



**The Principals' Partnership**  
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A Program of Union Pacific Foundation

## Research Brief

### Four-day Week Schedule

**Question:** What does research say about the four-day week as an alternative school schedule?

#### Summary of Findings:

More than 100 districts in at least 12 states currently use a four-day week alternative schedule. Most are located in rural areas, serve less than 1000 students, and made the move to a shorter school week with longer instructional days for financial reasons. Although four-day week schedules have been in place since the early 1980s, research about the effects of this non-traditional approach is very limited.

The studies that have been conducted confirm that a four-day week schedule saves money, primarily in the areas of transportation, energy, food service and substitute teacher expenses. Student and teacher attendance tend to increase when a four-day week is implemented. A number of districts cited fewer disruptions of instructional time and increased on-task behavior by students as benefits. Despite these benefits, the literature indicates that the change to a four-day schedule rarely increased student achievement. On the plus side, the shortened week had no adverse affect on achievement over time.

For the most part, parents, teachers and students expressed positive feelings about the four-day week schedule, but some negative perceptions related to local implementation issues or circumstances were also cited. Other concerns included 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.

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.
- 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 successfully made 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.

#### Online Resources:

##### Four Day School Week

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory summarized the research on four-day week school schedules conducted through the early 1990's. This Web page is part of a larger report on alternative schedules. Examples of districts that have adopted the four-day week schedule can be accessed by navigating through the report.

<http://www.nwrel.org/request/feb97/article4.html>



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### The Four-Day School Week

This article provides an excellent overview of the issues involved in implementing a four-day schedule and includes details about the experience in rural New Mexico and other states.

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0JSD/is\\_3\\_56/ai\\_77204690](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JSD/is_3_56/ai_77204690)

### 4 Days a Week

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/2006/03/0306asbjarbrough.pdf>

### The 4 Day School Week

This short but informative current status 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/4dayweek04.pdf>

### Some Specific Examples

#### Webster County School District, Kentucky

The link to the 4 day week rationale provides summary information about the planning process and results obtained to date. The Web site was undergoing changes so the video link was inactive at the time this research brief was written.

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

#### Custer School District, South Dakota

Background information, rationale, examples of school schedules, and other information prepared for the educational community when the four-day week was implemented in 2003-04 are available at this site.

<http://www.hssd.k12.sd.us/4day.htm>

#### School District 64, British Columbia, Canada

In addition to a description of the current schedule, this site contains very specific information about the planning process and includes access to the minutes of the implementation committee. The archive for 2004-05 shows how the district identified and dealt with concerns about the pending change.

<http://www.sd64.bc.ca/4day.html>

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