



# Doc H's Blog

Kentucky Education Commissioner  
Terry Holliday



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## Lack of Zzzs Can Lead to More Cs, Ds and Fs

If you've ever had a middle or high school student or taught one, you are probably acutely aware of the subject of my blog this week – insufficient sleep in adolescents. My thanks to the Kentucky Sleep Society's Adolescent Sleep Task Force, chaired by Sarah Honaker, Ph.D., C.B.S.M. for contributing this guest blog.

Terry Holliday, Ph.D.  
Education Commissioner

*It will come as no surprise to many educators that the vast majority of adolescent are achieving less than optimal sleep, impairing their ability to learn. The National Sleep Foundation's "Sleep in America" [poll](#) from 2006 includes disturbing data about this widespread public health problem. They found that only 20 percent of adolescents were getting the optimal amount of sleep (9 hours or more per night), with 45 percent of adolescents sleeping less than eight hours per night. Insufficient sleep among children in this age group has also been associated with mental health difficulties, substance use, and risky decision-making.*

*There are many factors contributing to the lack of sleep among our young people, including busy schedules, poor sleep habits, and a biological tendency to stay up later coupled with early school start times. Many studies have demonstrated a delay in the adolescent sleep cycle, which is associated with puberty. On average, a "natural" bedtime for an adolescent is between 10 and 11 p.m., making it very difficult to achieve the recommended 8.5-9.5 hours of sleep on school nights in particular. As a result adolescents are prone to nap after school and oversleep on weekends, perhaps understandable but often resulting in even less sleep on weeknights.*

*The Kentucky Sleep Society's Adolescent Sleep Task Force was formed to disseminate information to adolescents and their families about healthy sleep habits, and information to educators about the positive impacts associated with later school start times. In an upcoming blog, we will discuss tips on healthy sleep for adolescents and families and provide links to handouts for families.*