



Four-Day School Week

By Molly Ryan

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Introduction

As school districts nationwide struggle with funding cuts, the four-day school week has gained momentum as one way to save money. This past legislative session, legislators in six states considered measures to authorize eliminating one instructional day per week from the school calendar.¹

The four-day school week is not a novel issue, as it first appears to have been used by South Dakota in the 1930s.² During the energy crisis of the early 1970s, districts in New Mexico implemented the alternative schedule, and the number of districts across the country following suit has gradually increased with each economic crisis.³ Although the majority of the nation's districts operate under a traditional school calendar, approximately 120 districts (of 15,000 districts nationwide) in 17 states use a four-day school week.⁴ These districts typically are small (student enrollments of fewer than 1,000 students), rural and located west of the Mississippi River.⁵

State laws govern the amount of time students must attend class each year, and most states require schools to meet a minimum number of days or a minimum number of hours. In states where four-day weeks are authorized, districts must hold class an equivalent number of instructional hours. Generally, such districts do not hold classes on either Monday or Friday and extend school hours 60 to 90 minutes per day.

While the positives and negatives of the four-day week have been widely debated, research on the impacts of the schedule is extremely limited.⁶ Moreover, there is a decided lack of evidence how the schedule impacts student achievement.⁷

Potential Benefits, Drawbacks and Unknowns of Implementing a Four-Day Week⁸

Benefits	Drawbacks	Unknowns
Reduced transportation, heating and cooling, and food service costs	Substantial savings may not result if school remains open on the fifth day for non-instructional activities	Effects on student achievement
Decreased student and teacher absenteeism	Increased demand for child care	Effectiveness in non-rural areas
Increased time for academic support and extracurricular activities	Longer school day may be difficult for younger students	Effectiveness in large rural areas
Fewer long commutes for students	Collective bargaining	

The following graph shows three different statutory approaches taken by states to allow a four-day school week:

Approach: Specifically Authorize in State Statute		
State	Authorizing Statute	Implementation Notes
Arizona	<p>Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-801(A)</p> <p>The superintendent of public instruction may authorize an educational program on the basis of a four-day school week.</p> <p>Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 15-341(A)(2)</p> <p>The governing board may decide to offer an educational program on the basis of a four-day school week with 144 days of instruction (180 days or equivalent number of minutes of instruction required per year).</p>	
Arkansas	<p>Ark. Code Ann. § 6-10-117</p> <p>The General Assembly determined that granting districts greater flexibility in scheduling instructional time can reap educational benefits for the students and financial rewards for the school district. Thus, districts are authorized to operate on a four-day school-week basis, so long as planned instructional time is in accord with requirements established by the state board.</p>	<p>005 19 CARR § 002(5.00)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each district must conduct community forums to provide for continual community input into the success and continuation of four-day school weeks. • Academic distress districts that operate four-day school weeks who do not demonstrate yearly improvement must forfeit their right to the four-day option.
California	<p>Cal. Educ. Code § 37701</p> <p>Districts operating a school on a four-day school week must provide the following hours of minimum instructional time:</p> <p>Grades 4-12: 845 hours Grades 1-3: 700 Kindergarten: 560</p> <p>Kindergarten students may not be kept in school more than four hours in any day, exclusive of recesses, and the school day may not exceed eight hours.</p> <p>Cal. Educ. Code § 37700</p> <p>A district with an exclusive bargaining representative may operate a school on a four-day school week only if the district and the representative of each unit of district employees mutually agree in a memorandum of understanding.</p>	<p>Cal. Educ. Code § 37703</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school site council in the district must be involved in the planning and evaluation of a four-day school week. <p>Cal. Educ. Code § 37704</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The district must consider the impact of the longer school day on primary grade pupils and on working parents. <p>Cal. Educ. Code § 37707</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reduced number of days will not affect the rights of certificated or classified employees of the district with regard to classification, tenure, or notice, and will not otherwise affect the contract rights of the employees. <p>Cal. Educ. Code § 37710</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a school operating on a four-day week fails to achieve its academic growth target, the authority to operate on a four-day week will be permanently revoked the following school year.

