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## Schools around the US are finally pushing back their start times — and it's working



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With a population of just over 11,000, Dobbs Ferry, New York is your typical sleepy town, except for one thing.

When the first school bell rings, kids are wide awake.

Last September, Dobbs Ferry School District joined a small but growing cluster of schools around the US that have started pushing back their middle and high school start times in an effort to combat student grogginess.

Bolstered by a [mountain of sleep science research](#) that says pre-teens and teenagers are [some of the most sleep-deprived people](#) and would actually [do better in school](#) with more rest, these forward-thinking schools are finally cutting worn-out students a break.

They're letting kids sleep in.



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### What happens when you start later?

Dobbs Ferry Superintendent Dr. Lisa Brady tells Business Insider that prior to the 2015-2016 school year, middle schoolers started at 8:15 a.m. and high schoolers at 7:30 a.m. Under the new policy, each school now starts approximately 30 minutes later and ends 15 minutes later. Both schools have experienced tremendous benefits, Brady says.

Following a survey issued at the end of the last school year, Brady says "it was clear from both the parents and the kids, overwhelmingly, that the mornings were just less stressful."

Many of the kids reported having more time to eat breakfast and get ready for school, while parents said they didn't have to drag kids out of bed or yell at them to hurry up. Once students got to school, they felt more alert. At

night, they tended to reported going to bed at the same time, even though the new schedule freed up an extra 45 minutes.



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In Seattle, 85% of middle and high schools in the 2016-2017 school year swapped start times with the elementary schools. Now the older kids start at 8:45 while the youngsters start at 7:55.

Kira Hoffman, an eighth-grader at Jane Addams Middle School, [tells KUOW](#) that she "no longer feels super-rushed or worried about how much I've slept, or when I'm going to get to school, or if I'm going to be late."

## In Pennsylvania, a new hope

The trend has been building steam for the past few years. At the advocacy group [Start School Later](#), employees have been compiling an ongoing list of US schools and districts that have made the move to push back the first bell. So far, schools in [44 states](#) have jumped onboard.

One of those is Solebury School, in New Hope, Pennsylvania, where Director of Studies Rick Tony has pushed for a robust set of changes to the typical school schedule.

Beginning this academic year, kids at Solebury, a private boarding and day school, don't start until 8:30 a.m. On Wednesdays, it's 9:00 a.m. That's a full hour later than in years past, when the first bell sounded promptly at 8.

At the same time, the school also moved from six 50-minute classes to four 80-minute classes. With fewer teachers to assign homework, Tony says, kids can still enjoy their nights even if they get home slightly later.

"Every time we ask for feedback, the results come back 10 to 1, positive to negative," he tells Business Insider.

Tony is also a math teacher, and he says his students already produce better work on a more consistent basis, even though the schedule is just a month old. Around the campus, kids seem more relaxed now that they're not



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juggling as much work as early in the day.

"The freneticism is definitely reduced this year," he says, adding that in a few months he plans to follow up with teachers to get harder data about student achievement.

## The downsides of delaying start times

Negative responses to later start times are rare, but they do happen.

Brady says some parents at Dobbs Ferry have found it harder to complete the necessary morning rituals and still get to work on time. Meanwhile, Tony says the issue at Solebury is finding enough buses for

kids. In both cases, the officials say parents have the option to drop their kids off at school before the first bell so they can eat breakfast, charge their devices, or just hang out.



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Brady has also found challenges with athletics and after-school clubs. In years prior, teams had no trouble getting to away games. Now they have less time to get there, and they have to deal with worse traffic.

"The kids feel really rushed," she says.

Once they finally get home, many say they have less time for all the homework they've been assigned. Brady says the school is brainstorming changes to the school day similar to those made at Solebury.

## It takes a village

In districts where schools have yet to listen to the sleep science research, parents have begun to speak up.

A [recent op-ed in the Los Angeles Times](#) included voices from frustrated parents who were fed up with coaxing bleary-eyed adolescents to get dressed. "I have been saying for years that kids, especially high school students, should not be expected to be in their seats trying to learn anything in the early morning hours," a parent named Paula Del said.

When asked why more schools have yet to take her district's lead, Brady speculated it has something to do with generational pride. Even if the science is rock-solid, many administrators and parents simply don't pity the sleepy teen. Waking up is hard, but it's a part of life.

"I get that years ago we all walked 100 miles in the snow to school," Brady says. "But we know better now about the adolescent brain, and we know about their natural sleep rhythms being different than adults'."

