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Rebuttal Argument: Sleep and Education

Staying up late at night to finish homework or waking up early in the morning to study is something very common among students. In fact, most students have their preferred hours of studying; some love studying at dawn, while others prefer studying late at night. What students of the same age largely have in common, however, is the amount of sleep they need to function well. Thus, whatever time a student may choose to study is a good time provided he or she acquire and understand the knowledge they seek. In my former high school, St. Joseph's Girls Boarding School, students were required to wake up at 4 AM every day of the week and leave for their dormitories at 10 PM. That is only six hours, or less, of sleep for students during the school period. They claim that six hours of sleep is enough sleep for high school students, and that it creates more hours for studying, which consequently leads to improved student performance. However, this claim fails to acknowledge that six hours of sleep is not enough sleep for adolescents and that good academic performance is linked to quality sleep, not lack thereof.

While some students can get only six hours of sleep and still perform well in their waking activities, six hours of sleep is not enough sleep for everyone. This is contrary to my former school's claim, and it is not recommended for anytime, let alone every day of the school year. In his periodical article, Anthony Komaroff states that, "The National Sleep Foundation recommends seven to eight hours of sleep for people over age 64 and seven to nine hours for

ages 18 to 64. Kids need more sleep.” So, not only were students at my former high school not getting enough sleep, but they were getting less than the recommended average! That is not right. It was especially evident that students were not getting enough sleep as they would often get caught napping or dozing during class hours. At dawn, for instance, prefects were assigned with the role of noting down the names of students who were dozing or appeared to be. Sometimes, it was the teachers discreetly doing so through the class windows. Such unlucky students would get punished for napping instead of studying. The punishments, unfortunately, took effect during class hours. This not only supports my claim that six hours of sleep is not enough sleep for teenagers, but it also weakens and refutes my former high school’s claim. While students getting infrequent six hours of sleeps may still do well in their activities, they generally need more than that in order to get the adequate sleep that they should get to grow.

As my former high school claimed, as well as other schools with a similar system may claim, the six hours of sleep for students got created to have more hours for them to study, consequently improving their academic performance. However, while getting six hours of sleep does indeed create additional more hours to study, the argument that the students would logically use this time to study and improve their academic performance is untrue. For one, students whom I witnessed sleeping in class instead of studying, including myself, disavow the claim that students used this additional time to improve on their academics. In addition, according to Hyder Osman Mirghani et al., “Poor sleep is associated with lack of concentration and inability to function during the day [8] that affect academic performance.” They further conclude that, “A strong relationship is evident between good sleep quality and high academic performance” (Mirghani et al 4). Logically, this makes sense because not getting enough sleep leads to exhaustion, which would likely lead to the inability of a student to function well. The reverse

would probably lead to high academic performance. Therefore, instead of the punishment students got for sleeping in class, schools such as my former high school should increase the sleeping time. This would help them achieve their goal as well as eliminate the need for punishing students caught sleeping. Good quality sleep leads to high academic performances, not more hours of studying with little sleep.

In the claims from my opponents -- my former high school, any other boarding school, as well as a person with a similar claim -- there seems to be but one driving objective behind it: high academic performance among students, which would benefit them overall. However, the problems of not having enough sleep far outweigh any benefit. In addition to the exhaustion stated in the previous paragraph, Mirghani et al., asserts that, "Sleep deprivation of varying occasions and durations can substantially impair physical, cognitive, and emotional functions" (1). This not only contradicts the whole claim from my opponents, but it also reveals the harm student are exposed to in multiple ways, as a result of not getting enough sleep, including their ability to perform in their studies in the first place. Instead of improving their performance, students would have already compromised their learning abilities since a student with impaired emotional functions faces even more challenges when seeking education, compared to a normal, emotionally balanced student. Such impaired emotional functions may come in the form of depression. According to Karen Swartz et al., "The risk of depression increases as children become adolescents. The onset of depression during adolescence is associated with poor academic performance, family and social dysfunction, poor physical health, substance use disorders, unemployment, early parenthood, and suicide" (1970).

Similar studies support the problems adolescents have due to lack of sleep. In an academic journal by Lin Wen-Hsu and Yi Chin-Chun, they attest that, "Empirical studies have

demonstrated that unhealthy sleep practices are an important risk factor for adolescent conduct problems cross-sectionally. . . . The results from these studies have indicated that adolescents whose sleep practices are unhealthy (e.g., short sleep duration) or pathological (e.g., insomnia) are more likely to engage in substance abuse... delinquency. . . and risky behaviors . . .” (432). These prospects are damaging to all students’ present and future life, and therefore, they should be protected from them. Substance abuse, for instance, may lead to student expulsions from school. The consequence of this is that the students will not be exposed to the learning environment and may not study what their classmates are studying, making them fall behind. This leads to failure in their academics, not success.

Risky behaviors on the other hand, causes even more damage! Such risky behaviors in my former high school came in the form of dishonesty. Students who felt that the six hours of sleep they got was not enough often flooded sick bays, claiming that they were sick. Since our school was connected to a clinic, they could easily get sick leaves to go to the clinic when the matron was not around. While in the clinic, there are very high probabilities that they could meet outsiders. Those outsiders may as well be men who are out to exploit such students. Of course, there are even more dangerous possibilities like pregnancies and kidnapping. All of this is because students are trying to outsmart a system put upon them. As a result, these sources not only challenge my opponents’ claim, but they also undermine them: how can something that compromises learning enhance it?

Therefore, I assert that six hours of sleep is an unhealthy amount of sleep and does not lead to academic success. Good quality sleep is the first step towards improved academic performance. Good quality sleep eliminates any chances of students sleeping in class due to exhaustion, enhances their concentration in class (which leads to high academic performance),

and prevents the consequences of lack of sleep such as delinquency and risky behavior, which may hinder student's access to quality education. My opponents do not recognize the importance of sleep and its relationship to academic success. I think students given the recommended sleep hours for their various ages, not the six hours, would improve their performances in their academics significantly because that is what quality sleep is capable of. For this reason, I would advise my former school, or anyone with the same claim as theirs, to adjust the number of hours they assign to boarding school students. It will help them academically and prevent any disturbing and quite frankly avoidable consequences of lack of sleep.

Works Cited

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Opponent’s Reason

Onyango’s Rebuttal