Minnesota	<p>Minn. Stat. § 120A.41</p> <p>A school board's annual school calendar must include at least the number of days of student instruction the board formally adopted as its school calendar at the beginning of the 1996-1997 school year.</p> <p>Minn. Stat. §124D.12</p> <p>Districts may evaluate, plan and employ the use of flexible learning year programs, such as a four-day week school calendar.</p>	
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Virginia	<p>Va. Code Ann. § 22.1-79.1(C)</p> <p>Provides that school boards may approve, pursuant to guidelines developed by the state board, school-proposed alternative school schedule plans, including those providing for the operation of schools on a four-day weekly calendar, so long as the calendar has a minimum of:</p> <p>Grade 1-12: 990 hours Kindergarten: 540</p> <p>No alternative plan that reduces the instructional time in the core academics will be approved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not widely used.
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**Approach: Require Number of Instructional Hours Rather Than Days;
Allows Districts to Implement Four-Day Weeks at Their Discretion**

State	Authorizing Statute	Implementation Notes
Kansas	<p>Kan. Stat. Ann. § 72-1106</p> <p>Subject to a policy developed and adopted by the board of any district, the board may provide for a school term consisting of school hours (rather than the required days), consisting of:</p> <p>Grade 12: 1,086 hours Grades 1-11: 1,116 Kindergarten: 465</p>	
Montana	<p>Mont. Code Ann. § 20-1-301</p> <p>The minimum aggregate hours required by grade are:</p> <p>Grade 4-12: 1,080 hours Grades 1-3: 720 Full-day K: 720 Half-day K: 360</p> <p>1,050 aggregate hours of pupil instruction for graduating seniors may be sufficient.</p>	

<p>Nebraska</p>	<p>Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 79-211, 212</p> <p>The school term shall not be less than:</p> <p>Grades 9-12: 1,080 hours Grades 1-8: 1,032 Kindergarten: 400</p>	
<p>New Mexico</p>	<p>N.M. Stat. Ann. § 22-2-8.1</p> <p>Requires minimum number of instructional hours:</p> <p>Grades 7-12: 6 hours per day or 1,080 hours per year Grades 1-6: 5.5 or 990 Full-day Kindergarten: 5.5 or 990 Half-day Kindergarten: 2.5 or 450</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 17 out of 89 districts have schools operating a four-day week.
<p>Oregon</p>	<p>OR. Admin. R. 581-022-1620</p> <p>Required minimum number of instructional hours:</p> <p>Grade 9-12: 990 hours Grades 4-8: 900 Grades 1-3: 810 Kindergarten: 405</p>	
<p>South Dakota</p>	<p>S.D. Codified Laws § 13-26-1</p> <p>Each local school board must set the number of days in a school term, the length of a school day, and the number of school days in a school week. The number of hours in a school year may not be less than:</p> <p>Grade 4-12: 962.5 hours (exclusive of recess or lunch)</p> <p>Kindergarten: 437.5 (effective July 1, 2010)</p> <p>The Board of Education must set the minimum number of hours in the school term for grades 1-3.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 20 of 156 school districts in SD have schools operating on a four-day week.
<p>Wyoming</p>	<p>Wyo. Stat. Ann. § 21-4-301</p> <p>Requires each district to operate for a minimum of 175 days each school year unless an alternative schedule has been approved by the state board.</p> <p>Prior to submission of a proposed alternative schedule to the state board, the board of trustees must hold at least two advertised public meetings within the district, at which the board must present the proposed alternative schedule and respond to public questions and comments.</p> <p>Any school district operating under an alternative schedule must annually evaluate the effectiveness of that schedule in meeting the educational goals and purposes for which the schedule was adopted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 20 of 48 school districts have schools operating on a four-day week.

