

Summary of selected research findings on the “Four-Day School Week”

The Perceived Impact of the Four-Day School Week on Teacher Recruitment, Teacher Retention, and Job Satisfaction

This collective case study was undertaken to examine the perceptions of administrators, school counselors, and teachers on the four-day school week and the impact of the new calendar format on teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and job satisfaction. Three school districts were studied; each began implementation of the four-day school week during the 2015-2016 academic year. A total of 21 school personnel were interviewed, including three superintendents, three building administrators, three school counselors, and 12 teachers. Participants overwhelmingly identified the four-day school week as a benefit to them personally, citing the ability to balance work and family as positive. Employees of two of the three school districts reported improved ability to recruit potential candidates for teaching positions. Educators from all three districts reported an improvement in teacher retention, as the four-day schedule is very popular with teachers. Also noted as valuable and important to the teaching staff is the additional time for professional development and collaboration built into the school calendar. Given the difficulties small rural school districts frequently face when securing and retaining a highly qualified teaching staff, the findings of this study point to an unintended, yet powerful outcome of implementation of the four-day school week—the ability to recruit and retain teachers. (Marion, 2018)
Retrieved March 2019, at <https://search.proquest.com/openview/706999966802bf911cc73d48e9419924/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

Staff Perspectives of the Four-Day School Week: A New Analysis of Compressed School Schedules

This study collects data from 136 faculty and staff members in three rural Missouri school districts that have transitioned to the four-day school week within the last year. Quantitative statistical analysis identifies strong support of the four-day school week model from both certified educational staff and classified support staff perspectives. All staff responded that the calendar change had improved staff morale, and certified staff responded that the four-day week had a positive impact on what is taught in classrooms and had increased academic quality. Qualitative analysis identifies staff suggestions for schools implementing the four-day school week including the importance of community outreach prior to implementation. No significant differences were identified between certified and classified staff perspectives. Strong staff support for the four-day school week was identified in all demographic areas investigated. Findings support conclusions made in research in business and government sectors that identify strong employee support of a compressed workweek across all work categories. (Turner, Finch, Ximena, 2017)
Retrieved March 2019, at <http://redfame.com/journal/index.php/jets/article/view/2769>

Does Shortening the School Week Impact Student Performance? Evidence from the Four-Day School Week

In this study, we use school-level longitudinal data from the state of Colorado to investigate the relationship between the four-day school week and academic performance among elementary school students. We exploit the temporal and spatial variation in the four-day school week using a difference-in-differences empirical strategy. Our results suggest that student academic achievement has not been hurt by the change in schedule. Instead, the evidence indicates that the adoption a four-day school week shares a positive and often statistically significant relationship with performance in both reading and mathematics; the math results in particular are generally robust to a range of specification checks. These findings have policy relevance to the current U.S. education system, where many school districts must cut costs. The four-day school week is a strategy currently under debate. (Anderson, 2012)
Retrieved March 2019, at https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/full/10.1162/EDFP_a_00165

The Economics of a Four-Day School Week: Community and Business Leaders’ Perspectives

In many rural communities, the school district is the largest regional employer, which provides a region with permanent, high paying jobs that support the local economy. This study collects data from 71 community and business leaders in three rural school districts that have transitioned to the four-day school week within the last year. Quantitative

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statistical analysis is used to investigate the perceptions of community and business leaders related to the economic impact upon their businesses and the community and the impact the four-day school week has had upon perception of quality of the school district. Significant differences were identified between community/business leaders that currently have no children in school as compared to community/business leaders with children currently enrolled in four-day school week schools. Overall, community/business leaders were evenly divided concerning the economic impact on their businesses and the community. Community/business leaders’ perceptions of the impact the four-day school week was also evenly divided concerning the impact on the quality of the school district. Slightly more negative opinions were identified related to the economic impact on the profitability of their personal businesses which may impact considerations by school leaders. Overall, community/business leaders were evenly divided when asked if they would prefer their school district return to the traditional five-day week school calendar. (Turner, Finch, Uribe-Zarain, 2018) Retrieved March 2019, at <https://doi.org/10.11114/aef.v5i2.2947>

