

Lesson Plan: Should Schools Start Later?

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Featured resources

Above the Noise: [Why Can't Teens Wake Up Early for School?](#)

The Lowdown: [Should Schools Start Later?](#)



Melanie Ruiz/KQED

Opening quick write prompt:

How early do you wake up to make it to school on time? How does getting up at this time affect the rest of your day? Explain your answer. (For example: If your school day started later do you think your grades, test scores and other aspects of your life would improve? Or would it make it harder to participate in extracurricular activities or have a job?)

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze the debate about school start time as it relates to changes in the sleep cycle that happen during adolescence.
- Students will evaluate the evidence and write a response to the issue.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

How does the start of the school day affect students, especially teenagers? Should schools start later or should the schedule remain the same, given students' other activities and responsibilities?

Prompted by health warnings from organizations like the American Pediatric Association and others, schools are considering pushing back their start times to help students get more sleep. This is especially relevant for teenagers whose brains undergo a sleep-cycle phase shift during adolescence that causes them to stay up later. (It's not just bad smartphone habits!) Advocates say a later start time will help students reap the academic and health benefits of more sleep. But opponents say there's not enough evidence to disrupt the status quo. They fear later start times and later dismissals will cut into student athletics, extracurricular activities, family obligations and job responsibilities.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Chronotype (n.)	<p>The internal body clock that influences cycles of sleep and activity over the course of 24 hours; a person's preferred sleep time</p> <p><i>A person's chronotype changes during their teenage years. As a result, teens find it harder to fall asleep before 11 p.m. and wake up before 8 a.m.</i></p>
Coherent (adj.)	<p>Logical and well-organized</p> <p><i>It's hard to give a coherent answer in math class when you haven't had enough sleep.</i></p>
Deprivation (n.)	<p>Something being taken away or kept away</p> <p><i>Sleep deprivation can affect your memory and ability to concentrate. It can also keep your body from healing itself.</i></p>
Status quo (n.)	<p>The current situation; the way things are now</p> <p><i>Schools that start before 8:30am are the status quo in most places.</i></p>
Variation (n.)	<p>A difference in amount, degree or level</p> <p><i>There is a lot of variation in human chronotypes. Some people love waking up at sunrise. Others prefer staying up late.</i></p>

Investigate

- Discuss the quick-write prompt to gauge what students think about this issue.
 - **NOTE:** *The quick-write prompt is designed to begin the conversation and prepare students to write more detailed responses later in the lesson.*

- Explain that there's a growing amount of evidence that shows students don't get enough sleep because school begins too early in the morning. Refer to students' responses to the quick write to make a connection between the class's experience and the issue of school start times.

- As a class or in small groups, students watch the [Above the Noise episode](#)
 - **Stop the video at 1:36 and ask:** Do you think the fact that 87% of students don't get enough sleep is a serious problem? Why or why not?
 - **Stop at 1:56:** Why is getting enough sleep important to your health and mood?
 - **Stop at 3:48:** How do you figure out your chronotype? What is your chronotype?
 - **Stop at 4:47:** What evidence supports schools starting later than 8:30am?
 - **Stop at the end of the video:** What is an example of why school should NOT start later?

- To learn more about how states are addressing the issue through legislation and other strategies, students read [The Lowdown post](#).

- **Transition to the Make and Share:** Tell students they will have a chance to share their response to this issue in the comments section of The Lowdown. The first time they comment, students must sign in to [Disqus](#), a free discussion app embedded in The Lowdown.
 - To sign in to [Disqus](#), click the “Comments” button at the bottom of the post.
 - Click the blue “Get Started” button in the gray “Welcome to Disqus” box.
 - Students will need to enter a username. We recommend first name, last initial.
 - After signing in for the first time, students must verify their email address before commenting. A verification email will appear in their inbox once they sign in to Disqus.

Make and Share

- Individually or in small groups, students post in the comments section in response to the debate about when schools should start.
 - Responses should be supported by evidence from the Above the Noise episode, The Lowdown post, or other research on the topic. ([See source list](#))
 - Encourage students to reply to other comments after posting their response. Remind them to use evidence to support their claims and respectful language when replying to others.
- Students can create their own response or use the following questions as a starting point:
 - **Make your case:** What time do you think school should start based on your chronotype?
 - **Explore both sides:** In your opinion, what’s the best reason for schools to start later? What’s the most compelling reason to keep the schedule the same as it is now? Explain your thinking behind your response.
 - **Dive into research:** Conduct a survey of your classmates and friends to find out their chronotypes. Share your results and use the data to select the best start time for your school. Back up your suggested start time with statements of evidence.
 - **Personal take:** What side effects do you feel from not getting enough sleep? How does this affect your daily activities or behavior?
 - **Get creative:** Share an image that represents how you feel when you wake up in the morning. Explain what this image says about the time your school starts now, and what changes, if any, you would make to your school’s start time.

Assessment/Reflection

- Students reflect on what they have learned either through a class discussion or in writing:
 - What have you learned about the best time for schools to start? Did your opinion change or stay the same as you learned more about the issue?
 - What was it like to post your responses publically and reply to other posts? What did you learn from other students? What do you hope they learned from you? What will you do the next time you post a comment in response to The Lowdown?

[Circle chats](#), small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension/Homework

Write/speak locally: Students turn their response to this issue into a letter, short speech or presentation, then research ways to make their voice heard in their community. (Example: Speaking during the public comment section of a city council meeting, posting in an online forum, etc.) For a list of how to contact local officials in your area, check out [KQED Learning's Local Election Toolkit](#).

Common Core and NGSS standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
NGSS.SEP.7	Engaging in argument from evidence
NGSS.SEP.8	Obtaining, evaluating and communicating information
NGSS.CCC.2	Cause and effect: Mechanism and explanation