



Memorandum to the Board of Education

Meeting in Public`

FROM: Peter Dubinsky, Superintendent
DATE: December 15, 2023
SUBJECT: 4-Day School – Scholarly Research

For Information

Introduction

The Board is currently engaged in a process to evaluate the possibility of a 4-day school week for all the schools in the district. This includes consultation with parents and guardians, students, staff, partner groups, and school communities.

The Board also asked District Staff to gather research into the impacts and experience of 4-day school weeks in other districts. The literature and scholarly research available regarding 4-day school weeks in other districts comes primarily from the United States. There is limited information available from Canadian sources. While the American school context can be quite different from ours, many pieces of data from the literature can be helpful when considering the idea of a 4-day school week.

Third-Party Research, Analysis & Reports

Pertinent research, analyses and articles are linked below or attached as follows:

- **Simon Fraser University** - [Perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week in Saskatchewan](#)
- **CBC** – [Are 4-day school weeks good for students?s](#)
- **Education Week** – [4-Day School Weeks: New Research Examines the Benefits and Drawbacks](#)
- **MIT** - [Does Shortening the School Week Impact Student Performance? Evidence from the Four-Day School Week](#)
- **NWEA** – [What the research tells us about four-day school weeks.](#)
- **Rand Corporation** – [The Four-Day School Week: Are the Pros Worth the Cons?](#)
- **eSchool News** – [Does 4 equal 5? Research on impacts of 4-day school weeks](#)
- **Chmelynski, Carol** – Four Day School Weeks? - Only if they Fit (attached)
- **Vancouver Province** – West Kootenay SD goes to a 4-day school week (attached)
- **Calgary Herald** – School’s 4-Day week scrapped. (attached)
- **Globe & Mail** – Ottawa SD to pilot 4-day week in two schools (attached)



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General Conclusions:

Some crucial themes from the provided research include:

- Most research about 4-day school weeks is US-based. It is noted that more research will be needed in Canada to determine efficacy in our context.
- There appears to be no conclusive evidence of advantages or disadvantages academically for students. The literature shows slight improvements in both scenarios; however, the means for determining academic performance varies from state to state and does not match how academic achievement is measured in our district.
- The primary rationale for other districts moving to a 4-day week was either cost-saving measures or lifestyle choices and occurred predominantly in rural communities.
- While there seemed to be some cost savings from transportation, replacement staff, and utilities, other districts experienced less than a 3% savings.

Four-Day School Weeks?

Only If They Fit

By Carol Chmelynski From *School Board News*

LIKE a growing number of small, rural schools which are located across the nation, Merryville High School, in Louisiana, was hoping that it would be able to stretch its budget by cutting the school week from five days to four days. School officials also found the change resulted in academic improvements.

In addition to a shorter school week, it should be noted, the school switched over to the use of a block schedule, which means that there are fewer but longer classes in the course of each

day for high school students. Merryville High is actually a K-12 school, with 170 members of its 550 student population in high school.

District spokesperson Danielle LeMarie says Merryville's test scores have been as good as, and in most instances for the school better than, when the school had been on a seven-period, five-days-a-week schedule. "ACT scores are above state averages and have risen from an average of 18.7 the four years before the four-day, four-period block to 20 since—which means

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Four-Day Schools

more scholarships," says Le-Marie. "Grades have improved significantly. Honor Roll students in junior and high school have doubled."

In addition, she notes, "Teachers report less absenteeism, fewer discipline issues, and increased teaching time due to less time lost in transitions with the new schedule." And because of the block schedule, teachers "have more quality time to address individual needs and to develop positive relationships in the classroom."

Biggest Savings

Since Merryville went through with the procedure of adopting a shorter school week in the 1996-97 school year, LeMarie says the biggest savings have been on substitute pay, utilities, and hiring employees under a four-day contract. Merryville students attend school 155.5 days per year. The school day there runs eight hours, from 7:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. That schedule exceeds the state of Louisiana's requirements for instructional time.

School districts in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, and Wyoming also have switched to a four-day week—most of them small, rural districts. As many as 100 districts situated across the nation have adopted a shorter length for their school week, mainly in order to cut costs, im-

prove attendance, allow children to be able to work on their family farms, and give teachers more time with students.