The Four-Day School Week: Nine Years Later

Existing literature on the topic indicates that there are a number of advantages and disadvantages to the shortened week. For example, while the four-day week allows for an additional free day for students and teachers each week, it means longer days at school, which can be a challenge for some students (Donnis-Keller & Silvernail, 2009; Fager, 1997). Additionally, though districts tend to experience savings by going to a four-day week, it is often less than originally anticipated (Beesley & Anderson, 2007; Donnis-Keller & Silvernail, 2009; Gaines, 2008; Hewitt & Denny, 2010; Juneau, 2009). Finally, there is no strong evidence that the four-day week has either a positive or negative effect on student achievement. Rather, the majority of evidence suggests that the schedule does not strongly impact student achievement (Beesley & Anderson, 2007; Donnis-Keller & Silvernail, 2009; Hewitt & Denny, 2010; Ryan, 2009). (Plucker, Cierniak, Chamberlinm, 2012) Retrieved March 2019, at http://ceep.indiana.edu/pdf/PB_V10N6_2012_EPB.pdf

Three Midwest Rural School Districts’ First Year Transition to the Four Day School Week: Parents’ Perspectives

The four-day school week is a concept that has been utilized in rural schools for decades to respond to budgetary shortfalls. There has been little peer-reviewed research on the four-day school week that has focused on the perception of parents who live in school districts that have recently switched to the four-day model. This study collected data from 584 parents in three rural Missouri school districts that have transitioned to the four-day school week within the last year. Quantitative statistical analysis identifies significant differences in the perceptions of parents classified by the age of children, special education identification, and free and reduced lunch status. Strong parental support for the four-day school week was identified in all demographic areas investigated; however, families with only elementary aged children and families with students receiving special education services were less supportive than other groups. (Turner, Finch, Ximena, 2019)

Retrieved March 2019, at <http://epubs.library.msstate.edu/index.php/ruraleducator/article/download/387/432>

Comparing Professional Learning Practices of Missouri's Four and Five Day Schools

Teachers from 18 Missouri four-day schools and 21 comparable five-day schools based on size, RPDC region, and free and reduced lunch population were included in the study. The teachers responded via online survey distributed by email. Statistical analysis included independent sample two-tailed t-tests adjusted for unequal sample sizes at the $p < 0.05$ level. Missouri four-day teachers rated the Learning Communities, Leadership, and Data standards significantly higher than their five-day counterparts did. The findings of this study add to the sparse body of literature related to the four-day school week and professional learning practices. The study concluded that the four-day school week may help schools improve professional learning practices due to the unique availability of professional development time on the off-day. (Lewis, 2018)

Retrieved March 2019, at <https://search.proquest.com/openview/6fb8d8f9984e83b66e07d3a69f4a735d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

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List of the Advantages of the 4-Day School Week

1. There are fewer moments of wasted time.

A 2006 research study from Yarbrough and Gilman discovered that teachers during a 5-day school week are wasting precious time during their core classes. The structure of school makes it so that it is up to the students to learn instead of having the teachers provide instruction. In 2015, Coastal Conservatory reported that during the average 7-hour school day, over 2 hours of lost educational opportunities exist every day. Moving to the 4-day schedule shifts student movement patterns, reducing the number of lost transition minutes.

2. Students can adjust to the new schedule.

An understandable concern for parents, teachers, and students about the 4-day school week is the extended time required to be at school during the day. Two hours must be added to each day to make up for the added weekend day that is given. That means students are at school for 10-hour day instead of an 8-hour day. Five states in the U.S. have pushed for the 4-day week: New Mexico, Montana, Oregon, Colorado, and Oklahoma. Their research has found that young students adapt to the new schedule just as well as the older students.

3. It allows students to create an extracurricular schedule that works.

Children who attend schools that have implemented the 4-day schedule are found to be happier about their extra day off. They stay happier than 5-day schedule students throughout the entire academic year. Many of the kids even say they look forward to going to school because it feels productive to them. The issue of student exhaustion tends to be tied to the constant transitions that happen during a compressed schedule, which is reduced during the 4-day week. Then students have more energy to create an extracurricular schedule outside of school for athletics, scouting programs, spiritual activities, and family-oriented options because they have time and energy to do it.

