

Practical Leadership

Improving the Schools of Today

Inventing the Schools of Tomorrow

RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

Four-Day Week Schedule

In A Nutshell

More than 120 districts in at least 21 states currently use a four-day week alternative schedule. Most are in small, rural areas, serve less than 1000 students, and made the move to a shorter school week with longer instructional days primarily for financial reasons. Although four-day week schedules have been in place since the 1930s, research about the effects of this schedule is very limited.

Summary of Findings:

The most frequently cited reason for moving to a four-day week schedule is cost savings. Studies on the model confirm that a four-day week schedule saves money, primarily in the areas of transportation, energy, food service and substitute teacher expenses. But a study by the Education Commission of the States (2007) found that while there may be a 20% reduction in school days, costs savings rarely exceed 2.5%. That's because the majority of a school district's budget goes to salary and benefits of employees and employees are most often expected to work the same number of hours during the school year. Other benefits to the four-day schedule have been identified. Student and teacher attendance tends to increase when a four-day week is implemented. A number of districts cite fewer disruptions of instructional time and increased on-task behavior by students as benefits.

What About Student Achievement?

There is recent evidence that the four-day week positively impacts student learning. A 2012 study examined the relationship between the four-day week and student learning using school-level longitudinal data from Colorado schools. This study found a positive, significant relationship to performance in both reading and mathematics with the greatest impact on mathematics scores (Anderson & Walker, 2012). Older studies generally reported a neutral effect on student test scores. That is, there was neither a positive nor a negative impact.

Challenges

For the most part, parents, teachers and students express positive feelings about the four-day week schedule. Negative perceptions tend to be due to local implementation issues rather than about the four-day model. Issues that emerged included concerns about increased childcare demand on parents, primary-aged students' ability to handle significantly longer school days, and a concern that shortening the school week appears inconsistent with school reform approaches that emphasize more time in school.

Classified staff are often the employee group most impacted when moving to the four-day week. A shorter week means fewer hours for bus drivers, lunch personnel, and other hourly staff.

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Getting Started

As economic and demographic conditions change across the country, more districts are considering the four-day week as an alternative school schedule. The following is a summary of implementation ideas and recommendations from the literature.

- Check your state's law. Some states allow greater flexibility than others in establishing school calendars and schedules. Existing legislation may require a set number of days as well as hours of instruction during the school year. Oregon is one of the state's that permits a four-day week schedule.
- Confirm that the proposed changes meet accreditation requirements and contract obligations.
- Examine what has been done in other districts and spend time discussing the implications of changing to a four-day week schedule in your setting. Districts that were most successful when making the change involved teachers, support staff, students and the community in the decision-making process. Widespread participation will help identify and resolve potential problems.
- Identify the curriculum and instructional modifications that will be required to take advantage of longer school days. Involve teachers in this process to help them prepare for the changes.
- Develop a plan for monitoring the effects of the change once the new schedule is in place. Frequent measures that provide feedback to principals, teachers, and parents are more effective than year-end evaluations.
- Keep lines of communication open between administrators, teachers, students, parents and members of the community. Don't just make an administrative decision without engaging teachers and other staff, families and community.

Online Resources:

Focus on the School Calendar: The Four-Day School Week (2008)

This paper by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) provides an excellent overview of the four-day school week and discusses the benefits and challenges of the model.

http://publications.sreb.org/2008/08S06_Focus_sch_calendar.pdf

Soaring Costs, Cutting Budgets (2008)

An article published in the American School Board Journal described how the four-day schedule was implemented in Webster County School District in Kentucky. The article includes a list of recommendations for others considering this approach.

<http://www.asbj.com/MainMenuCategory/Archive/2008/September/September2008UpFront.html>

Short School Week and Student Performance (2012)

This report from researchers in Montana and Georgia examines the impact of the four-day week on student achievement.

<http://www.governing.com/news/state/gov-four-day-school-week-could-boost-student-performance.html>

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Evidence Blast – Four Day School Week (2013)

This short report from Education Northwest provides an overview of a four-day school week. It summarizes the research and describes the rationale provided for moving to the four-day schedule.

<http://educationnorthwest.org/eb/4day-school-week>

Four-Day School Week: Research Brief (2009)

This report from the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research and Evaluation at the University of Southern Maine looks at the evidence supporting a four-day school week.

<http://www2.umaine.edu/mepri/sites/default/files/CEPARE%20Brief%20on%20the%204-day%20school%20week%202.10.pdf>

The 4 Day School Week (2006)

This short but informative report published by the Colorado Department of Education contains contact information for all of the districts in the state using the four-day week schedule.

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeedserv/download/pdf/4dayweek06.pdf>

Examples of Schools/Districts with Four-Day Weeks

These links direct you to school districts that have adopted the four-day week schedule. Each site provides a link to their district calendar and detail about how the week is organized. Even though students are not in attendance professional staff often have obligations on the fifth day of the week.

Webster County School District, Kentucky

<http://www.webster.k12.ky.us/About/4DaySchoolWeek/tabid/58/Default.aspx>

Stanfield Secondary School - Stanfield, OR

<http://www.stanfield.k12.or.us/home>

Taft High School – Lincoln City, OR

http://www.lincoln.k12.or.us/schools/taft_high/index.php

Glendale School District – Glendale, OR

http://www.glendale.k12.or.us/District%20Office/District_Office.htm

Reedsport School District – Reedsport, OR

<http://reedsport.schoolfusion.us/modules/cms/announce.phtml?sessionid=01fd343d17e9e7beb09699727f65341e&sessionid=01fd343d17e9e7beb09699727f65341e>

Sweet Home School District – Sweet Home, OR

<http://www.sweethome.k12.or.us/district/>

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This *Research into Practice* brief was prepared by Practical Leadership, LLC and authored by Ronald Williamson, Professor of Educational Leadership at Eastern Michigan University and Howard Johnston, Professor of Secondary Education at the University of South Florida. This brief is prepared for use by principals and school staff in Oregon GEAR UP schools.

Practical Leadership, LLC is a full service educational consulting firm specializing in research, evaluation, leadership development and achievement-oriented school improvement. Contact us by email: hojofl@gmail.com or rwmsn214@aol.com. Visit our website at www.mypracticalleadership.com