

AUSD High Schools to Launch Later School Start Times in 2020-21

Beginning next year, AUSD high schools will begin later in order to more fully support secondary students' mental, emotional, and physical needs, district leadership announced last week. The start time for elementary and middle schools is still being determined. The changes come in the wake of a bill signed by Governor Gavin Newsom last fall.

Community members first began advocating for later start times in February 2016, when they presented a petition asking the Board of Education to consider allowing secondary students to begin their day later. Numerous studies have shown that due to changes in the biological clocks of adolescents, they do best when allowed to go to sleep and wake up later. Because of this shift in the sleep-wake cycle, numerous medical organizations now recommend that secondary schools start later (see sidebar).

A survey administered in March 2017 showed clear support for later school start times among AUSD students, staff, and families, and the district convened a small working group to discuss the logistics of such a change. That spring, State Senator Anthony Portantino introduced SB 328, which called for middle schools to start no earlier than 8:00 am and high schools to start no earlier than 8:30 am. That bill failed to win approval by first the Assembly (in 2017) and then Governor Brown (in 2018). In October 2019, Governor Newsom finally approved it.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

A wide variety of studies have found that adolescents are not getting the sleep they need due to a physical shift in their brains that causes them to naturally become sleepy later at night and awake later in the morning.

Studies have also found that later school start times for high schools are correlated with:

- Better concentration
- Better grades
- Decreased rates of tardiness and absenteeism
- Reduced depression and anxiety
- Fewer vehicle accidents

Organizations that now recommend that secondary schools start later include:

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Academy of Sleep Medicine
- National Association of School Nurses
- National Association of Social Workers
- American Medical Association
- American Psychological Association

SB 328 gives districts three years to implement the change, but AUSD has decided to implement the change next year. District staff are proposing an 8:30 am start for high schools; the Board of Education will vote on this recommendation at its January 28 meeting.

“The scientific evidence shows that later school start times help adolescent students get the sleep they need to support their mental health, physical well-being, and academic performance,” says Superintendent Pasquale Scuderi. “I am excited that we are implementing this change sooner rather than later.”

The district expects to release the start times for AUSD middle and elementary schools in the early spring.

For more information on AUSD’s school start time project, please see our [Later School Start Times webpage](#).