4. The 4-day school week follows the working schedule of many parents.

Outside of the extra day off which students have, the 4-day week at school fits into the working schedule of most parents. The school districts, which have implemented the 4-day week typically, hold class from 7:30 am to 5 pm each day, or from 8 am to 5:30 pm. That makes it possible for parents to drop off their children on the way to work, then pick them up on the way home. That reduces child care costs throughout the week, especially if parents can shift their own schedule to a 4-day, 40-hour week with their employer.

5. School districts can plan after-school events with greater ease.

Under the standard 5-day schedule that schools use, most practices for athletics occur in the afternoon. Then you’ll have games in the evening and on the weekend. Depending on the location of the school and the size of the conference or division, schools are often forced to travel during school hours to meet their obligations. By adding an additional day off, more athletic events can be scheduled during non-school hours, which means fewer lessons are missed or passed on as a “self-learning opportunity.”

6. Teacher recruitment is easier with a 4-day school week.

The popularity of the 4-day school week became so popular in New Mexico that the state government had to set a moratorium on the practice to determine how beneficial it would be for their students. It is a schedule, which is popular with teachers because they get more time with their families as well. Most teachers work outside of their usual 8-hour day anyway, so their schedule isn’t really that different – except for the added day where they can work from home if they wish. Schools with a 4-day week in New Mexico found recruiting to be 20% easier when compared to their 5-day counterparts.

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7. It is cheaper to run a 4-day school week for some school districts.

Rural school districts often look at the 4-day school week as an option because they are trying to meet tight budgetary constraints. By shifting to this new schedule, districts are able to immediately cut 20% from their transportation budget. That expense is often the largest line-item for a district behind labor costs. If every school district in the United States were to shift to the 4-day schedule, taxpayers would save over \$4 billion. At the local level, districts save between \$700 to \$1,200 per student each year.

8. Students perform better when compared to the 5-day week.

Many teachers have discovered that the added daily time for each subject they teach allows for the adoption of different teaching styles. Under the 5-day format, most teachers use a lecture-based teaching style that incorporates self-study from textbooks. Videos are watched, and other media is incorporated to create varied content. The average student retains about 10% of this information. Under the 4-day format, teachers are using small-group discussions and practical practice as teaching tools, which improves the retention rate to over 90%. When students remember the information better, they’re able to score higher grades throughout the year and on their standardized tests.

9. The 4-day schedule reduces discipline issues for schools.

According to reporting from the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, having fewer days in classes results in some students receiving fewer referrals for disciplinary issues. In Georgia, the Chattooga County School District implemented a 4-day school week and saw discipline referrals decline by more than 70% in their first year on this schedule. That effort resulted in fewer disruptions during classroom time, which created engaged learning opportunities. With the added rest, students were more likely to stay on-task, feel rested, and be focused on the work, which was required.

10. It improves the overall attendance rate for students.

In the United States, there were 84 school districts, which had implemented a 4-day school week in 1995. Most were small, rural districts where students lived on farms and worked agricultural jobs. By shifting away from the traditional 5-day schedule, student attendance rose by more than 20% on the average day. It is a trend that these districts are still seeing today, more than 20 years after they implemented this schedule change.

11. Teachers take fewer sick days with a 4-day school week.

Teachers take fewer days off during the school year when they’re working the 4-day school week as well. The extra day off gives teachers more flexibility to engage in volunteer activities, hold down a second job if required, or rest after a difficult week. In Melstone, Montana, administrative attendance went up 20% in the first two years of their 4-day school week plan.

(Ayres, 2018) Retrieved March 2019 at <https://connectusfund.org/19-big-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-the-4-day-school-week>

NOTE: This is by no means an exhaust list of research findings and reports on the four-day school week. Rather, a representation of common findings among researchers. Most notable among them in terms of academic achievement. There are also a number of studies pertaining to potential cost savings. For the purpose of this summary, these are not included as it is not the primary goal of Stoutland R-II to implement a four-day week to save money. While some savings can be expected, the primary goal of Stoutland R-II is to implement a four-day week to improve teacher recruitment and retention, a critical component of improved teaching and learning.