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SLEEP STUDIES

How to get kids back on a sleep schedule for the school year



Second grader Aaminah Ingram-Kirk, 7, leads the way off the bus for the first day of school at Bishop McCort Catholic Elementary West on Tioga Street in Johnstown on Aug. 21, 2024. **THOMAS SLUSSER/THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT VIA AP, FILE**

Penn State’s lobbying trail difficult to follow

Lax disclosure makes it tough to tell who, what the university is trying to lobby

By Wyatt Massey
SPOTLIGHT PA STATE COLLEGE

Penn State University outspent its peers lobbying state lawmakers in recent years, but the commonwealth’s lax disclosure requirements and the university’s protection from the open records law make following the school’s activity in Harrisburg difficult.

Spotlight PA reviewed more than 15 years of quarterly lobbying reports from the Pennsylvania Department of State and adjusted the figures for inflation to make annual comparisons. The data show that Penn State increased its lobbying expenditures after 2020 and is now spending more on its influence efforts than any year since 2008. Its expenditure of \$1.7 million over the past two calendar years exceeded those of Temple University (\$1.3 million), the University of Pittsburgh (\$968,000) and the University of Pennsylvania (\$700,000).

Penn State — the largest among this group by student head count — focused its lobbyists on topics such as “economic development,” “education,” “health care” and the state’s budget, according to the reports. Pennsylvania’s disclosure laws, which have been criticized for their lack of transparency, require groups to reveal which subjects were lobbied on, as well as total costs for direct and indirect communication, and for gifts or hospitality each quarter.

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How you can save money when you’re tempted to spend

By Danielle Labotka
MORNINGSTAR

Why do so many of us struggle to save? Saving for the future can be difficult because of a cognitive bias known as hyperbolic discounting: our tendency to place greater weight on immediate satisfaction, even if focusing on the long term will have a greater payoff. This bias is why, when you get a raise, you may consider getting a new car—incurring a higher monthly payment—instead of sacking away more money each month for retirement and perhaps getting to retire several years earlier.

Feeling stressed about finances can also get you off track with your savings. While some people respond to financial stress by saving more, others respond by spending more in order to regain feelings of control.

Unfortunately, these shortsighted decisions on spending versus saving can have large effects on our ability to achieve our

See MONEY on Page A4

By Adithi Ramakrishnan
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — After a summer of vacations and late nights, it’s time to set those back-to-school alarms.

A good night’s sleep helps students stay focused and attentive in class. Experts say it’s worth easing kids back into a routine with the start of a new school year.

“We don’t say ‘get good sleep’ just because,” said pediatrician Dr. Gabrina Dixon with Children’s National Hospital. “It really helps kids learn and it helps them function throughout the day.”

The amount of sleep kids need changes as they age. Preschoolers should get up to 13 hours of sleep. Tweens need between nine and 12 hours. Teenagers do best with eight to 10 hours of shut-eye.

SET AN EARLIER BEDTIME

Early bedtimes can slip through the cracks over the summer as kids stay up for sleepovers, movie marathons and long plane flights. To get back on track, experts recommend setting earlier bedtimes a week or two before the first day of school or gradually going to bed 15 to 30 minutes earlier each night.

Don’t eat a heavy meal before bed and avoid TV or screen time two hours

before sleep. Instead, work in relaxing activities to slow down like showering and reading a story.

“You’re trying to take the cognitive load off your mind,” said Dr. Nitun Verma, a spokesperson for the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. “It would be like if you’re driving, you’re slowly letting go of the gas pedal.”

Parents can adjust their back-to-school plans based on what works best for their child. Nikkya Hargrove moves her twin daughters’ bedtimes up by 30 minutes the week before school starts.

Sometimes, her 10-year-olds will negotiate for a few extra minutes to stay up and read. Hargrove said those conversations are important as her children get older and advocate for themselves. If they stay up too late and don’t have the best morning, Hargrove said that can be a learning experience too.

“If they’re groggy and they don’t like how they feel, then they know, ‘OK, I have to go to bed earlier,’” said Hargrove, an author and independent bookstore owner from Connecticut.

In the morning, soaking in some

daylight by sitting at a window or going outside can help train the brain to power up, Verma said.

SQUASH BACK-TO-SCHOOL SLEEP ANXIETY

Sleep quality matters just as much as duration. First-day jitters can make it hard to fall asleep no matter how early the bedtime.

Dixon says parents can talk to their kids to find out what is making them anxious. Is it the first day at a new school? Is it a fear of making new friends? Then they might try a test run of stressful activities before school starts to make those tasks feel less scary — for example, by visiting the school or meeting classmates at an open house.

The weeks leading up can be jam-packed and it’s not always possible to prep a routine in advance. But kids will adjust eventually so sleep experts say parents should do what they can. After all, their kids aren’t the only ones adjusting to a new routine.

“I always say, ‘Take a deep breath, it’ll be OK,’” Dixon said. “And just start that schedule.”

“We don’t say ‘get good sleep’ just because. It really helps kids learn and it helps them function throughout the day.”

DR. GABRINA DIXON, Children’s National Hospital

Q&A Sorting out COVID vaccine confusion: New and conflicting federal policies raise questions

By Michelle Andrews
KFF HEALTH NEWS

If you want a COVID-19 shot this fall, will your employer’s health insurance plan pay for it? There’s no clear answer.

Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a longtime anti-vaccine activist, has upended the way COVID vaccines are approved and for whom they’re recommended, creating uncertainty

where coverage was routine.

Agencies within HHS responsible for spelling out who should get vaccinated aren’t necessarily in sync, issuing seemingly contradictory recommendations based on age or risk factors for serious disease.

But the ambiguity may not affect your coverage, at least this year.

“I think in 2025 it’s highly likely that the employer

plans will cover” the COVID vaccines, said Jeff Levin-Scherz, a primary care doctor who is the population health leader for the management consultancy WTW and an assistant professor at Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health. They’ve already budgeted for it, “and it would be a large administrative effort to try to exclude coverage for those not at increased risk,” he said.

With so much in flux, it’s important to check with your employer or insurer about coverage policies before you roll up your sleeve.

Here’s what we know so far, and what remains unclear.

Q: How have the recommendations changed?

A: What used to be straightforward is now much murk-

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A Care Health Plan vaccination clinic was held at Los Angeles Mission College in the Sylmar neighborhood in Los Angeles on Jan. 19, 2022. **GHETTY IMAGES FILE**

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