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Your Question:

You asked for information on four-day school weeks, including how many states allow the practice and what is done on what would have been the fifth day of the school week.

Our Response:

Interest in the four-day school week has grown considerably in the past two decades. The number of schools with four-day weeks has increased from roughly 250 schools in 1999 to more than 1,600 schools in at least [25 states](#) as of 2022, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Districts that implement the four-day school week are primarily in rural communities and have low overall enrollment. However, there is at least one suburban [district](#) in **Colorado** that adopted a four-day school week in the 2018-19 school year. More than half of the districts implementing a four-day school week are in four states: **Colorado, Montana, Oklahoma** and **Oregon**. Most schools with a four-day schedule operate Monday through Thursday, with a few operating from Tuesday through Friday. To meet states' minimum instruction time, schools that operate four days often have longer school days. Below, we provide state examples of policies that allow districts to operate four-day school weeks.

We also provide the reasons that districts may consider a four-day school week as well as the pros and cons of implementing a four-day school week, including recent evaluations on student achievement. Finally, we will provide information on what staff and students reportedly do on the fifth day of the week.

State Policies for the Four-Day School Week

Arkansas [statute](#) (A.C.A. § 6-10-117) provides local school districts greater flexibility in scheduling instruction time. School districts may initiate and maintain a four-day school week as long as school board requirements are fulfilled. Each district may initiate a four-day school week in any or all of the schools in a district. Department [regulations](#) require schools to provide a minimum of six hours of instruction per day and 30 hours per week; this allows four, seven and a half-hour school days each week. Classes in grades nine through 12 must meet the clock hour equivalency of 120 clock hours for a [Carnegie unit](#).

California [allows](#) only three school districts to operate a four-day school week. The [rest](#) of the state's school districts must have a school month of 20 days — or four weeks of five days — not including legal holidays.

This **Colorado** [statute](#) (Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. 22-32-109 (n) (I) and Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. 22-32-109 (II)(A) page 685) outlines the requirements for both school days and teacher-pupil instruction hours. School districts that want to adopt a school calendar with fewer than 160 days of instruction must receive specific approval from the commissioner of education. The Colorado Department of Education's [website](#) provides an overview of the four-day school week in the state.

Since 2005, **Montana** has provided school districts the option to implement a four-day school week. School term, day and week [statute](#) (Mont. Code Ann. § 20-1-302) allows the trustees of a school district to set the number of days in a school term, the length of the day and the number of school days in a week. This [statute](#) (Mont. Code Ann. § 20-1-301) provides the minimum hours required by grade.

Oklahoma [statute](#) (70 Okl. St. Ann. § 1-109 page 90) requires a school year of both 1,080 hours with a minimum of 180 days or 165 days of instruction each year with approval. School districts that operate with 165 days per school

year must meet or exceed the minimum guidelines for student performance and school district cost saving developed by the state board of education. These [regulations](#) (Okla. Admin. Code 210:10-1-4. Length of Term) outline the specific student performance requirements and fiscal criteria for approval of an alternate school calendar.

Pros and Cons of the Four-Day School Week

This 2021 RAND [report](#) (noted throughout this section) used data from at least nine states with four-day school weeks to study the implementation and outcomes of a four-day school week. Page 104 of the report provides a summary table for positive/negative findings from the research. Note: Student achievement did not grow as fast in the four-day school week districts after the adoption of the four-day school week policy compared with similar five-day school week districts. Other notable findings from the report are:

- Districts with a four-day schedule had longer days by about 50 minutes, but over the course of the year, averaged 58 fewer hours of school.
- Students in the four-day weeks spent more time on school sports, chores, homework, jobs, school activities and hobbies than their five-day week counterparts.
- The four-day school week did not appear to result in more food insecurity for students.
- Elementary students who attended school four days per week reported getting more sleep and four-day secondary students reported feeling less tired than their counterparts in five-day school week schools.

Common Reasons for Implementing a Four-Day School Week

The most prevalent reasons district administrators cite for moving to the four-day school week are saving money, reducing student absences, and [recruiting and retaining teachers](#). We will look at each in turn below. The effect of the Great Recession on school budgets was the start of the [proliferation](#) of the four-day school week. Districts looking for innovative ways to save money experimented with moving to a four-day school week. Most recently, mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a consideration for implementing a four-day school week. Four-day school weeks are primarily concentrated in rural communities where a four-day school week may address other school-related challenges such as student absences and teacher shortages.

