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Study Examines Conflict between Sleep Needs and School Start Time

Kay Hyatt

College of Education & Human Development, University of Maine

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Selected News Releases

Study Examines Conflict between Sleep Needs and School Start Time

ORONO, Maine - Teens' struggles to get up in the morning and stay awake in class have more to do with science than with stereotyping. But delaying the start time of school to accommodate those sleep needs is more complicated and far reaching than a simple internal adjustment, according to a recent report from the University of Maine.

Research shows that adolescents, in general, benefit from sleeping later because the biological changes of puberty affecting natural sleep patterns favor morning sleep. Adequate sleep aids adolescents' biological and mental health, and improves their memory, concentration and critical thinking - benefits that more and more high schools around the country are beginning to recognize and address in their scheduling.

The study from the Center for Research and Evaluation at UMaine's College of Education and Human Development points out that schools should approach such a change cautiously and comprehensively and be aware of possible consequences and complications that can vary from community to community.

"On My Own Times: The Conflict between Adolescent Sleep Needs and High School Start Times" by research associate Gail Downs summarizes the scientific research on adolescent sleep deprivation and the knowledge gleaned from schools districts that have responded by altering the school day.

The research findings must be balanced against other factors that changing the beginning and ending of the school day could affect, according to the study. For example, how it might impact sports and other after-school activities, students' afternoon jobs, family routines, teachers' lives, bus transportation staggered to serve other schools in the district, and the use of school facilities by community organizations.

Most of all, the study emphasizes, changing the time of the opening - and closing - school bell must be a local decision, made with the participation and input of the community after extensive communication and candid discussion of all concerns and benefits.

The study, "On My Own Times, is available on the Web at <http://libraries.maine.edu/cre>. Hard copies are available at no cost by calling (207) 581-2761 or sending an e-mail to kay.hyatt@umit.maine.edu.

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Contact: Kay Hyatt, (207) 581-2761

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