

# Should Schools Start Later? A Case for Health, Safety, and Academic Success

Imagine a mother, exhausted from working late into the night to make ends meet, waking up at 6:00 a.m. to walk her children to school. With only six hours of sleep, she relies on caffeine to keep her going, unaware that this habit is slowly weakening her bones. Her children, too, struggle to stay awake in class, missing crucial lessons and falling behind in their studies. This scenario is not uncommon, and it highlights a pressing issue: early school start times are harming families. Schools must begin later to reduce reliance on caffeine, prevent accidents, and improve academic performance.

Early school start times force families to rely on caffeine to cope with sleep deprivation. Many parents and teenagers consume coffee to stay alert, but excessive caffeine intake can lead to health issues such as increased heart rates, breathing difficulties, and weakened bones due to calcium depletion. Over time, this reliance on caffeine can lead to long-term health problems, including osteoporosis and cardiovascular issues. By starting school later, families can enjoy more sleep in the morning, reducing their dependence on caffeine and promoting healthier lifestyles.

Early school start times increase the risk of sleep-related accidents. Sleep-deprived parents driving their children to school are more likely to be involved in accidents. Research by Vorona et al. (2014) found that crash risks are 30% higher during traditional school hours compared to later times. These accidents not only endanger lives but also place a financial burden on families and communities through medical costs and property damage. Delaying school start times would reduce the number of sleep-related accidents, ensuring safer roads for everyone.

Early school start times negatively impact students' academic performance. A study of 30,000 students across 29 high schools found that delaying school start times to 8:30 a.m. improved attendance rates from 90% to 93% and graduation rates from 80% to 90% within four years. Sleep-deprived students often struggle to concentrate, leading to gaps in their knowledge, lower grades, and reduced long-term prospects, including employment opportunities and health outcomes. Later

school start times would allow students to get adequate sleep, improving their focus, academic performance, and overall well-being.

Starting school later is not just a matter of convenience—it is a necessity for the health, safety, and success of students and parents alike. By delaying school start times, we can reduce reliance on caffeine, prevent accidents, and improve academic outcomes. This change would create a healthier, safer, and more productive society. Let's prioritize the well-being of our families and give them the opportunity to thrive.

## Are smartphones making us dumber?

Imagine a student sitting in class, struggling to focus as her smartphone lights up with notifications every few minutes. Despite her best efforts, she instinctively reaches for her phone, tuning out her teacher's words. Her classmates face the same challenge, missing crucial lessons and falling behind in their studies. This scenario is all too common and highlights a pressing issue: smartphones are significantly affecting students' cognitive abilities. From memory retention to focus and critical thinking, smartphones are undermining the very skills essential for learning and development.

Smartphones have become a crutch for memory, with students relying on them to store everything from reminders to important dates. While this may seem convenient, it comes at a cost. Memory retention is a critical component of cognitive development, as it allows us to store and recall information when needed. However, by outsourcing this function to smartphones, students are losing the ability to remember things on their own. For example, relying on alarms to wake up or calendars to track exams can lead to problems when the phone runs out of battery or malfunctions. Learning to remember important tasks without digital assistance not only strengthens memory but also prepares students for situations where technology isn't available.

One of the most significant impacts of smartphones is their ability to distract students from their work. Constant notifications, social media, and endless scrolling create a cycle of distraction that pulls students away from their studies.

This not only leads to incomplete homework but also results in missed lessons and poor grades. The temptation to check a phone is hard to resist, especially when it's within arm's reach. By keeping smartphones away during study or class time, students can regain their focus and improve their academic performance. The ability to concentrate without interruption is a skill that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Smartphones also encourage users to rely on technology for answers without fully understanding the underlying concepts. While tools like calculators and search engines are helpful, they can hinder the development of critical thinking skills. For instance, solving a math problem like  $2 \times 3 + 4$  versus  $2 \times (3 + 4)$  requires an understanding of mathematical principles, not just the ability to input numbers into a calculator. Similarly, blindly accepting information from the internet without questioning its accuracy can lead to misunderstandings. By fostering a deeper understanding of fundamental concepts, students can develop the ability to think critically and solve problems independently.

The impact of smartphones on cognitive abilities cannot be ignored. They weaken memory retention, disrupt focus, and encourage overreliance on technology for problem-solving. While smartphones are undeniably useful, their negative effects on learning and development are significant. To combat this, students must learn to use technology responsibly, balancing its convenience with the need to develop essential cognitive skills. By doing so, they can protect their ability to think, learn, and grow in an increasingly digital world.

## Should Rich Countries Be Required to Help Poorer Nations?

Imagine a nation where millions depend on foreign aid for survival—where entire communities rely on external funding for food, shelter, and healthcare. Now, picture what happens when that aid is withdrawn. Without the skills or resources to sustain themselves, people face extreme hardship, struggling to secure even a single meal. This is the danger of enforced reliance on aid. While supporting poorer nations is an act of compassion, making it an obligation can foster dependency, misallocate resources, and violate national autonomy.

When governments become overly reliant on foreign aid, they risk losing their ability to sustain their own people. Instead of developing self-sufficient economies, they become trapped in a cycle of dependency. Take Lebanon, for example—crippled by economic collapse, it now relies heavily on humanitarian assistance. Without addressing the root causes of poverty, continuous aid only prolongs the crisis. A more effective solution would be to invest in education and vocational training, equipping people with the skills to build their own economies rather than perpetuating reliance on external support.

Beyond dependency, aid often leads to wasted resources. According to a study published in ScienceDirect, nearly 4% of donated food spoils before reaching those in need. While this may seem like a small percentage, on a large scale, it translates to millions of tonnes of wasted food—resources that could have been used more effectively. Instead of simply providing handouts, a better approach would be to invest in agricultural development programs that enable communities to grow their own food, reducing waste and promoting sustainability.

Forcing wealthier nations to provide aid also raises ethical concerns. Assistance should stem from goodwill, not obligation. Psychologist Jack W. Brehm's reactance theory suggests that when individuals—or nations—are forced into action, they often resist, even if the action is beneficial. If countries are compelled to help, they may become reluctant or disengaged, reducing the overall effectiveness of aid efforts. A more sustainable approach would be to encourage voluntary international cooperation, fostering a spirit of shared responsibility rather than resentment.

While aid can be beneficial, it should not be a requirement. Instead of enforcing obligations, we should promote sustainable development by empowering poorer nations with education, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. This way, they can build resilience, reduce waste, and foster genuine global cooperation. True progress comes not from endless handouts but from providing nations with the tools to thrive independently.