

Communicate the science

Identify key stakeholder groups in your community and opinion leaders within each group:

- Elected officials –May or may not usually involve themselves in school-related decisions, but it's important to reach out to leaders who may actively support or oppose changing school schedules. You want all leaders to be well-informed and to be able to talk coherently about this issue in case reporters or other stakeholders seek out their opinions.
- Teachers' organizations
- Principals
- Parents
- Students
- Coaches
- Community Sports Leagues
- Community organizations that provide before or after-school care or activities for children
- Local health professionals: Pediatricians, sleep docs, school nurses, medical professional
- Chief of Police, truancy officers, school resource officers

Share key messages (for example):

- Teens with later school start times do get more sleep. This advantage can add up to almost one month of sleep gained by the end of the school year.
- Students are sleeping at the right time and are more alert and awake for lessons.
- Adequate sleep improves learning, memory, mood, and performance in school, sports, and other activities.
- Districts with later start times have significantly lower teen car crash rates.
- More sleep means better sports performance and fewer sports injuries.
- Districts with later high school start times have less depression and less need for medications to treat depression. Attendance improves, tardiness decreases, and more students graduate.
- Schools that shifted later had fewer disciplinary referrals—fewer interruptions to instruction.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control, and the American Medical Association support middle and high school start times after 8:30 a.m.
- The return on investment is worthwhile: Brookings Institution economists report that improved performance is equivalent to two extra months in school and estimated that the benefits to cost ratio is 9:1.

Identify key statistics specific to your community (for example):

- 1 in 4 teens suffers from symptoms of depression.
- 2 in 3 teens are severely sleep deprived (lose 2 or more hours of sleep every school night).
- We can help XX students graduate on time.

Be consistent and clear. The evidence is compelling. Repeat the messages using different channels to communicate – presentations at meetings, press releases, emails, newsletters, videos, etc.

Change Management Techniques and Common Elements of Success

Communication: One theme seems to be a focus on increasing awareness among stakeholders to ensure that the community is aware of the benefits of this change to the health, well-being, and learning of our children.

Time: Lead time is important to a smooth transition.

Options: It's important to bring more than one potential plan to the community and to incorporate community input and suggestions along the way and to revise the options to attempt to address concerns.

Problem-solving: Identify concerns and investigate potential solutions. One district wrote an "Issue" paper for each issue that was identified providing a detailed proposed solution.

Plans to study the results are helpful because then there is feedback about what is working well and what could be improved.

Leadership from the Superintendent, the school board, and sometimes help from champions within the community. Use facts and provide reassurance to dispute myths and quell the fears and speculation that come with any change.

Change is hard and smooth transitions require leadership, communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (problem-solving).

There isn't just one solution to the logistical challenge of scheduling later, healthier high school start times. There are many solutions. Studies show that later high school start times bring meaningful improvement to our middle and high school students' quality of life and improve their academic performance. Other districts with later start times have shown that students' access to after-school or pre-school activities do not suffer. You, too, can make this happen.

Chace Anderson, Superintendent, Wayzata, MN, Fall Conference of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators—"Eventually, though, change will only happen by getting to a "Go Point" – 'Ultimately, every decision comes down to a 'go point,' that decisive moment when the essential information has been gathered, the pros and cons are weighed, and the time has come to get off the fence.'—*The Go Point: When It's Time To Decide*, Michael Useem, Professor of Management and Director of the Center for Leadership and Change Management at the Wharton School (2006)"