

Name _____

Date _____

Evaluate an Argument

In an argument, the author expresses a position on an issue and then attempts to support that position. A **successful argument** persuades readers to agree with the author's position. To evaluate whether an argument is successful, you must first delineate, or outline, its basic parts.

Read the following argument and answer the questions.

School Start Times: A Case for Later Beginnings

For decades, most American high schools have started classes around 7:30 AM, requiring teenagers to wake up while it's still dark outside. This practice continues despite overwhelming scientific evidence that it harms students' health and academic performance.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that high schools start no earlier than 8:30 AM. This recommendation is based on research showing that teenagers' biological clocks naturally shift during puberty, making it difficult for them to fall asleep before 11:00 PM and wake up early. When schools force students to attend class before 8:30 AM, they are essentially requiring attendance during what scientists call "biological night" for teenagers.

Schools that have shifted to later start times report impressive results. In Seattle, when the district moved high school start times from 7:50 AM to 8:45 AM, students

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gained an average of 34 minutes of sleep per night. Academic performance improved, and tardiness decreased by 44%. Similarly, in Fairfax County, Virginia, later start times led to significantly improved graduation rates.

Critics argue that later start times would disrupt after-school activities and parents' work schedules. However, the districts that have made the change have successfully adjusted athletic schedules, and many parents report preferring the later schedule. The initial inconvenience of changing established routines pales in comparison to the documented benefits for students' health and academic success.

Given the clear evidence supporting later start times, school districts across the country should follow the science and make this important change for the benefit of their students.

1. What is the main claim of this argument? What evidence does the author provide to support it?

2. Identify one potential weakness in the author's argument.

3. Does the author address counterarguments effectively? Explain your reasoning.

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Evaluate an Argument-Answer Key

1. What is the main claim of this argument? What evidence does the author provide to support it?

The main claim is that high schools should start later than 7:30 AM. Evidence includes recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and improved outcomes in Seattle and Fairfax County schools.

2. Identify one potential weakness in the author's argument.

The author provides limited examples (only two school districts) and doesn't address potential differences between communities or the financial costs of implementing schedule changes.

3. Does the author address counterarguments effectively? Explain your reasoning.

The author acknowledges concerns about activities and parent schedules but provides limited evidence that these issues were successfully resolved, relying on general statements rather than specific examples.