

# TEENS & SLEEP

**Eleven-and-a-half-hour days of schoolwork, homework-laden evenings and early mornings, and long schedules of activities have youth sleep-deprived and stressed, with high school students suffering the most. What do teens think it will take to help them get the sleep they need and deserve?**

GENYOUTH's latest survey on teens and sleep, conducted in partnership with Sleep Number, offers new — and surprising — perspective on a topic of fundamental importance to supporting the whole child.

**Like nutrition and physical activity, adequate sleep is vital to students' health and well-being, and essential to learning.**

According to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, "Children and adolescents who don't get enough sleep are at increased risk for obesity, diabetes, injuries, poor mental health, and attention and behavior problems, which can affect them academically."<sup>1</sup> And the National Sleep Foundation notes that sleep "can even help [students] to **eat better and manage the stress** of being a teen."<sup>2</sup>

Sleep deficits among youth are well documented. The CDC reports that nearly 73% of U.S. high-school students and almost 58% of middle-school students receive less than the recommended amount of nighttime sleep. An American Academy of Pediatrics **policy statement** "recognizes insufficient sleep in adolescents as an important public health issue that significantly affects the health and safety, as well as the academic success, of our nation's middle and high school students."<sup>3</sup> Screen-based media is often **cited** as a contributor to widespread sleep deficiencies.<sup>4</sup>

Given this situation, this GENYOUth Insights survey aimed to investigate attitudes, trends, and possible solutions to the pervasive lack of sleep among today's youth ages 13 to 18.

**Today's students have a strong sense of responsibility for their health and wellness. We know because we ask them. GENYOUth Insights elevates youth voice through original, timely research on topics that matter to students and to healthy, high-achieving schools.**

## Students Speak Out at "Teens & Sleep" Event

*How can we become less busy? How do we make sleep a priority? How do we fit sleep into any schedule? These are the kinds of questions high school students posed to a group of health, education, and business leaders gathered in Washington, D.C. in October 2018 to discuss the Teens & Sleep Survey results and brainstorm solutions.*



Students Tori, Destinee, and Prescott with Sleep Number CEO Shelly Ibach (center) and GENYOUth CEO Alexis Glick (right) at national thought leader event to discuss the teen sleep dilemma.

**"I'm one of the 74% of high schoolers who are sleep deprived. We're encouraged to get good grades and be in after-school activities. It's hard to fit all that into one schedule and still manage to get your eight hours of sleep."** TORI, 10TH GRADE, PENNSYLVANIA

**"In health class they always told me to get eight hours of sleep to feel better, but I was never told how to get eight hours of sleep with a busy schedule or why I needed those hours of sleep. As students, we need leaders to bring our questions into the discussion."** DESTINEE, 9TH GRADE, WISCONSIN

**"I knew that sleep deprivation was a problem with teens, but I never knew how much. It's an epidemic. It's great to have student voice incorporated in the survey process to share information and to make sure adults know this actually matters."** PRESCOTT, 10TH GRADE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

**INSIGHTS** from GENYOUth in partnership with Sleep Number and in counsel with Edelman Intelligence

# Key Findings

## THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM: BIG AND PERVERSIVE

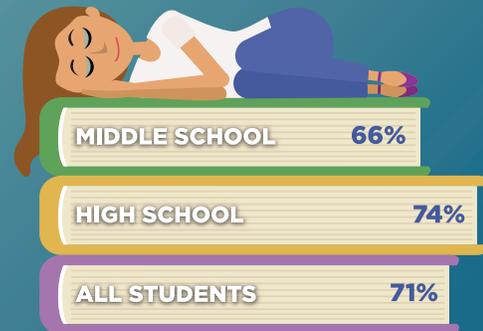
According to the survey results, **71% of middle and high school-aged students are getting less sleep on weekday nights than they need** to perform at their best throughout the school day.

- Among these sleep-deprived students, the **average sleep deficit is 1.7 hours per night** — about 25% less sleep than students themselves think, and what experts think, they need.
- The problem is **more pervasive as students age**. Among middle-schoolers, 66% (or 2 out of 3) report getting less sleep than they need to perform at their best. Among high schoolers, that jumps to 74% (or almost 3 out of 4).
- The problem is **worse among high school girls**, among whom 81% report being sleep deprived an average of 2.1 hours per night.

Students put in an **11.5-hour “work day”** on average including school, school-related activities, and homework — before doing any household chores or other responsibilities.

