

Brief

Four-Day School Week Overview

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Related Topic: [Education](#)

Key Takeaways

Twenty-four states have at least one school district using a four-day school week schedule, an increase of over 600% since 1999.

Approximately 850 of the nation's school districts use a four-day schedule, up from 650 in 2020.

A four-day school week is an alternative to the traditional five-day weekly educational schedule. A four-day schedule involves reducing the number of school days to four, usually from Monday to Thursday, while increasing the length of each school day. The idea of a four-day school week has gained popularity over the last decade, especially in rural areas where schools face budgetary constraints and staff shortages.

Reasons for implementing the shorter week vary, but most school districts choose a shorter week to cut costs due to budget constraints. [Research shows](#) that the maximum possible cost savings for districts on a four-day week is 5.43%, but average savings range from 0.4% to 2.5%. One factor affecting savings is whether the school remains open on the fifth day. Some school districts opt for four-day school weeks to attract and retain teachers. Most four-day-a-week schools are in small, rural districts; however, in recent years, some larger, more urban districts have begun to consider the option of a shorter week.

Most four-day-a-week schools operate Monday through Thursday, with a few opting for Tuesday through Friday. School days are lengthened to deliver the same amount of instructional time over fewer days, as required by state law. Some schools may offer optional enrichment activities, tutoring or time for teacher development during the fifth day.

How States Implement the Four-Day Week

School calendars are dictated by states' minimum instructional time requirements, which are in turn tied to funding formulas. Schools not meeting the minimum instructional time requirements will receive less funding from the state. Therefore, it is likely only schools operating in states where a four-day week does not violate these requirements would seek to do so.

Most states allow districts to opt into a four-day week, either through flexible requirements, explicit administrative rules or a waiver approval process. The level of legislative involvement in this process varies. Statutory guidelines generally do not allow four-day school weeks but may allow calendar

flexibility by expressing that the minimum instructional day requirement can also be counted in the hour or minute equivalent.

Some states establish additional guidelines school districts must follow to transition to a four-day week, but do not monitor the process directly or track the number of districts opting into such a schedule. Other states require districts to submit their four-day plans to the state education commissioner or superintendent for approval.

As noted above, most states use this schedule to benefit rural districts. As a strategy to attract teachers in rural districts, Missouri recently experienced a surge in the use of a four-day school week, with [approximately 25%](#) of schools adopting this schedule for the 2022-23 academic year. According to [the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#), [144 school districts](#) in the state are currently operating on a four-day schedule.

Pros and Cons of the Four-Day Week

Proponents of a four-day school week argue that it offers several benefits, including cost savings, improved student attendance and increased teacher morale. By reducing the number of school days, schools can save money on transportation, food and energy costs. This can be especially important for rural districts where students may need to travel long distances to get to school. District administrators also claim that the appeal of a four-day work week helps recruit teachers in areas where it is consistently difficult to attract new staff.

In addition, some studies have shown that student attendance improves under a four-day school week. With a longer weekend, students have more time to rest and engage in extracurricular activities, which can lead to better attendance during the week. This, in turn, can lead to improved academic performance.

Furthermore, a four-day school week can help to boost teacher morale. With an extra day to plan lessons, grade assignments and attend professional development opportunities, teachers can feel more prepared and engaged in their work. This can lead to better job satisfaction, which can translate into better classroom performance.

However, opponents argue that longer school days can be difficult for students, especially those in elementary grades. Four-day school weeks can also pose a challenge to families who are unable to find affordable, enriching care arrangements on the fifth weekday. Further, students who are food insecure may not have access to sufficient meals during the off day. If optional activities were offered by schools on the fifth day, lack of transportation could limit access.

What the Research Says

Education researchers [have pointed out](#) that little is known about the effects of a four-day week on student outcomes. While large-scale research has yet to be performed, some state-specific studies have been published. The results are mixed; [one study](#) of students in Colorado showed a statistically significant improvement in math scores among students on a four-day schedule, while [a similar study](#) found no significant differences in student performance.

A [Rand Corp. study](#) used quantitative and qualitative methods and collected surveys and interviews on the four-day school week experience in Idaho, New Mexico and Oklahoma. The research team examined student achievement, student health outcomes (sleep and physical activity), cost savings and more. The report highlights positive qualitative findings, such as improvements in student attendance, behavioral and emotional well-being, and school climate. But it also indicates when there was no difference in quantitative data, including in the areas of sleep, fatigue and student achievement.

A [report from Oregon State University and NEWA](#) on the effects of four-day school weeks on student achievement and within-year growth found very little difference on rural district academic effects, but a more significant difference for four-day schools in suburban areas. The report also found that reading suffered more than math on four-day schedules.

A [study](#) in the journal of Educational Research and Policy Analysis showed that shortened schedules can lead to calmer and safer schools. Across Oklahoma, 411 districts adopted the four-day model for at least some of their schools. Researchers found that Oklahoma high schools saw less fighting and bullying among students after switching from a five-day-a-week schedule to a four-day schedule. However, the researchers also found that a four-day schedule had “no detectable effect” on student attendance or scores on the ACT college entrance exam.

Future of the Four-Day Week

The four-day school week has gained popularity in recent years, with many school districts adopting this schedule in an effort to improve student performance and reduce costs. While the impact of a four-day week on academic outcomes is still a matter of debate, it is clear that more districts are adopting the schedule each year. Most four-day-a-week districts are smaller and rural, but a few notable exceptions have raised questions about the possibility of more urban districts moving toward a four-day week. [Colorado School District 27J](#), located in the Denver metro area, [moved](#) to a four-day week in the 2018-19 school year. Today, the district serves more than 22,600 students and is the largest in the state to adopt the four-day schedule. The district provides full-day child care for a fee on Mondays, when schools are closed, for students ages 5 to 12, and it continues to evaluate needs and capacity for these programs. The local Boys & Girls Club also expanded its services on Mondays. Overall, it is likely that the four-day school week will continue to be a topic of discussion in education circles for years to come.

Related Resources

Updated October 12, 2023

Pre-K-12 Education Legislation Database

The Education database tracks state legislation on more than 50 Pre-K-12 education issues, including curriculum, educators, finance and student supports (2023 to present).

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