National Association of School Nurses (NASN) and Society of Pediatric Nurses (SPN)
Joint Position Statement: School Start Times

It is the joint position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) and the Society of Pediatric Nurses (SPN) that school start time policies should align with the best available evidence to support K-12 students' developmental needs. Commencing middle and high schools no earlier than 8:30 a.m. is an evidence-based policy measure that allows adolescents to obtain more sleep, thereby enhancing their overall health, safety, and learning capacity. It is essential that school nurses who are professional registered nurses (RNs) with specialized competencies in school health, as well as pediatric RNs in other settings collaborate with students, families, interprofessional healthcare colleagues, and legislative and community members to examine the best available evidence and address factors impacting students sleep quality, duration, and variability.

Background and Rationale

Regular and sufficient sleep is critical to the healthy development of the K-12 school-age population. Inadequate sleep can cause daytime drowsiness that affects students' ability to concentrate, assimilate new information, and problem-solve, which can lead to academic, physical, and emotional difficulties (Yip et al., 2022). During adolescence, biological circadian rhythm alterations result in a delayed sleep phase when compared to that of childhood. Lifestyle factors during middle and high school such as homework requirements, after school jobs, extracurricular or athletic activities, use of mobile devices and electronic media at night, intake of caffeine or other stimulants, and family and cultural practices, may also contribute to later bedtimes (Alfonsi et al., 2020; James et al., 2020; Mousavi & Troxel, 2023; NASN, 2025; van den Eijnden et al., 2021; Ziporyn et al., 2022). In addition, differences in socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic demographics may impact the quality and quantity of sleep among students (Billings et al., 2021; El-Sheikh et al., 2022; Saelee et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Collectively, physiologic changes and environmental and social effects influence adolescent sleep quality, duration, and variability.

A research study reported that approximately a third of high school students missed school due to lack of sleep (Gee et al., 2025). Per Werner et al. (2021), a majority of adolescents expressed a preference for a later school start time (SST). One way to increase the amount of secondary students' sleep time is to delay SST. Later SSTs are an effective population-level policy intervention that allows for deferred waking, resulting in a longer period of time available for sleep. Currently, the average high school start time in the U.S. is around 8:00 a.m. (Giglierano et al., 2024). An SST of 8:30 a.m. or later is the recommended start time for middle and high school students. (Meltser et al., 2022).

The effects of later SSTs can influence better academic performance that in turn, leads to increased graduation rates, an important driver of lifetime health outcomes (Borisenkov et al., 2022; Johri et al., 2025; Meltzer, Plog, Swenka et al., 2022; National Sleep Foundation, 2021; Neuroth et al., 2021; Widome et al., 2020). Reduced daytime sleepiness benefits middle and high school students through improved:

- attention and executive function (Alfonsi et al., 2020; Barlaan et al., 2022)

- physical, behavioral, and mental health (Chan et al., 2024)
- on time school arrival and attendance (Berry et al., 2021)
- safety, related to fewer car accidents (Bin-Hasan et al., 2020)

While evidence supports the benefits of later SSTs for middle and high school students, logistical challenges to implementation exist. Altered school hours may require that elementary students start school earlier. Though the impact on younger students has thus far been found to be minimal, further studies are needed to examine optimal start times for younger students (Bastian & Fuller, 2023; Meltzer et al., 2021; Meltzer, Plog, Wahlstrom, & Strand, 2022). Other changes may be needed in school bus transportation schedules, after-school sports and extracurricular activities, after-school employment, childcare, and other family accommodations. Despite challenges and necessary changes, school start times should be delayed to prioritize students' health, well-being, and developmental needs while carefully considering the significant impact this change would have on families, communities, the educational system, and other key parties involved (Berger et al., 2025; Bertsimas et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick et al., 2020; McKeever et al., 2022; Meltzer, Plog, Wahlstrom, & McNally, 2022; Meltzer et al., 2021).

As leaders, RNs collaborate with students, families, interprofessional healthcare colleagues, and legislative and community members to promote understanding of adolescent sleep/wake patterns. Advocacy for later SSTs is essential for creating equitable educational environments that support the health and wellbeing of adolescents (Mousavi & Troxel, 2023; Saelee et al., 2023). Nurses have the capacity to translate evidence on the impact of later SSTs into population-level public health policy to improve outcomes in student health, well-being, safety, and academic functioning.

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