- Given their various responsibilities and activities, in general students have about 8.75 hours as the best-case scenario in terms of time between lights out and getting out the door in the morning — making it **almost impossible** for them **to get the 8 hours or more of sleep** they say they need.
- Given this context, it’s not surprising that less than 20% of the students surveyed say they are very satisfied with the amount of sleep they get, and 55% of students currently experiencing chronic sleep deficit are **worried about the long-term effects** of not getting enough sleep.
- **Even though many students say they are conscious of eating healthy foods (65%) and exercise regularly (63%), their sleep practices do not follow suit.** Yet, 67% of students surveyed say **sleep is a priority for them.**

## Percent of Students with a Sleep Deficit

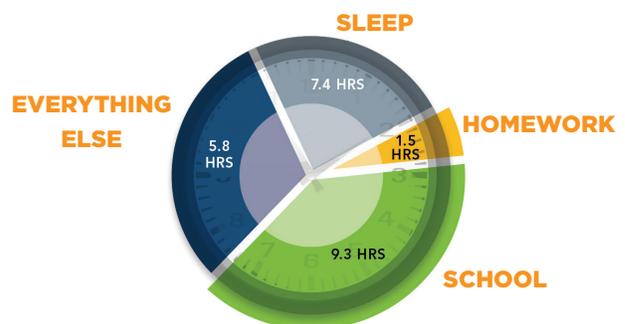


Sleep-deprived students are losing about 8.5 hours of sleep per school week on average. That’s equal to missing out on one full night’s sleep a week.

## A STUDENT’S DAY: HIGH SCHOOL\*



## A STUDENT’S DAY: MIDDLE SCHOOL\*



With only 24 hours in a day, teens can’t possibly fit in the recommended amount of sleep with the demands of their schedule, including time spent at school, doing homework, and participating in other activities. The problem is worse among high school students, who get, on average, 45 minutes less sleep a night than do middle school students.

\*Average time by category as reported by all student survey respondents

## THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE PROBLEM: SURPRISINGLY, NOT PREDOMINANTLY BECAUSE OF TECHNOLOGY, AND NOT BY CHOICE

In reflecting on nights when they do not get enough sleep, only about 22% of students see their sleep deficit as being mostly or entirely volitional. In contrast, 42% say that their **lack of sleep is mostly due to things they “have to do”** and another 36% say that it is equally due to things they “have to do” and things “they chose to do” (the latter includes use of screen-based devices for entertainment and socializing).

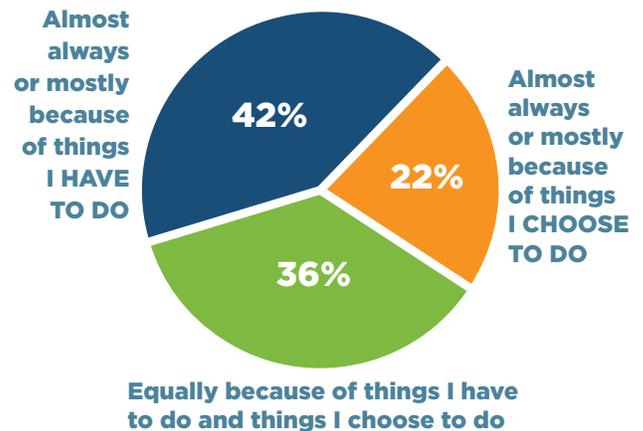
- The outsized role of “have-to-do’s” in keeping students up is perhaps why sleep-deprived students seem to **feel resigned to their fate**, with 63% saying that they do not see how their sleep habits could change anytime soon.
- Fifty-one percent of sleep-deprived students say that they have tried many different things to get more sleep, but they almost always end up failing. However, 66% of all students say that they **wish there was a fix that would help them get more sleep**. That number goes up to 76% among students who report a sleep deficit.

## HELPING YOUTH GET THE SLEEP THEY NEED

To help youth get the sleep they need, survey results indicate that we should **focus more on addressing barriers** that prevent students from getting more sleep and focus less on motivators intended to “sell” sleep to youth.

- Students **already understand the benefits of getting more sleep**. They do not need to be convinced that they would be better off if they got a full eight hours most school nights (although some reminding wouldn’t hurt).
- Among the sleep-deprived students, the **top changes they would expect to see in their lives if they started getting more sleep** include: having more energy throughout the day, being better able to handle stress better, doing better in school, and looking better.

## Why Students Aren’t Getting Enough Sleep



The percentage of students who say they don’t get enough sleep because of things they **have to do** (homework, job, etc.) is almost double that of students who say it’s because of things they **choose to do** (phone, social media, TV, etc.).

