



## Best Practice: Late Start for Teens

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**CITY: TORONTO**

**POLICY AREAS: EDUCATION**

### BEST PRACTICE

Eastern Commerce Collegiate Institute, a Toronto District School Board High School, implemented a later school start time to better align school instruction time with peak hours in the day for student alertness and learning potential. A later start time allows students to get more sleep, leading to subsequent improvements in education and health indicators.

### ISSUE

Studies have shown that adolescents perform better later in the day as opposed to early morning. Additionally, studies have shown that adolescent short term memory is better in the morning but long term memory improves in the late afternoon and early evening. These findings do not coincide with a traditional school day that can begin as early as 7:30 am and end by 3:00 pm.

With traditional school schedules and a biologically different sleep and wake patterns, adolescents typically sacrifice sleep – they are not tired until late in the evening and then wake early for school. Shortened sleep times have been associated with lower academic performance, GPA's, and motivation levels, while more sleep and later weekday rise times have been associated with better grades and a higher motivation to do well in school.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following are the specific aims of the Late Start at Eastern Commerce:

- To address the serious lateness and absenteeism problem;
- To help students succeed by aligning student learning times with the middle part of the day when adolescents can be more alert and learn better;
- To help adolescents get more sleep and be more awake and alert in school;
- To help maintain enrollment numbers at the school by providing a different schedule option than other high schools in the area.

### IMPLEMENTATION

In September 2009, Eastern Commerce Collegiate Institute (ECCI) implemented a later start to the school day. Previously, the school day began at 9:00 am; with the later start time, the school day now begins at 10:00 am. Tuesdays through Thursday, students are dismissed at 4:15 pm, Mondays at 3:00 pm and Friday at 2:30 pm, which also allows Muslim students to attend a Mosque.

There was a good deal of preparation and consultation that had to be done prior to the initiation of the schedule change. This included planning the schedule and engaging in communication and consultation with students, parents, staff, media and the interested general public. Students and staff were able to transfer schools if the later schedule did not suit their needs. While no staff members reported leaving for this reason, there were some students who transferred in response to the schedule change. However there were also students who transferred into ECCI because of the change in schedule.

The early adjustment period continued as students and staff adjusted to the schedule change once it was implemented.

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### COST

There have been no additional costs for implementing the late start. All costs are covered under regular school funding provided by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION

Overall, the change in schedule did take some preparation and a period of early adjustment, but it is now perceived as generally positive by students and staff. Positive results are shown across academic indicators, staff and student perceptions, absenteeism rates, as well as overall average sleep times.

Based on the one year interim report, these are some of the findings:

- Seventy percent (70%) of ECCI respondents report that it is “easier to come to school” after the schedule change, this is a much higher positive response compared to a control school in the TDSB;
- ECCI teachers report that students are more alert and able to participate in class, particularly morning classes;
- ECCI students had higher participation rates in sports, volunteer activities, and leadership programs than the control school;
- ECCI students were absent less often (among 14, 16, and 17 year olds) following the schedule change, where there were marginal absenteeism increases across all age groups across the TDSB;
- ECCI students got on average 30 minutes more sleep per night than students in the control school; and
- ECCI reported 2.5 times the number of students getting more than 9 hours of sleep per night than in the control school.

Additionally, ECCI showed a 4-9% improvement in academic credit accumulation for students in Grades 9 and 10 following the later start. This improvement was greater than rates of improvement in the TDSB overall. In Grades 9 and 10 English and Science, ECCI showed the highest percentage improvement compared to TDSB as a whole. In Grades 11 and 12, Eastern Commerce showed the highest percentage improvement in English and Mathematics compared to TDSB as a whole. Although these overall achievement trends are encouraging, the results are by no means definitive. In terms of overall marks, there were more increases than decreases. To balance this, there was a slight decline in Grade 11 and 12 Science marks, and no improvement according to the provincial Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) Grade 9 and 10 assessment results. Thus, achievement patterns at Eastern Commerce can be seen in a positive, but a very cautiously positive, light. Following student achievement trends will be crucial in further monitoring the later start at ECCI.

### TIMELINE

Fall 2008	Initial planning took place between then Superintendent Jill Worthy and TDSB Vice-Chair Cathy Dandy, an education advocate and long-time researcher of adolescent mental health
Spring 2009	Reconciling the new schedule with Ontario Ministry of Education's required minutes of instruction
Sept 2009	Consulting with staff, parents and students
	Late Start implemented

### LEGISLATION

N/A



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### LESSONS LEARNED

Immediate adjustments were necessary as staff and students faced specific challenges with the new schedule.

Two issues were discovered in the first semester. First, a lunch period shorter than one hour was not sufficient as students were late to the after-lunch classes, and secondly, extracurricular activities were being negatively affected. To remedy these issues, in the second semester, lunch was made one hour long, and extracurricular issues were resolved by moving some activities to the morning.

What remains a challenge is that a later finish time means that student athletes miss more class time for meets and games because other schools' dismissal remain at 3:15 pm. Additionally, students with afterschool commitments such as part time jobs and/or the responsibility of picking up younger brothers and sisters have greater difficulty.

Additionally, staff has found it hard to make appointments and run errands during the week, which has resulted in reduction of staff involvement in after-school activities. Although this has not been specifically addressed, most staff noted that it is beneficial to have two days a week that end earlier than 4:15 pm to conduct other activities.

### TRANSFERABILITY

This program is highly transferable to other cities; student alertness and optimum learning times are maximized and there are no costs involved as long as busing is not an issue.

### CONTACTS

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Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners.