

Samuel Bradshaw, Period 1
AP Language and Composition
Persuasive Essay 1/19/07

REVISION 1/19/07

The 7:20 bell has signaled the start of a school day at Gulf Breeze High School for a long time. But should school really start this early? I believe that school hours at our high school (and also other “early-morning” schools) should be shifted one hour later. With the current schedule, students do not get enough sleep. With another hour, students will get more sleep, be healthier, and, as a result, receive a better education. They will be more productive, get into less trouble, and be safer.

Most students do not get enough sleep on nights before school. The trend is, and probably will not soon change, that students finally go to bed after midnight. They then wake up as early as 5:00 AM to begin their preparation for school, or even 4:00 AM for those with before-school activities. Adolescents require between 8.5 and 9.25 hours of sleep every night (“Adolescent Sleep Needs and Patterns”). In contrast, the average student gets 7.5 hours of sleep on weekdays. In a study done by the National Sleep Foundation, it was found that only 15% of students get 8.5 hours or more. 26% get less than 6.5 hours. I know several people at school who’ve even remarked getting 3 or less hours of sleep some nights.

However, contrary to common thought, going to bed late is not entirely the fault of the teenagers (to a point). The natural teenage sleep patterns are different than other ages. Melatonin, a chemical in the brain that causes sleepiness, is released in a teenager’s brain from 11 o’clock at night to 8 in the morning (“Later Start Times for High School Students”). As explained by researchers at the University of Minnesota, “[T]ypical youth

are not able to fall asleep much before 11 PM and their brains will remain in sleep mode until about 8 AM, regardless of what time they go to bed.” (“Later Start Times for High School Students”) Thus the students are tired throughout the morning, especially during their first few classes.

If students could sleep in a little longer in the mornings, they would most certainly be able to pay more attention to their classes. Students would participate more, would not fall asleep in class, and would be able to focus on the lessons. Although scientific proof has not been established concerning the grades of students with different sleep amounts, it has been observed that:

High school students who describe themselves as having academic problems and who are earning C’s or below in school report getting less sleep, having later bedtimes and having more irregular sleep schedules than students reporting higher grades. (“Adolescent Sleep Needs and Patterns”)

Tired students have “reduced short-term memory and learning ability, negative mood, inconsistent performance, poor productivity and loss of some forms of behavioral control.” (“Adolescent Sleep Needs and Patterns”) A school in Minneapolis, after shifting their school schedule one hour ahead, reported that attendance rates had improved since the change and that students were getting an hour more of sleep (on average). (“Minneapolis Study Shows More Sleep Increases Student Attendance”)

In addition to improved academic performance, several safety and health benefits of this time change proposal should be mentioned. Many students drink beverages with caffeine or use other stimulant drugs to keep themselves awake. These addictive substances are unhealthy for their bodies and can cause anxiety, dizziness, irritability, an

inability to concentrate, and headaches. Long-term use can increase the risk of cancer, heart problems, and problems with body development. (“Caffeine’s Effects on Health”) Therefore, with later school schedules, students will be less likely to use stimulants and thus will decrease the risk of major health problems.

When students have a lack of sleep throughout the week, they tend to sleep excessive amounts on the weekends. (“Adolescent Sleep Needs and Patterns”) Many students remain in bed until the afternoon. This irregular sleep pattern repeated weekly may cause fragmented (not restful and unhealthy) sleep. If they could get more sleep during the week, their weekends would be more regular. They would have more time on the weekends to do things they enjoy, as well as to finish homework and work on projects.

A lack of sleep may also cause car accidents. It is unsafe for students (especially younger ones) to wait for a bus so early in the morning, when it is still dark and drivers can’t see very well. Older students, who drive, must often be traveling to school in the dark on early mornings. This, combined with the fact that they are especially tired, creates a major safety hazard. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), drowsiness and fatigue are principal causes of at least 100,000 car crashes in the United States every year, killing and injuring tens of thousands of people. More than half of these accidents involve people under 26. (“Adolescent Sleep Needs and Patterns”) About 1 million crashes yearly are attributed to lapses in a driver’s attention, which lapses could easily be a product of a lack of sleep. Mr. Mills, a teacher at Gulf Breeze High School, argues that it would be dark *after* school during certain times of the year, but I would point out that it is darker for a longer period of the year in the

early morning than at the time school would end; in addition, the students would not be as tired in the afternoon as they would be before school.

Extended sleep is not the only benefit of a later schedule. Many students, given extra morning time, may find it easier to do homework in the morning before school than in the evening after school. It is a time when students probably won't be out with friends or going anywhere, so they can be at home and focus on their homework. Also, there are those who have after-school activities that take the whole evening, such as work or sports, or those who procrastinate their homework and work best under pressure. These students could get their homework done before school on the morning that they have to turn it in, rather than during their first classes.

After-school hours are the most common time for juvenile criminal activities; in fact, 45% of all violent juvenile crime takes place between 2:00 and 8:00 PM, and within that time range most of occur between 2:00 and 4:00. (“Adolescent Sleep Needs and Patterns”) If students could be kept at school for another hour, they would have less after-school time to do anything illegal. They would be under adult supervision for a larger part of the day.

Thus we see that in the interest of students and of the whole community, Gulf Breeze High School and other schools of similar hours must start an hour later than they currently do. Students need to sleep longer, and will be able to if they have more time in the mornings. They will be healthier and happier, they will learn more, and they will be more productive. They will be safer, and be less disposed to take part in criminal activity. This is why school schedules should shift to one hour later.

WORKS CITED

“Adolescent Sleep Needs and Patterns.” National Sleep Foundation. 13 Jan. 2007 <[http://](http://www.sleepfoundation.org/_content/hottopics/sleep_and_teens_report1.pdf)

www.sleepfoundation.org/_content/hottopics/sleep_and_teens_report1.pdf>.

“Caffeine’s Effects on Health.” *Go Ask Alice*. 16 Apr. 1999. Columbia University. 13

Jan. 2007 <<http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/1485.html>>.

“Later Start Times for High School Students.” *College of Education and Human*

Development. 3 Jan. 2007. University of Minnesota. 13 Jan. 2007 <<http://education.umn.edu/Pubs/ResearchWorks/sleep.html>>.

“Minneapolis Study Shows More Sleep Increases Student Attendance.” *Urban*

Educator: The Nation’s Voice for Urban Education. 8 Oct. 2001. Council of the

Great City Schools. 13 Jan. 2007 <[http://www.cgcs.org/urbaneducator/](http://www.cgcs.org/urbaneducator/oct_vol_10_no_8_article_11/oct_vol_10_no_8_article_11.html)

[oct_vol_10_no_8_article_11/oct_vol_10_no_8_article_11.html](http://www.cgcs.org/urbaneducator/oct_vol_10_no_8_article_11/oct_vol_10_no_8_article_11.html)>.