



Massachusetts State Chapter

health, safety and equity in education

Massachusetts Residents Petition Legislature on Middle and High Schools Start Times

On May 30, 2017, a petition signed by almost 5,000 residents requesting legislation that sets Massachusetts middle and high school start times to 8:30 AM or later will be delivered to Governor Baker and several legislative leaders, including House Speaker Di Leo and Senate President Rosenberg. The petition will be delivered by the leaders of the Massachusetts Chapter of Start School Later, a nonprofit organization dedicated to healthy, safe, equitable school hours.

Massachusetts high schools currently start at an average time of 7:37 AM. Extensive research has shown that early school start times decrease and disrupt adolescent sleep due to later shifts in sleep cycle that occur during puberty. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that adolescents start school no earlier than 8:30 AM. The Massachusetts Medical Society and Massachusetts Association of School Committees have also passed resolutions in favor of the 8:30 A.M. AAP recommendation. Schools that have met this standard are enjoying the benefits of decreased rates of teen car accidents, substance abuse, obesity, depression, and anxiety, as well as and better academic performance.

Despite compelling and consistent research demonstrating the benefits and feasibility of later start times, change has been slow. Although a handful of districts in Massachusetts have successfully delayed bell times, fear of change has stopped or delayed other local efforts to change, leaving the state with a public school system that is unhealthy, unsafe, and which presents a disproportionately negative impact on students from ethnically and economically diverse backgrounds.

Statewide legislation is necessary to mobilize Massachusetts communities to meet the goal of healthier school start times – and it will enable them to overcome the challenges presented by inter-community scheduling for academic and athletic events. Statewide legislation on School Start Times would ensure that Massachusetts supports the proper health and wellbeing of all children in the Commonwealth.

“By setting 8:30 A.M. as the earliest time that middle and high schools may operate, the state ensures that adolescents have the opportunity to get the sleep they need while allowing local communities to determine how to meet that standard,” said Mary Hamaker, leader of the Massachusetts Chapter of Start School Later. “Massachusetts prides itself on having top-rated education systems and has set standards for nutrition and physical exercise in schools. It is time that Massachusetts safeguard the physical and emotional health of our children by setting the standard for school start time. Doing so will provide a more equitable opportunity for all of the Commonwealth’s children to learn.”

Start School Later Massachusetts is a chapter of Start School Later, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working to ensure school start times compatible with health, safety, education, and equity.

Please visit our website at <http://www.startschoollater.net/ma---statewide.html>.

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