.

Plus, some say, changing the start of the school day sends the wrong message. Being on time, managing a busy schedule, and getting enough sleep are important skills teens will need when they enter the workforce. There are also those who worry that if classes start later, teens will just go to bed later.

Jilly believes these obstacles can be overcome with some creativity. And she would know. The school board was so convinced by Jilly's research that they changed her school's start time to 8:55 a.m.

Now Jilly is resting easy. ●