Approach: Require Permission from State Board of Education

State	Authorizing Statute	Implementation Notes
<p>Colorado</p>	<p>Colo. Rev. Stat. § 22-32-109(1)(n)</p> <p>Any school district scheduling a school year of fewer than 160 days must obtain permission from the commissioner of education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 67 out of 178 school districts utilize the four-day week. Most schedule 7.5 hours per day for 144 days rather than the usual 6 hours for 180 days. • Some districts only use the alternative schedule during the winter months. • In 1990, the Colorado Department of Education instituted a formal application process.
<p>Georgia</p>	<p>Ga. Code Ann. § 20-2-168(c)(1)</p> <p>Provides for a 180-day school year or the equivalent as determined in accordance with State Board of Education guidelines.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Became effective May 4, 2009. • One district switched to a four-day school week for the 2009-10 school year.
<p>Louisiana</p>	<p>La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 17:154.1 A(1)</p> <p>The minimum school day consists of 360 minutes of instructional time and 177 days of instruction.</p> <p>However, in order to provide teacher training, provide for the safety and well-being of students, or to implement other educational reform efforts, any governing authority of a public elementary or secondary school may authorize some or all of its schools to modify the required number of minutes and days as long as the total number of instructional minutes per year is no less than the 360 minutes per day multiplied by 177 days.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 43 schools in seven districts in the state use the four-day system.
<p>Washington</p>	<p>Wash. Rev. Code § 28A.305.141</p> <p>The state board may grant waivers from the requirement for a 180-day school year to school districts that propose to operate one or more schools on a flexible calendar for purposes of economy and efficiency. Such districts must offer an annual average of at least 1,000 instructional hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five districts will be eligible for the waivers, two of which have students populations under 150 and three of which have between 150 and 500 students. • The state board is to adopt criteria to evaluate the waiver requests. All waivers expire August 31, 2014. 	<p>Became effective July 26, 2009.</p> <p>Waiver applications must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proposed calendar for the school day and year that demonstrates how the instructional hour requirement will be maintained. • A summary of comments received at one or more public hearings on the proposal and how concerns will be addressed. • An explanation and estimate of the economies and efficiencies to be gained from compressing instructional hours. • An explanation of how monetary

		<p>savings from the proposal will be redirected to support student learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An explanation of the impact on: (1) students who rely upon free and reduced-price nutrition services and the impact on the ability of the child nutrition program to operate an economically independent program, (2) the ability to recruit and retain employees in education support positions, and (3) students whose parents work during the missed school day.
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Molly Ryan, researcher for the ECS Clearinghouse, may be reached at 303.299.3614 or mryan@ecs.org

¹ Associated Press. "4-day school week gains momentum: Shorter week is seen as way for districts to save," *MSNBC*, 12 March 2009. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29664981/> (accessed August 1, 2009).

² Christine Donis-Keller and David L. Silvernail, *Research Brief: A Review of the Evidence on the Four-Day School Week*, Center for Education Policy, Applied Research and Evaluation, University of Southern Maine, February 2009, p. 2, <http://usm.maine.edu/cepare/pdf/CEPARE%20Brief%20on%20the%204-day%20school%20week%202.10.pdf> (accessed August 1, 2009).

³ Gale F. Gaines, *Focus on the School Calendar: The Four-Day School Week*, Southern Regional Education Board, August 2008, p.1, http://www.sreb.org/scripts/focus/Reports/08S06_Focus_sch_calendar.pdf (Accessed August 1, 2009).

⁴ Donis-Keller and Silvernail, 1-2.

⁵ Gaines, 1.

⁶ Donis-Keller and Silvernail, 1-2.

⁷ Gaines, 3.

⁸ Molly Chamberlin and Jonathan Plucker, "The Four-Day School Week," *Indiana Education Policy Center, Education Policy Briefs*, Vol. 1 No. 2, Winter 2003, p. 1, http://www.iub.edu/~ceep/projects/PDF/PB_V1N2_Four_Day_School_Week.pdf (accessed August 15, 2009).