Kathy Christie, who serves in the capacity of vice president of information management at the Education Commission of the States, doesn't think the four-day school week will become a nationwide trend, however: "In rural areas requiring lengthy bus rides, the downsides probably are countered by the savings. But in metropolitan areas, a four-day week raises the issue of child care. It also raises the perception—not the reality, but the perception—that kids aren't spending enough time in school." In fact, schools that have made the switch to four-day weeks lengthen the school day or year, or both, in order to make up for the shorter week.

The trend toward four-day school weeks is most popular in Colorado, where 47 of the state's 178 districts have adopted a four-day week, ranging from the Branson school system, with 42 students, to Moffat County, with 2,575 students. According to a state education department report, many districts have been able to cut 20% from their transportation costs. For some isolated districts, the bus trip can be 100 miles a day.

Colorado's Karval School District RE 23 adopted a four-day schedule in the early 1980s in response to rising gasoline costs,

says Superintendent Wes Hooper. The K-12 district has just 70 students and 13 teachers, but it spans 751 square miles. "Some students are on the bus three to four hours every day they come to school," Hooper says.

"Most of our students live on farms and ranches, so they are getting an education at home, also," Hooper says. "On the farms, they've got to be able to figure how much seed is needed to plant the field that day and how much it will cost." On the other hand, in a metropolitan area—where students might use the extra day for the purpose of watching TV, playing video games, or roaming the streets—a four-day school week wouldn't work as well, he says.

But the four-day school week could have a downside even in rural areas, Hooper says, if teachers are not efficient in the classroom: "If we take advantage of every minute we have in the classroom, our four-day week could be more efficient than a regular schedule. But if we don't, we have one less day to reach students."

Morrow County School District 1, located in Lexington, Oregon, turned to a four-day school week eight years ago in order to lower expenses. The district is saving an estimated \$250,000 in a \$14-million budget, says Duane Yecha, the principal of Riverside High School. "But unfortunately, some of the savings have come on the backs of some of our em-

ployees, such as the cooks, bus drivers, and teacher aides." He says the achievement level in the high-poverty district has been basically flat since the transition—with gains in some areas and losses in other areas—but the lack of money prevents the district from returning to a five-day week.

Other Ways

Officials at Weatherford School District 26, located in Oklahoma, had been planning to present to the school board a proposal for switching the schedule to a four-day week, since district officials estimated they could save \$100,000 to \$140,000 a year in utility, transportation, and staff expenses. But the plan for doing this was withdrawn after Oklahoma Superintendent of Education Sandy Garrett wrote a letter urging districts which were considering a four-day week to look for other ways in which to save money.

"It's not family friendly, and it's not good for the continuation of instruction," Garrett says. "Our board really values the fact that the law says we must have 175 instructional days." She says that a shorter week would force parents to find child care for an extra day and, in some cases, children would probably stay home alone.

Declining state revenues have forced all Oklahoma districts to cut their budgets by 4.75%. For

the schools of Weatherford, that means a \$300,000 budget cut this year, says Jim Ritz, the principal of Weatherford High School. Ritz is disappointed that his school must retain a five-day week and doesn't know how the district will make up the budget shortfall. The district might have to cut support staff or maintenance costs or raise property taxes, he says.

Vern Hagedorn, who is superintendent of the 930-student Hot Springs, South Dakota, school district, says survey results show staff, parents, and secondary school students are generally happy since the district cut the school week to four days this year and added 63 minutes to each day. But, he adds: "The teachers are tired. They're not as flexible as the students are with the longer day."

More Focused

Initially, the school board was mainly interested in a shorter school week to save money, Hagedorn says, but as school officials did more research, greater emphasis was placed on the educational benefits. "We're seeing some very positive attitudes from the middle and high school. The staff is saying that the students are more focused, and that makes it all worth it, even though there hasn't been a financial saving," he notes.

John "Clyde" Briley, principal of Midland High School in

Louisiana, which switched to a four-days schedule last year, says: "Money was not our main objective. We wanted to try to find a way to get rid of the apathy, motivate kids, and raise student achievement." The schedule change has been successful, Briley says. "We've had students who were really struggling and not doing well, and they've done a lot better" since the change.