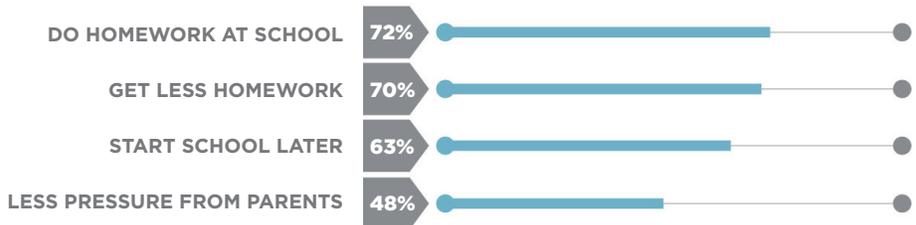
By and large, teens are not sleep deprived because they fear that increasing the number of hours they get each night will have negative consequences. In fact, **fewer than 1 in 4 students believe that they would miss out on something** important to them if they started getting more sleep, and fewer than 1 in 10 students fears their grades would suffer if they spent more time sleeping.

- Instead, the biggest sleep barriers, and thus the best potential solutions, center on helping students cope with their “have to do’s.” When we asked our chronically sleep-deprived students what would help them to get more sleep, the top answers related to **later school start times and homework** — both reducing the volume of homework and giving them time during the school day to do it.
- Students also acknowledge their role in the predicament. The top potential **youth-controlled solutions** offered by sleep-deprived students were: better time management, stress reduction, less time on social media, and better sleep habits, like going to bed at the same time each night.

# Getting Enough Sleep: What Could Help?

Percentages represent the proportion of sleep-deprived students who recommended this solution in the survey.

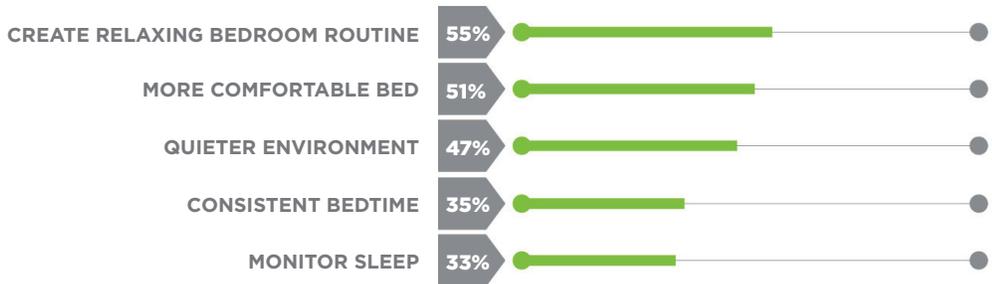
## Sleep Solutions: School



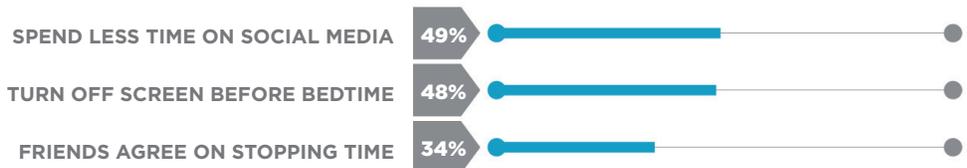
## Sleep Solutions: Time



## Sleep Solutions: Habits



## Sleep Solutions: Tech



# The Bottom Line

Chronic sleep deprivation is a real problem among teens. Middle and high school-aged students feel like they are in a helpless situation regarding sleep — they realize they aren't getting enough sleep, they know they should get more, but don't feel like it is anything that can or will change anytime soon. To chalk it all up to too much time spent in front of a screen or on social media would be an over-simplification. Students are up too late and too long because their school days are elongated and they have more work than they know how to effectively manage, which is stressing them out.

Youth are looking for guidance, help, and strategies to cope. Caring adults in teens' lives should focus on two things:

- Help make youth less busy while helping them manage their time better and
- Teach them, as well as help facilitate, good sleep hygiene, especially as youth move from middle to high school age.

In particular, the importance of ritual and routine when it comes to sleep cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately, as a topic, youth-oriented sleep hygiene is too often neglected in parenting and health education.

**Nutrition, physical activity, and adequate sleep can all contribute to healthy, high-achieving youth and schools. Educators, families, other caring adults, and students themselves can all help to make a difference.**

## EDUCATORS AND SCHOOLS

Be aware of teens' sleep needs. Provide guidance and support to students, families, and school staff on this issue. Educate families, teachers, school administrators, and staff about the biological and environmental factors (including school start times) that contribute to widespread chronic sleep deprivation. Support staff wellness initiatives that promote healthy sleep. Take advantage of

programs like Fuel Up to Play 60 ([FuelUptoPlay60.com](http://FuelUptoPlay60.com)) and AdVenture Capital ([AdCapYouth.org](http://AdCapYouth.org)) to help students develop and strengthen their leadership skills to create healthy, high-achieving youth and schools.

## PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, AND FAMILIES

Have a set bedtime and a bedtime routine for children/youth. Don't use a child's bedroom for timeouts or punishment. Create a good sleeping environment for children/youth. Model healthy habits yourself by having a regular sleep routine, eating healthy, and getting physical activity. Support your school's efforts to educate and engage students, educators, and staff about healthy eating, physical activity, and sleep. More tips for better sleep are available from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

## OTHER CARING ADULTS

Health professionals should be aware of adolescent sleep needs and educate youth, educators, and parents about optimal sleep. Companies can support student well-being through business practices, outreach, and social responsibility activities. Learn more about harnessing youth voice for business and social good at [www.genyouthnow.org](http://www.genyouthnow.org).

## STUDENTS

Have a set sleep schedule. Relax before going to bed. Eat right and get physical activity during the day. Learn and practice effective time management skills. See more tips on teens and sleep from the [National Sleep Foundation](http://National Sleep Foundation).

Youth can help create a healthy school that prioritizes student well-being. Fuel Up to Play 60 ([FuelUptoPlay60.com](http://FuelUptoPlay60.com)) has starter ideas (and funding) for things you can do with other students and staff to create a healthier school — and AdVenture Capital ([AdCapYouth.org](http://AdCapYouth.org)) has a project planner to help student social entrepreneurs create healthy solutions.

**Students: Make your voice heard in GENYOUTH's future youth surveys; visit <https://tinyurl.com/GYResearchPanel> to join!**

## METHODOLOGY

Online survey conducted April 26 to May 18, 2018 with a nationally representative sample of middle, junior, and senior high school students, ages 13-18, including 1,587 youth affiliated with GENYOUth programs and initiatives (e.g., Fuel Up to Play 60 and AdVenture Capital) and 521 youth in a control group. Results were statistically weighted to ensure a representative group by gender, age, race/ethnicity, and geography. An advisory committee of health, education, social science, and youth engagement experts and practitioners provided guidance on the research topic, hypothesis, and online survey content. Two waves of student focus groups (conducted by phone conference) were held to inform the survey content and questions.

## THANK YOU

Thanks to the following individuals who provided invaluable perspective on this GENYOUth Insights survey:

**David M. Bersoff, PhD**  
Edelman Intelligence

**Charlotte Cabot**  
Thrive Global

**Susan DeFranco**  
Sleep Number

**Connie Diekman, MEd, RD, CSSD, LD, FADA, FAND**  
Washington University in St Louis

**David Duguid**  
Fuel Up to Play 60

**Stephanie Domain, MS**  
American Academy of Pediatrics

**Karen Kafer, RDN**  
GENYOUth

**Sarah Lee, PhD**  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Jodi Mindell, PhD**  
Saint Joseph's University and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

**Yesenia Pion**  
East Middle School (NY)

**Sarah Sliwa, PhD**  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Julia Stone**  
Thrive Global



GENYOUth empowers students to create a healthier future for themselves and their peers. GENYOUth convenes a network of private and public partners to raise funds for youth wellness initiatives that bolster healthy, high-achieving students, schools, and communities nationwide. We believe that all students are change-agents, who deserve the opportunity to identify and lead innovative solutions that positively impact nutrition, physical activity, and student success. Learn more at [www.genyouthnow.org](http://www.genyouthnow.org).



### ABOUT SLEEP NUMBER CORPORATION

As the leader in sleep innovation, Sleep Number Corporation delivers the best quality sleep through effortless, adjustable comfort and biometric sleep tracking. Sleep Number's proprietary SleepIQ® technology platform – one of the most comprehensive databases of biometric consumer sleep data – is proving the connection between sleep and well-being. With breakthrough innovations such as the revolutionary Sleep Number 360® smart bed, Sleep Number is redefining the future of sleep and shaping the future of health and wellness. For more information on how Sleep Number is improving the lives of youth through better sleep, visit the [social impact page](#) on Sleep Number's newsroom.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Wheaton AG, et al. Short Sleep Duration Among Middle School and High School Students — United States, 2015. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2018;67:85-90. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6703a1>

<sup>2</sup> Teens and Sleep, National Sleep Foundation. Available at: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep>

<sup>3</sup> Policy Statement: School Start Times for Adolescents, American Academy of Pediatrics. DOI:10.1542/peds.2014-1697

<sup>4</sup> LeBourgeois M K, et al. Digital Media and Sleep in Childhood and Adolescence. Pediatrics Nov 2017, 140 (Supplement 2) S92-S96; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2016-1758J