

MMA--Minnesota Medical Association

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April 4, 1994

Kenneth Dragseth, Superintendent Edina Public Schools 5701
Normandale Road Edina, MN 55424

Dear Superintendent Dragseth:

The Minnesota Medical Association urges all Minnesota school districts to eliminate early starting school hours for teenagers.

Scientific studies show that many adolescents need more than 9 1/2 hours of sleep--more sleep than children or adults - just when demands on their time are increasing. Many young people who are juggling school, jobs, sports, homework, and socializing, cut back on their sleep-sometimes with disastrous results. Sleep deprivation causes accidents and interferes with learning.

Contrary to commonly held ideas, adolescents need more sleep than younger children:

Adolescents are objectively sleepier during the day after the same amount of sleep at night. In addition, there is scientific evidence that the timing of their sleep period is delayed; they are unable to fall asleep as early as their younger and older counterparts, and tend to sleep later.

Athletic and employment commitments are more stringent and more common than in the past; participation in sports now requires more time and is less flexible and negotiable.

The percentage of high school students who work is increasing. One-half to two-thirds of American high school students work. (By comparison, only 2% of Japanese students do.)

To further complicate matters, there remains an erroneous societal concept that sleep is negotiable, rather than a biologic imperative. Therefore, napping and "sleeping in" on weekends or holidays is discouraged, if not interpreted as a defect in character. This attitude is aided and abetted by another societal misperception: sleep deprivation has no significant consequences.

Despite the fact that older adolescents require more sleep and tend to have a delay in their sleep phase as compared to younger ones, the school starting times are earlier for the older adolescent--the opposite of what scientific data would suggest. One apparent reason for this is to permit after school extracurricular activities and employment. Another factor is bus scheduling. Students are encouraged, and occasionally required, to participate in extracurricular activities. Out-of-school employment is encouraged by the early dismissal times and work-study programs.

Your serious consideration of eliminating early starting school hours for teenagers is deeply appreciated. Please contact Mark Vukelich at the Minnesota Medical Association, 612/1378-1875, for further information.

Sincerely,

Barbara P. Yawn, M.D., Speaker Minnesota Medical Association
House of Delegates

BPY/bh

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