Midland High School has added a twist to the schedule change. Students with failing grades are required to come to school on Friday for three hours of remediation. That policy has actually motivated students to work harder so that they will be able to get Friday off, Briley says. Furthermore, another 10 or 12 students voluntarily come in to school on Fridays to do research in the library or to make up schoolwork they missed. And, instead of being suspended, students who violate school rules also have the possibility of coming to school on Fridays in order to perform work on campus, such as sweeping floors, washing windows, or landscaping.

"Teachers love it. Students love it," says Briley of the four-day week. Initially, parents of the younger children were concerned about child care, he says, but he has not heard a single complaint during the entire year that the new schedule has been in place. ei

West Kootenay school district goes to four-day school week: [Final Edition]

McLellan, Wendy

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

"We have declining enrolment because of unemployment and we're wrestling with the budget," said district superintendent Denny Kemprud. "But if we take out a school to meet the budget, we destroy the community. It will never come back."

Although the four-day week was approved this week, Kemprud said the new school calendar won't be finalized until July.

"I don't have a ready answer to the daycare concerns, but our primary role is not custodial -- our role is to educate kids," Kemprud said.

FULL TEXT

School trustees in the West Kootenay have decided to save money by switching to a four-day school week rather than close schools in the district.

Beginning in September, elementary and high-school students in the Boundary district will attend school Mondays to Thursdays and stay in class about one hour longer each day.

"We have declining enrolment because of unemployment and we're wrestling with the budget," said district superintendent Denny Kemprud. "But if we take out a school to meet the budget, we destroy the community. It will never come back."

He said the new school week will save at least \$210,000 a year in janitorial, transportation and utilities costs -- and will enable the school board to balance its budget without losing any of the 10 schools in the district.

Although the four-day week was approved this week, Kemprud said the new school calendar won't be finalized until July.

He said the students won't lose any instructional time with the four-day week. Sports days and teacher professional days will be scheduled on Fridays and when a statutory holiday falls on a Monday, students will go to school Tuesday to Friday that week.

He said a few parents are unhappy with the plan because of the longer school day and the problem of child care for one day, but many were pleased to find a way to keep rural schools open.

Kemprud said the district was facing the closure of at least four small schools, along with many other cuts, to balance its budget.

"I don't have a ready answer to the daycare concerns, but our primary role is not custodial -- our role is to educate kids," Kemprud said.

Lorene Matteis, whose daughter attends the elementary school in Midway, said altering the school week is a far better solution to the budget problem than closing the school and sending kids out of the community on school buses.

"We have spent so many hours trying to come up with a solution to balance the budget and still keep our school," Matteis said. "This is a really good solution. My daughter is looking forward to it."

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School's four-day week trial scrapped: [Final Edition]

Dempster, Lisa

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

A controversial four day school week project in Airdrie has failed to meet the grade.

More than 450 students at Meadowbrook middle school will return to five days of classes a week this fall after Rocky View school division trustees voted to scrap the pilot program.

An independent report released last month on the four-day Meadowbrook program said achievement test results showed growth in learning was below expected rates. Many working families had struggled to find child care and supervised activities for their children on Fridays.

FULL TEXT

A controversial four day school week project in Airdrie has failed to meet the grade.

More than 450 students at Meadowbrook middle school will return to five days of classes a week this fall after Rocky View school division trustees voted to scrap the pilot program.

The community has been divided over the move.

"I'm pleased that logic has finally taken over in the halls of learning," said Doug MacKenzie, one of several parents who fought the four-day week with petitions, letters to the provincial government and parent rallies.

An independent report released last month on the four-day Meadowbrook program said achievement test results showed growth in learning was below expected rates. Many working families had struggled to find child care and supervised activities for their children on Fridays.

Superintendent Colleen Brownlee admitted Friday that the process used to introduce the idea to the community was flawed.

Trustees voted 5-2 Thursday night to put an end to the experiment, nearly a year after two other reports had indicated it was likely doomed because of parent opposition and inconclusive educational benefits.

"There seemed to be less support from parents," Brownlee said, adding even some parents who initially supported the concept began to back away.

However, the independent report showed teachers and students liked the four-day approach.

More than 500 children in Grades 5-8 have participated in the shortened week at Meadowbrook -- which involves an extra 32 minutes of classes Monday through Thursday -- since last spring.

A six-member committee of parents and school officials was formed last July after parents collected a petition forcing the division to reconsider the issue.

Brownlee said valuable lessons were learned during the project, and future decisions will be made in collaboration with the community and the newly-empowered school council.

