

Title: Research on the four-day school week

Date: August 2015

Question: >> Could you provide research on the four-day school week?

Response:

We have prepared the following memo with research on the four-day school week. The citations below include a link to a free online version, when available. References are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the document. We have not done an evaluation of the methodological rigor of these resources, but provide them for your information only.

References

Anderson, D. M., & Walker, M. B. (2012). *Does shortening the school week impact student performance? Evidence from the four-day school week* (Andrew Young School of Policy Studies Research Paper Series No. 12-06). Atlanta: Georgia State University. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2008999

Abstract: Public schools face difficult decisions on how to pare budgets. In the current financial environment, school districts employ a variety of policies to close budget gaps and stave off teacher layoffs and furloughs. An increasing number of schools are implementing four-day school weeks hoping to reduce overhead and transportation costs. The four-day-week policy requires substantial schedule changes as schools must increase the length of their school day to meet state-mandated minimum instructional hour requirements. Although some schools have indicated that this policy eases financial pressures, it is unknown whether the restructured schedule has an impact on student outcomes. In this study, we use school-level longitudinal data from the state of Colorado to investigate the relationship between the four-day school week and academic performance among elementary school students. We exploit the temporal and spatial variation in the four-day school week using a difference-in-differences empirical strategy. Our results suggest that student academic achievement has not been hurt by the change in schedule. Instead, the evidence indicates that the adoption of a four-day school week shares a positive and often statistically significant relationship with performance in both reading and mathematics; the math results in particular are generally robust to a range of specification checks. These findings have policy relevance to the current U.S. education system, where many school districts must cut costs. The four-day school week is a strategy currently under debate.

Beesley, A. D., & Anderson, C. (2007). The four day school week: Information and recommendations. *The Rural Educator*, 29(1), 48–54.

Abstract: Within the past three decades, a number of schools and districts, particularly those in rural areas, have moved toward a four-day school week. Recent articles and reports indicate that there are now schools with four-day weeks in Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Louisiana, New

Mexico, Idaho, and Nebraska. The reasons for this shift include saving money in the face of declining enrollments and avoiding interruptions and absences due to sports and activities. Districts contemplating the four-day week need current information about this alternative schedule and how it is working in schools around the country. This report is intended to summarize recent research and other articles on the four-day week and make recommendations to district personnel on whether and how it should be implemented.

Dam, A. (2006). *The four day school week*. Denver, CO: Colorado State Department of Education. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from http://www.usd205.com/pages/uploaded_files/4dayweek.pdf

Excerpt: This paper is intended as an overview of the practice...The four-day week presents only one interesting method of utilizing time in ways other than the traditional. For many communities, it meets a need for efficiency. These communities tend to be small and rural in nature. Probably, these communities also have a larger percentage of traditional families with at least one parent not working outside the home. Many communities have a strong agricultural base with a tradition of family farms. There are potential implications beyond the rural setting. In the cities, school usually gets out around 2:30 or 3:00 p.m. If students stayed until 4:30, the latchkey problem could be reduced. The fifth day could then be used for family, recreational or community activities. In other words, the positive characteristics experienced by small districts might hold potential for larger districts as well. There are good reasons why districts which originally changed to four days for financial reasons during the energy shortage periods have maintained the practice even though the crisis has passed. These reasons may have implications for restructuring not driven primarily by finance. Even though a small percentage of students are enrolled in districts with a four-day week, almost a quarter of Colorado's school districts are on the plan. The practice clearly warrants a closer look as all schools are struggling to find new and innovative ways to meet the changing needs of today's students.

Dixon, A. (2011). *"Focus" on the alternative school calendar: Year-round school programs and update on the four-day school week. Challenge to lead*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved on May 14, 2015, from http://publications.sreb.org/2011/11s01_alt_cal.pdf

Abstract: In recent years, lean economic conditions have led to state and local agency budget cuts, including reductions to elementary and secondary education. To compensate for less state funding and decreasing local revenues, many state legislatures have passed policy and funding bills that give school systems more latitude in making finance and program decisions. A key area where more flexibility is apparent is the scheduling of school calendars. One of the first responses to the downturn in the economy was to explore the four-day school week as a money-saving measure. Statutes in nearly half of the 16 SREB (Southern Regional Education Board) states now permit local school districts to adopt calendars where students attend school for longer but fewer days. With renewed focus at the state and federal level on reforming education and increasing student learning, state policymakers also are looking for more creative ways to arrange the instructional school year. The concept of altering the traditional school calendar is not new, but few schools and districts across the country have embraced the idea. Those that have chosen alternative calendars typically have similar reasons, including raising student achievement, reducing the achievement gap among groups of students, saving money, and decreasing school overcrowding. In the SREB region, most schools and districts that operate on an alternative calendar use either a year-round school program or a four-day school week, although year-round schedules are more prevalent. Year-round school calendars reorganize minimum instructional time requirements across the school year; reduce the time students spend on summer vacation; and provide multiple opportunities for tutoring, remediation and enrichment throughout the school year. This "Focus" report provides an overview of year-round programs and examines the advantages and challenges

that are inherent to most, if not all, of these programs. It also provides an update on actions relating to the four-day school week. Although only a small percentage of schools in the SREB region have year-round programs in operation, it is important for education leaders and legislators to explore whether this type of calendar contributes to stronger academic achievement results for students.

Donnis-Keller, C., & Silvernail, D. L. (2009). *Research brief: A review of the evidence on the four-day school week*. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Center for Education Policy, Applied Research and Evaluation. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from <http://www2.umaine.edu/mepri/sites/default/files/CEPARE%20Brief%20on%20the%204-day%20school%20week%202.10.pdf>

Excerpt: This research brief provides a history of the reform and presents a synthesis of the research base, albeit limited, focused on the implementation and impact of moving to a four-day school week schedule. Also included is a discussion of the most commonly voiced concerns.

