

Four-day week schedules are increasing across rural U.S. school districts to support various areas of improvement such as student engagement, school culture, and district operations. A Hanover Research (Hanover) member district is considering a calendar change that would result in a four-day school instruction model; however, district leaders would like to ensure all stakeholders understand the structural changes and potential advantages and challenges to implementation. This document provides an overview of considerations for stakeholders.

COMPONENTS OF THE FOUR-DAY STRUCTURE

Changing to a four-day school week requires districts to extend learning time during the four days of school and offer additional supports and services to support students' needs. Often, districts designate in-person instruction Monday through Thursday or Tuesday through Friday and provide optional programming on the fifth day.

EXTENDED DAYS



- Changes to school start and end times
- Approximately 50 additional minutes of instruction (Average of 58 fewer hours per year)

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



- Additional community support for academic (e.g., tutoring) and non-academic services (e.g., enrichment, counseling)

FIFTH-DAY PROGRAMMING



- Recreation
- Extracurriculars
- Academic interventions
- Staff professional development
- Teacher planning time

ADVANTAGES

Four-day school weeks typically allow districts to save costs from changes in transportation, operations, and staffing and allocate resources to additional services to support student programming and well-being. In addition to resource allocation advantages, the school community benefits across the following areas:

TEACHER OPPORTUNITIES



- Reduces travel time and increases personal time
- Increases time for collaboration, planning, and professional development (e.g., professional learning communities)

SCHOOL CULTURE



- Reduces behavior referrals and incidents
- Improves attendance for students and teachers
- Increases school connectedness with greater extracurricular involvement

FAMILY LIFE



- Allows students to stay at home on fifth day to support family activities (e.g., business) and results in more free time for students
- Provides flexibility for weekday commitments (e.g., doctors appointments, community events)
- Limits student/family travel time with less commutes to school

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



- Provides flexibility for academic programming and enrichment opportunities (e.g., arts activities, vocational/technical training, field trips)
- Supports targeted intervention for students with specific academic and social-emotional needs

LIMITATIONS

Research demonstrates mixed findings regarding the impacts of four-day school weeks on students’ academic performance, social-emotional health, physical health, and wellbeing. However, schools and communities must navigate common challenges that may determine student outcomes, including the following:



PARENT SCHEDULES AND PLANNING

- Providing childcare or supervision, transportation, meals, and enrichment opportunities during the fifth day

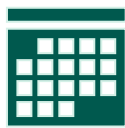


LONGER SCHOOL DAYS

- Difficulty focusing especially for elementary students
- Potential for negative health and behavioral habits (e.g., decreased sleep and nutrition)

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Although there are several limitations for school stakeholders in a four-day week schedule, district implementation strategies determine how effectively stakeholders can overcome challenges and support student success. Implementing a four-day school week requires careful planning and intentional use of instructional time, as shown by the following best practices:



Make a plan



Address student needs



Focus on instruction



Work with the community



Use the fifth day effectively

Districts can effectively implement four-day schedules that meet the needs of the school community by focusing on the following guiding principles:



FOCUSED INSTRUCTION

- ✓ Develop streamlined teaching approaches that focus instructional delivery on essential content and state standards
- ✓ Assess curriculum, instruction, and time management regularly through classroom observations and teacher feedback



FUNCTIONALITY

- ✓ Leverage structural efficiencies with the four-day schedule (e.g., athletics on Fridays to minimize classroom absences)
- ✓ Understand the role of extracurricular activities, staff morale, and broader needs of the community



FEEDBACK

- ✓ Gather feedback from school community members regularly to evaluate the success of any changes to the school environment
- ✓ Develop improvement plans and disseminate resources to the community based on feedback

LEVERAGE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Districts can partner with community organizations to provide childcare and enrichment for students on the fifth day.



Recreation and athletics (e.g., local YMCA)



Academic tutoring or intervention (e.g., community learning center)



Food services and childcare (e.g., local food bank or community center)

INTENTIONALLY PLAN INSTRUCTION

Districts must examine curriculum and instructional practices to support longer school days and maintain student engagement.



Engaged learning strategies, such as hands-on activities, digital learning, and flipped classroom models



Block scheduling, after school support, and summer learning and enrichment to complement the school day



Dedicated time for collaborative staff professional development and student data review

SOURCES

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