

## **NASW Ohio Chapter Board Position Statement: School Start Times for Adolescents**

In accordance with the mission of the National Association of Social Workers Ohio Chapter to advocate for social policies that advance social justice and the social work profession's commitment to enhance the effective functioning and well-being of individuals, families, and communities, NASW Ohio Chapter endorses the evidence-based recommendations that school start times for adolescents occur after 8:30am.

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing awareness of the changes in sleep patterns in children as they transition to adolescence. Sleep researchers have now identified a clear, universal shift in the sleep cycle during puberty caused in part by changes in melatonin levels and resulting in a later sleep-wake internal clock.<sup>1</sup> Schedule demands of school, work, sports, and family, however, generally require adolescents to ignore this natural shift and to endure chronic sleep deprivation.<sup>2</sup> This chronic sleep deprivation in adolescents impairs their ability to concentrate, solve problems, and retain information—leading to lower academic performance.<sup>3</sup> According to the National Sleep Foundation, sleep-deprived teens are also more likely to engage in risky behavior, to be involved in auto accidents, to experience more sports injuries and other health concerns, to feel irritated and depressed, to act impulsively and to be involved in delinquent behavior—including violence.<sup>4</sup> States and school districts that have adopted later school start times for adolescents have reported several positive results including improved attendance, fewer student trips to the school nurse, some improvement in parent-teen interactions, better grades, and fewer traffic collisions.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, NASW Ohio Chapter supports efforts at the state level to delay school start times for Ohio adolescents.

NASW Ohio Chapter endorses the recommendation for later school start times with the understanding that multiple socioeconomic factors—such as work schedules of both parents and students; childcare for students' younger siblings; extracurricular activities and socializing; and transportation costs and logistics—would be affected by this change. We, therefore, encourage Ohio lawmakers to examine both the clinical research and the impact of later school start times on Ohio families and to act in the best interest of our youth and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfson, A.R. & Carskadon, M.A. (1998). Sleep schedules and daytime functioning in adolescents. *Child Development*, 69, 875-887.

<sup>2</sup> National Sleep Foundation. (n.d.) Backgrounder: Late school start times. Retrieved April 29, 2014 from <http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-news/backgrounder-later-school-start-times/>

<sup>3</sup> Ax, E.A. (2006). Effect of Sleep Disorders on School Behavior, Academic Performance and Quality of Life. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida.

<sup>4</sup> National Sleep Foundation. (n.d.) Backgrounder: Late school start times. Retrieved April 29, 2014 from <http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-news/backgrounder-later-school-start-times/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.