**Rethinking the Secondary School Model: Advocating for Alternative Academic Pathways**

COM 822 – Persuasive Communication

David Coronado

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. Curtis McClane

***Assignment #1 – Core Essential Elements***

* + 1. 1. Generate a thesis statement for your persuasive essay. a. Using the OGS Forum Paper Template, complete the following:
    2. i. Enter your essay title on the title page and the first page of the essay. Complete the rest of the title page.
    3. ii. Use the Thesis Statement Generator to draft a thesis statement. Use only the “generate example” to view several examples of a well-written thesis statement.
    4. iii. On the Thesis Statement page, enter a clear, concise thesis statement of your argumentative position.
    5. iv. In the body of the paper, write a three-paragraph description of the topic that includes the basic logic behind your argument.
    6. v. In the Works Cited section, enter a minimum of 11 references relevant to your topic. Include *no more than two books*; the remaining references should be for journal articles from a minimum of four different academic journals. Use only primary research articles with a majority of them published within the past 5 years. Include references to both support (additive) and counter (variant) your argument.
    7. **B.** Professor will check for quality of content and word-count requirements. Grade assigned will be Credit or No Credit (CR/NC).

**Rethinking the Secondary School Model: Advocating for Alternative Academic Pathways**

Traditional secondary education forces students into the same academic mold—disregarding developmental science, behavior management needs, and post-secondary goals. Although the current educational system intends to promote fairness and college readiness, the current system fails to serve many students and overlooks viable, student-centered alternatives. Middle and high schools should implement alternative academic pathways—including later start times, vocational tracks, independent, online, and hybrid study modalities, and student mentorship—to better serve students’ unique developmental, socio-emotional, and future career needs.

**Arguments & Counterarguments**

There are three primary arguments supporting the need for a new educational model in K–12 secondary education. The current system fails to align with students' needs on multiple levels: biologically, it disregards adolescent sleep patterns; developmentally and socially, it overlooks the importance of tailored learning environments; and practically, it minimizes the acquisition of basic life skills and vocational preparedness.

Even though adjusting start times would disrupt family schedules, transportation routes, and extracurricular activities, the K-12 education system must adapt to fit the needs of students on a biological and developmental level. There is support that academic success and learning is largely linked to sleep and circadian chronotype in adolescent youth (Ahmad & Mehmood, 2022; Yu et al., 2022); Sleep has been linked to student learning, behavioral outcomes, and improved student engagement (Rodríguez Ferrante, et al., 2022), however many secondary schools start in the early hours of the morning and do not take into account that adolescents experience a natural shift in circadian rhythms during puberty, making it difficult for them to fall asleep before 11:00 pm. Thus, when adolescent students are biologically geared up to stay up late but systematically required to get up early, the educational schedule produces a psychological and developmental mismatch (Pifer et al., 2024).

Critics of adjusting the current school schedule include the increased stress within the family unit, as many parental figures rely upon school hours to align in the morning to fit work shifts and family dynamics. However, some schools have adjusted their scheduling to a four-day school week rather than the traditional five-day schedule. These adjustments, plus others that are polar opposites, such as year-round school schedules, are widely used among certain school districts. The argument for adjusting school schedules has already been implemented in varying school districts. It should be noted that a shift in educational scheduling is not a new phenomenon to be experienced by society.

When COVID-19 occurred, the world shifted education from in-person to 100% online. While the shift was needed to fit a global pandemic, society pivoted and managed to handle this change to its best abilities. Therefore, as with any change, the idea of being discomforted is a real threat to one’s psyche, but the need for one’s understanding to align with adolescent biological development goes beyond one’s comfort, it becomes an essential change to promote the health and performance of student outcomes and society as a whole.

An additional argument against offering individual educational pathways, such as offering vocational and trade skilled education, is that offering a tiered education where only the elite are college-bound, while those who are marginalized by lower socio-economic status are directed to vocational and trade education can create a social stratification and inequality (Zamfir et al., 2024). This is a strong argument against offering individualized educational pathways by viewing this model through this lens. However, the emphasis of creating a new model is on the individualized component, which involves choice-based vocational pathways that enhance one’s life by including their own interest, skills, and choices. As with any new model of education, the pathways are driven by choice, not forced by a system.

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