Gaines, G. F. (2008). *Focus on the school calendar: The four-day school week*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from http://publications.sreb.org/2008/08s06_focus_sch_calendar.pdf

Abstract: When the economy weakens, heightened consideration is given to ways in which schools can more efficiently use financial resources. Discussions about implementing four-day school weeks—with students attending school more hours each day—are surfacing again in some states. While the need to balance the budget is real, the current emphasis on improving student achievement should continue to be central to state-level decisions affecting students and schools.

Griffith, M. (2011). *What savings are produced by moving to a four-day school week?* Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/93/69/9369.pdf>

Excerpt: Due to the current economic downturn, policymakers have been looking for budgetary options that allow for reductions in expenditures without impacting student achievement. One cost-cutting policy that some states and districts have adopted is to keep instructional time the same but shorten the school week. A recent policy brief from ECS found that approximately 120 districts in 17 states have made the move to a four-day school week. But the question still exists—what cost savings, if any, are produced? This report shows what savings a district might realistically expect to realize when moving to a four-day week.

Hewitt, P. M., & Denny, G. S. (2011). The four-day school week: Impact on student academic performance. *Rural Educator*, 32(2), 23–31. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ987605.pdf>

Abstract: Although the four-day school week originated in 1936, it was not widely implemented until 1973 when there was a need to conserve energy and reduce operating costs. This study investigated how achievement test scores of schools with a four-day school week compared with schools with a traditional five-day school week. The study focused on student performance in Colorado where 62 school districts operated a four-day school week. The results of the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) were utilized to examine student performance in reading, writing, and mathematics in grades 3 through 10. While the mean test scores for five-day week schools exceeded those of four-day week schools in 11 of the 12 test comparisons, the differences were slight, with only one area revealing a statistically significant difference. This study concludes that decisions to change to the four-day week should be for reasons other than student academic performance.

Juneau, D. (2011). *Four-day school week report in Montana Public Schools*. Helena, MT: Montana Office of Public Instruction, Accreditation Division. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/superintendent/11OCT_4Day_School.pdf

Excerpt: This report provides information, through surveys conducted during the springs of 2009 and 2011, of why districts changed to a four-day week, the benefits of the change, and the pitfalls they have encountered. The report also contains trends from states in our region concerning the four-day school week issue. It is the hope of the Office of Public Instruction staff that this report will give districts guidance to make an informed decision when considering changing to a four-day school week.

Lefly, D. L., & Penn, J. (2009). *A comparison of Colorado school districts operating on a four-day calendar*. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from <http://www.cde.state.co.us/sites/default/files/documents/research/download/pdf/coloradofourdayandfivedaydistricts.pdf>

Abstract: Sixty-seven Colorado school districts operate all their schools on a four-day week rather than a five-day week. Colorado law requires that all districts provide a specified amount of 'contact time' for students. Consequently, the shorter week includes longer day so the actual 'contact time' is the same as the schools with longer weeks. This report compares the academic achievement and student growth of the four-day districts to the academic achievement of five-day districts of similar size. Overall, the results indicate that both groups of districts perform similarly on the state assessments and that their students show very similar amounts of academic growth as reflected by the Colorado Growth Model.

Muir, M. (2013). *The four day school week. Research brief*. Pittsburgh, PA: Education Partnerships. Retrieved on May 14, 2015, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED538736.pdf>

Abstract: Can four-day school weeks help districts save money? How do districts overcome the barriers of moving to a four-day week? What is the effect of a four-day week on students, staff and the community? This paper enumerates the benefits for students and teachers of four-day school weeks. Recommendations for implementation of a four-day week are also presented.

Plucker, J. A., Cierniak, K., & Chamberlin, M. (2012). *The four-day school week: Nine years later*. Bloomington, IN: Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, Indiana University. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from http://ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/PB_V10N6_2012_EPB.pdf

Excerpt: In 2003, the Indiana Education Policy Center (now CEEP) released an Education Policy Brief, *The Four Day School Week* (Chamberlin & Plucker, 2003). In the current brief, the discussion of the four-day week continues, including advantages and disadvantages of the modified schedule, the steps a school might take to make the switch, and recommendations for districts considering the change. Examples of districts that have made the switch are also included. This brief intends to provide information and guidance for school districts and policymakers considering the possibility of a four-day school week.

Ryan, M. (2009). *Four day school week*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/82/94/8294.pdf>

Abstract: As school districts nationwide struggle with funding cuts, the four-day school week has gained momentum as one way to save money. This ECS *StateNote* examines measures in the states that authorize eliminating one instructional day per week from the school calendar.

Yarbrough, R., & Gilman, D. A. (2006). From five days to four. *Educational Leadership*, 64(2), 80–85.
Retrieved on May 13, 2015, from
http://ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/PB_V10N6_2012_EPB.pdf

Abstract: Facing financial difficulties, the Webster County Public School System in rural Kentucky implemented a four-day school week to save money on transportation and staffing. The district's research in the experience of other rural districts had indicated that such a calendar change could increase efficiency and also yield some unexpected benefits. Webster County's experience in the last two years under the new calendar has confirmed the viability of the four-day week. Student achievement has risen, and teachers feel that they are using planning and staff development time more profitably. Anticipated problems—such as student fatigue from the longer school day and parent problems with child-care issues—have not proven to be serious obstacles.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

“Four-day school week”

Search of Databases

EBSCO Host; Google; and Google Scholar

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the Western region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.