A handful of other school boards in Alberta which have adopted the shortened week, largely rural schools, have reported their systems are working well.

*** Infomart-Online ***

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An Ottawa school board looks to test four-day school week: A French Catholic school board in Ottawa is looking to pilot the compressed week at two of its elementary schools next fall if it receives provincial Ministry of Education approval

Alphonso, Caroline

[ProQuest document link](#)

FULL TEXT

On top of new backpacks and school supplies, some parents whose children attend Ottawa-area schools will soon have another choice to consider: a four-day school week.

The Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est, a French Catholic board, is looking to pilot the compressed week at two of its elementary schools next fall –provided it receives provincial Ministry of Education approval. Kids would get the same number of instructional hours as their traditional five-day-schedule peers; it would just happen over a shorter school week.

“We strongly believe this will help overall with well-being and student success,” said Marc Bertrand, the board’s director of education. Two elementary schools would offer its families the choice between a four-day calendar and the regular five-day week.

It’s not unusual for boards to experiment with the school calendar where the number of instructional hours are redistributed, not reduced. A number of schools in Canada, for example, have year-round classes, which means students have a shorter summer break to prevent learning loss and more holidays dispersed throughout the year. A few boards across Western Canada have adopted the four-day school calendar. The idea has gained traction in the United States, especially among smaller, rural school districts. Educators say it saves money, because it cuts down on busing costs, for example, and improves staff and student attendance. However, in many cases, families may have difficulty finding child care.

Mr. Bertrand said that in recent consultations, one question emerged among educators and families: How can the board help them achieve a better work-life balance or, in this case, a school-life balance?

More parents have flexible work schedules these days and remote work has become commonplace. A four-day calendar would give students and staff more time to spend with families, attend appointments or simply take time to rest.

For families that opt in, the school day would be extended by 38 minutes, and kids on the new calendar would start school one week earlier and end three days later in June.

“We’re not taking anything away,” Mr. Bertrand said. “We’ll offer the same quality instruction. It’s just an extra option for families.” He said the composition of classrooms would be determined by how many families choose the new calendar.

Research on the benefits of a four-day school week are mixed. An analysis done by U.S.-based research group Rand Corporation found that school boards across that country reported cost savings as a major motivation. Parents said their children were less stressed, the shortened school week helped with extracurricular activities, and it allowed for more family time.

However, Christopher Doss, a policy researcher at Rand, said that the four-day week “is definitely a policy that has a

lot of trade-offs.”

In the analysis, researchers found that student achievement did not climb as quickly as those who were on the traditional five-day schedule. American school districts extended their days with a four-week calendar but had fewer instructional hours over the course of the academic year, according to the research paper.

Grace Lee, a spokeswoman for Ontario Education Minister Stephen Lecce, said in an e-mail that “students should continue to learn in school for five days a week with a focus on improving reading, writing and math, and expanding mental-health supports.”

In Alberta, Fort McMurray’s public school district considered compressing the school week in 2013 to cut costs.

Trustees voted against it after parents expressed concern about how they would manage child care.

Michael Di Massa, a spokesman for the Elk Island Catholic Schools, said one of its schools in Camrose adopted the four-day model when it opened a decade ago, based on community feedback. “The preference for shorter weeks hasn’t changed among our school families, and their ability to spend more time together continues to be the largest benefit of four-day weeks,” he said.

The Boundary School District in Grand Forks, B.C., also rolled out the four-week model in all its schools about two decades ago. At that time, schools were seeing a significant decline in enrolment and the compressed calendar was adopted as an alternative to closing small remote schools to balance the budget, said Miranda Burdock, the district’s secretary-treasurer.

Schools meet instructional time set by the province by extending the school day.

Ms. Burdock said that anecdotally, the board has seen improvements to the mental health of staff and students, and there have been fewer employee absences for medical appointments. However, she acknowledged that families have to figure out child care on Fridays.

Sophie-Catherine Ménard, a parent with two children attending one of the proposed pilot schools in the Ottawa area, is unsure if her job would provide flexibility so she can opt for the four-day school week.

However, the proposed calendar would allow families to go a cottage earlier, for example, or spend time with grandparents, she said.

“It’s very innovative,” she said. “We just have to figure out if it’s a good fit for our family.”

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