Saving Money

According to this 2021 RAND [report](#), superintendents and school board members said that cost savings was a major motivation for adopting a four-day school week. Using data from six districts, this 2011 Education Commission of the States [resource](#) outlines the expected savings of moving to a four-day school week. While there are cost savings for reducing transportation, food service, operations and maintenance, among others, the largest cost to districts, educator salaries and benefits, does not represent a significant reduction. The savings estimates for moving a district to a four-day school week are between 0.4% and 2.5% of its total budget.

Even though expected savings are a small portion of total costs, they can still mean big dollars for districts with larger budgets. For example, District 27J, a Colorado suburban district, [estimates](#) that it saves \$1 million annually by implementing a four-day school week. The district reports that the money saved is used to implement other priorities like having a counselor in every elementary school. Other district administrators noted that small savings were a meaningful way to increase spending flexibility and retain instructional services through savings in noninstructional categories.

Reducing Student Absences

Another often-cited reason for moving to the four-day school week is to improve student attendance. Districts in rural areas where travel time is a major factor, administrators indicate that students can use the “fifth day” of a school week to attend medical appointments and participate in sports and other extracurriculars. Qualitative findings in the RAND [report](#) (page 53) indicate that there is a perception that student absences are lower. According to the report, there is no statistical difference between the absenteeism among five-day and four-day school week students. This 2022 [research paper](#) also indicates that attendance for high school students is not significantly impacted by the implementation of a four-day week.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

A four-day school week may be a tool to attract and retain teachers. [Teacher shortages](#) are not uniform across the country and tend to be more acute in rural areas where most of the four-day school weeks are implemented. District [administrators](#) believe that a four-day school week provides a competitive advantage for hiring. The RAND [report](#) indicates that teachers view the four-day school week as a job perk but found quantitative results inconclusive as a long-term retention strategy. This 2017 [analysis](#) of staff perspectives in rural **Missouri** found that teachers supported the four-day school week and believed it positively impacted classroom teaching and academic quality.

Implications of the Four-Day School Week on Student Achievement

Studies on the impacts of switching to a four-day school week on students’ achievement have failed to reach a consensus. Reports like this 2015 [one](#) on the impact of switching to a four-day week in Colorado showed student gains in math and reading proficiency while this [2019 study](#) of student test scores in Oregon found a negative impact on student achievement. The Oregon study found more significant negative impacts for boys and students from low-income backgrounds. An additional [examination](#) in 2021 of the four-day week in Oregon shows that a reduction in school time drives declines in achievement.

Other reports like this 2022 [analysis](#) on students’ achievement and growth indicate that the effects of a four-day school week on rural schools are small; however, the effects are increasingly negative over time for rural and non-rural students. Implementing the four-day school week seemed to hurt reading achievement more than math achievement. The report also indicates that the effects on student achievement in small towns and suburban schools were more negative compared to rural schools.

Community Considerations

As states consider allowing districts more flexible policies to accommodate a four-day school week, policymakers may consider the popularity and satisfaction among parents and students. Qualitative data from the RAND [report](#) indicate that parents and students are very satisfied with the four-day school week and, if given an option of a four- or five-day school week, would overwhelmingly choose the four-day option. The satisfaction of the four-day school week among teachers, parents and students may make returning to a five-day school week a challenge.

Fifth Day Activities

This RAND [report](#) (page 42) examines what students and staff do on what would have been the fifth day of the school week. Most districts that participated in this study reported offering student activities such as sports practices, competitions and clubs on the fifth day. Most teachers reported doing school-related work on the fifth day but reported that they were only occasionally required to report to school on the fifth day. Most students, regardless of grade, reported spending their time at home on the fifth day.

In this 2018 [study](#) on juvenile crime and the four-day school week, researchers found a link between a four-day week policy and an increase in juvenile criminal offenses, especially for property crime. The study also shows that the adoption of a shortened school week resulted in agencies in those districts experiencing a 20% in juvenile criminal offenses.

Resources

[50-State Comparison: Instructional Time Policies](#) — an ECS state overview of instructional time requirements for K-12.

[Does Four Equal Five](#) — a RAND report on the implementation and outcomes of a four-day school week.

[EdWorkingPaper No. 22-630](#) — a multi-state, student-level analysis of the effects of the four-day school week on student achievement and growth.

[A User's Guide to the Four-Day School Week](#) — a guide from the Center on Reinventing Public Education to assess district readiness and evaluate results.

[What Savings are Produced by Moving to a Four Day School Week?](#) — an ECS policy report using data from six districts to estimate cost savings of implementing a four-day school week.