

Research to Inform Academic Calendar: Start Times and Vacation Breaks

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Agenda

- Background
- Research question
- Findings
 - Later start time
 - Vacation breaks
- Limitations
- Recommendations
- References

Background

- When interviewing nationwide sleep experts for the [A Better Night's Sleep podcast](#), I consistently hear the call for later start times for adolescents.
- Mr. Scott Clifthorne recommended I assemble the relevant research on this topic and also research related to vacation breaks.

Research Question

I conducted literature reviews to investigate the known effects of later start times and long vacation breaks on students':

- Academic outcomes
- Health
 - Physical health
 - Sleep
 - Mental health
- Attendance

Findings – Later Start Times (1/2)

There is **sufficient** evidence in the peer-reviewed literature to support the finding that later start times for adolescents result in:

- Academic benefits
 - Improved performance
 - Increased graduation rates
- Increased sleep

Findings – Later Start Times (2/2)

There is **some** evidence that later start times result in:

- Less symptoms of depression
- Fewer vehicular accidents

There is **mixed** evidence that later start times result in:

- Improved attendance
- Increased attention

Findings – Vacation Breaks

There is **some** evidence that long vacations **may** result in:

- Loss of reading fluency
- Loss of fitness gains and increase in body weight.

I did not find sufficient evidence in the literature to summarize the effects of lengthening the school year for children other than those with special needs.

Limitations

- I only included literature in academic (peer-reviewed) journal articles, yet many school districts have implemented these changes without publishing their findings. It is important to look at less formal data as well.
- It is unclear what the logistic, second-order effects of these changes will be.
- I did not find any reviews of school systems that implemented both of these changes simultaneously.

Recommendations

- Conduct a [needs assessment](#) to determine what the students, caregivers, and teachers feel to be most wanting in terms of schedules.
- Speak to representatives from similar-sized districts about their lessons learned after implementing these changes.
- Evaluate the second-order effects of these proposed changes and develop a reasonable implementation timeline.
- Consider how many changes the school district can implement in one period of time and prioritize accordingly.

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