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As a parent in the Hall-Dale school system (RSU2), I am writing in support of this act to provide for a later start time for high schools.

There is agreement among scientists that adolescents' bodies are biologically primed to go to sleep later and wake up later because of changes in their melatonin production and shifts in how their brains process sleepiness. There is also agreement that middle school and high school students in our country are chronically sleep deprived. This sleep deprivation has negative impacts on academic and athletic achievement, mood and emotional health, drowsy and distracted driving, and physical health. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that adolescents start school no earlier than 8:30 a.m.

Later start times lead directly to more hours of sleep and better academic, mental and physical outcomes. Starting school later is also one of the most effective and cheapest ways to improve the health of adolescents. Based on these data, school districts in Maine are moving start times later in the day, and several other states have passed laws requiring later start times for middle and high school. Schools in Maine that have already made this positive change include Old Town, Westbrook, Dayton, Biddeford, Saco, Old Orchard Beach, Yarmouth, Cumberland, Cape Elizabeth, Portland, and South Portland.

Currently, in the Hall-Dale Schools, the middle and high school starts before the elementary school. The district could switch the start times so that elementary students started earlier and middle and high schools started later. Argumentatively, this would be better for all our students, as elementary-aged students generally wake up and are ready to learn earlier in the morning than middle and high school students.

We know that there will be resistance to changing sports and bus schedules. However, schools all over the nation manage to start and end at a variety of times, and we too can find ways to make our sports and transportation systems work smoothly for the benefit of our children, rather than the other way around. Whether they dismiss at 1:40 p.m. or 3:30 p.m., schools manage to support athletics and other extracurricular activities. When communities change their school hours, the whole community adjusts accordingly. This is precisely what happened when many schools moved start times earlier in the 1980s. Just because something is done a certain way now doesn't mean it's the only or best way for our children. The evidence bears this out: starting school after 8:30 a.m. helps in-school, extracurricular, and at-home performance and health.

Thank you for considering.