

Parents push for later start for schools to boost results

EXCLUSIVE
TIM WILLIAMS
EDUCATION REPORTER

THE state's peak parent group wants high schools to trial starting times as late as 11am, in line with international sleep research that shows it would improve student health and academic results.

The South Australian Association of State School Organisations is highlighting the work of Oxford and Harvard university researchers, who recommend start times of 10am or later for Year 10s and 11am for Year 12s and university students.

The researchers say adolescents and young adults are chronically short of sleep because their internal body clocks dictate their need to wake later than younger children and older adults.

SAASSO director David Knuckey said trials in some local high schools should be considered.

"While it may sound abstract to many who grew up in the 20th-century 9-5 world, it would be irresponsible to ignore science just because it doesn't fit in with the established timetable," he said.

"If we can improve health (and) attendance and raise basic skill levels by changing school hours, why wouldn't we consider it?"

Next year Fremont-Elizabeth City High School will start lessons at 9.30am each day and Year 8-10 students will have home group sessions at 9.15am. Optional study sessions will stretch the school day from 8am to 5pm, and some senior students will have official lessons up to 5pm two days a week.

Principal Rob Knight said the later start meant fewer students would skip breakfast or be late to school, attendance rates would rise and students would be more alert in class.

Mr Knight said he would "ideally" like a 10am start, but that would interfere with students' after-school sport and



HANDS UP: Fremont-Elizabeth principal Rob Knight resets the clocks with Karen, Emmanuel and Tyson. Picture: DYLAN COKER

work commitments. He predicted there would be "radical changes" for school timetables across the state over the next five years.

"For us, it is about baby steps because we are doing something that is unique in SA," he said.

"Ultimately, as an educational system, we need to be relevant to kids' lives and have to look at restructuring and de-regulating the school day."

SA Secondary Principals Association president Peter Mader said Glenunga International High and Hamilton Secondary College were among schools that began as late as 10am one day a week to make time for staff professional development.

Mr Mader said schools had

to provide 27.5 hours of instruction time a week, so later starts meant later finishes. That could become an industrial issue because teachers were entitled to time off in lieu for any lessons after 5pm.

Glenunga principal Wendy Johnson said a 10am start on Wednesdays, introduced in 2009, gave students a midweek sleep-in that meant they didn't have to be up early more than two days in a row. Slightly shorter lunch and recess times ensured mandatory teaching time was maintained.

"We find by doing it on one day it actually sustains the kids for the whole week," she said.

"They are so different on Wednesday, it's lovely to see. They are relaxed because they have had a sleep-in."

UniSA Professor Kurt Lushington, who heads the School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, said the international researchers were right that adolescents' brains were wired to need sleep and wake later.

Prof Lushington said Glenunga's system "sounds very sensible" and he advised schools to schedule free periods for senior students "first thing rather than last thing" so they could arrive later.

However, he said "adolescents also live in the real world, with parents and teachers who need to go to work (normal time)," meaning large cultural shifts would be needed to accommodate later start times across the board. Some European countries started school

later, but had an extra day of lessons on Saturday, he said.

Australian Education Union SA president Howard Spreadbury said schools had some flexibility on hours. Teachers in individual schools might negotiate further changes but the union would not want later hours "systematically imposed", he said.

The Education Department's executive director of preschool and school improvement, Anne Millard, said adjusting start times was a decision for individual schools and their communities.

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NOT AFRAID: Michaelia Cash says Chris Brown might have trouble entering Australia.

Abusive singer facing visa ban

LAUREN NOVAK
POLITICAL REPORTER

AMERICAN singer and convicted domestic violence abuser Chris Brown could be denied entry to Australia for an upcoming tour because of his criminal history.

Federal Minister for Women Michaelia Cash strongly hinted yesterday that the 26-year-old music star, convicted in 2009 over the assault of pop star Rihanna, his former girlfriend, could expect to have his visa rejected after his application was examined by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton.

"Without pre-empting the decision of the minister, I can assure you this is something the minister will be looking at very, very closely," Senator Cash said.

"This is a government that is not afraid to say 'no'. We are not afraid to say no to those wanting visas who commit domestic violence."

Senator Cash made the comments while outlining details of a \$100 million Federal Government package to tackle domestic violence.


Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Australian of the Year and anti-violence campaigner Rosie Batty announced the funding yesterday for better training of frontline officers, distributing 20,000 mobile phones to at-risk women and expanding the respectful relationships programs in schools.

Measures to specifically benefit SA include \$3.6 million for the Cross Border Domestic Violence Intelligence Desk to share information about victims or abusers who move around the cross-border region of SA, WA and the NT.



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