

## Tim Lamkin

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**From:** Lisa Alexia <lisa.alexia@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 20, 2020 7:46 AM  
**To:** Senate Education  
**Cc:** Katie McCall  
**Subject:** TESTIMONY: SMART START SB 149

Dear Senators of the Education Committee,

Starting school later is perhaps the single greatest investment you could make in the education, health, and safety of high school students in Alaska. The American Medical Association, Centers for Disease Control, and the American Association of Pediatrics all endorse high school start times be no earlier than 8:30 a.m., based on solid research demonstrating the profound improvements that starting later can have on mental health, learning, and safety.

Because human sleep cycles are still determined primarily by morning sunlight, many Alaskans, not just high school students, suffer chronic sleep deprivation as the hours of morning darkness are extended far beyond anywhere in the lower 48. For most Alaskans, it's how far west, (not north), that makes mornings so dark, since 1983 when the state lost most of its time zones. For example, when adjusted for the sun's true time, the equivalent school start time on St. Paul Island, far west in Alaska but further south than Juneau, is 4:55 in the morning on Halloween, before the clock falls back to standard time. While communities in SE Alaska are the least affected by this time zone mismatch, Juneau has already recognized how important the school start time is, by moving their high school start times to 9:15.

Sleep deprived children don't learn well or test well. They are more likely to experience emotional and behavioral problems. Substance use rates go up. Traffic accidents go up. These effects are particularly acute in the spring and fall months when Daylight Saving Time is in effect and school is in session. And for high school students, the problem is particularly acute, because adolescent bodies experience a well-documented circadian shift, whereby they become night owls until their early 20s. Thus, that 4:55 am school start time in St. Paul, would feel like a 3 a.m. start time to the average 15-year-old.

Nowhere in the country is a shift to later school start times more important than Alaska, with our notoriously low student test scores, high rates of youth suicide, and pervasive substance abuse problems. All of these are affected by sleep deprivation. **When high schools start later, standardized test scores go up. Depression decreases. Substance abuse decreases. Morning traffic accidents decrease.** I propose to you, Senators, that making the high school start time later, is a major missing link to solving many public health and education problems which have plagued the state for so long. At the least, Alaska has the most to gain in the nation, by setting a minimum bar for high school start times.

Community life revolves around school, and so the time that school starts determines many other schedules in a community. Mandating an absolute early start at the state level, allows communities to figure out an appropriate, local adaptation which may have positive ripple effects for the rest of the community. Leaving this decision up to local districts, however, hasn't worked, and invites confusion and a lack of understanding of Alaska's unique history with relation to time zones. It is the responsibility of good government, however, to set minimum standards to protect public health and safety. This is why we have seat belt laws, and why we require vaccinations for school entry. It's time that Alaska does the same with school start times.

I would be happy to discuss any of this further upon request. I am a physician assistant in Alaska who started as a Community Health Practitioner in a small Interior village; I've lived here for 20 years and traveled extensively in rural Alaska for work. I currently practice psychiatry. In addition, I am the mother of two teenage sons. Thus, my interest and knowledge in all of the above is based on years of observation as well as professional experience.

Thank you,

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