

A User's Guide to the Four-Day School Week: How to Assess District Readiness and Evaluate the Results

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INTRODUCTION

The popularity of the four-day school week among small, remote districts has traditionally ebbed and flowed with the country's various economic crises. Eliminating one day of schooling per week—for at least part of the year—seems like an obvious way to reduce transportation and utilities costs for districts with long bus routes in cold locales. A South Dakota district first used the four-day school week in the 1930s. In the early 1970s, several states began experimenting with the schedule. Maine, Massachusetts, and New Jersey implemented pilots but abandoned them once the economy recovered. The Cimarron School District in New Mexico tried the schedule in 1973 and has kept it ever since.¹

Until the mid-2000s, the concept persisted among these districts in the northeast and west, but it was not widespread. Then, in reaction to the 2008 recession, the four-day schedule saw a resurgence of popularity. This time, it continued to spread even after the recession eased; districts using the schedule increased from 120 districts in 2009 to 292 in 2011. The idea has been especially popular among states in the intermountain west like Colorado, Wyoming, and New Mexico.² In Montana, the number of schools using the four-day schedule increased from 10 in 2006-07 to 100 in 2012-13.³

As the four-day school week spreads, the motivation and format shifts. What started as a purely cost-saving measure for small, remote districts is now being used in larger and less remote districts.⁴ When districts didn't achieve the savings they had planned for, they started using the four-day schedule to gain other benefits: training for teachers using new state assessments, focused intervention for struggling students, or additional extracurricular activities for interested families.

Schools in districts that move to a four-day school week operate for the same number of minutes each week as before, but over fewer days. The most common schedule is for schools to be in session Monday through Thursday. Districts implementing a four-day schedule have often done so because they believe that eliminating bus routes and school utilities for one day would be a less obtrusive way to save money than reducing teaching staff or academic programs.

Moving to a four-day schedule is a far more complex intervention than shifting bus routes, however. When a community shifts its school schedule, it affects parents, teachers, classified staff, and local businesses. The schedule change—with longer school days and extended weekends—affects students most of all, and different students react in different ways. Elementary school-age students, English language learner (ELL) students, and students who struggle academically are likely to feel the impact most.

What begins as a way to save money often becomes a complex problem that has no clear theory of action to guide ongoing planning and assessment. However, some districts begin implementing a four-day school week with clear and realistic goals for what they are trying to achieve and with structures in place to assess results. Some districts have the resources to ensure the stability of new programs for the day that no longer has regular instruction—the “fifth day.” These are the circumstances in which we see districts taking full advantage of the innovative potential of the four-day school week.

We created this guide to help district leaders understand the benefits and drawbacks of the four-day school week, assess their district's readiness to make the switch, and evaluate the results of implementing the new schedule. It can be used by a variety of districts:

- For districts considering a four-day schedule, we summarize the reasons other districts have made the switch and discuss actual results and common pitfalls. Thinking ahead about the different consequences helps districts build a realistic plan.
- For districts ready to implement a four-day schedule, we include recommendations to help them realize the intended benefits and avoid unintended consequences.
- For districts currently on a four-day schedule, we offer ideas for developing evaluation tools to assess ongoing program design and service delivery.

This guide begins with an overview of common goals and outcomes for the four-day school week. It then provides a set of questions and tools that helps district leaders assess their district's readiness to implement the schedule change, along with guidance to assess the results. This guide's goal is to help district and community leaders make informed decisions about the usefulness of the four-day school week and, if they decide to move forward, implement the schedule in the most effective way possible.

How We Developed This User's Guide

CRPE reviewed written documents and interviewed 21 education leaders from school districts in Idaho, Oregon, and Arizona that had either implemented or considered implementing a four-day school week. Our recommendations are compiled from lessons learned, practices that worked for districts with the four-day schedule, and available research. The 21 interviewees included 17 rural superintendents, an elementary school principal, a curriculum director, a federal programs director who had worked in two four-day districts, and the executive director of a four-day charter school network. All interviews were conducted in the spring of 2015 and lasted 30 to 60 minutes.

THE FOUR-DAY SCHOOL WEEK: GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Why Districts Choose a Four-Day School Week

Districts consider switching to a four-day week for various reasons, but the initial motivation is to save costs. Once districts begin to explore the schedule change, there may be additional considerations, such as enhancing the quality of life for families, and districts often find uses for the fifth day.⁵

Realizing cost savings

Schools that implement the four-day school week often do so with the intention of saving money. District leaders hope that savings will come from one less day of operating school buildings and buses, and from reduced hours for classified staff such as office staff, janitors, and school nurses.

Improving quality of life

Some districts hope a four-day schedule will improve their community's quality of life. School leaders told us that rural families can often keep children at home on the fifth day or use children's help in family businesses. Some students face long commutes to school, so cutting a school day reduces their travel time.

Attracting teachers and students

A four-day schedule tends to be popular with teachers, who like the reduced travel time and increased personal time. Many small, remote districts face extra challenges in attracting and retaining teaching staff, and some see the four-day schedule as an attractive feature. This holds true for student enrollment: attracting or simply keeping students in rural schools is critical to the bottom line. In states with inter-district choice, some rural districts believe that the four-day schedule will attract students.

Increasing time for teacher collaboration and planning

From a district leader perspective, a major benefit of the four-day schedule is that it provides a day for teacher training and planning.⁶ Districts use the day for in-service teacher professional development, training for new assessments or curriculum, and peer planning. In small rural schools, the additional time allows teachers of the same grade level to convene across schools or even districts.

Improving school culture and reducing absences

Studies of the four-day school week show that it reduces behavior referrals. In some cases, it has been correlated with increased graduation rates.⁷

Some districts hope the four-day schedule will reduce absences for both students and teachers. In remote rural districts, sports travel can eat into Friday class time, causing random student absences. In rural districts that have four-day schedules, district leaders in our interviews said they scheduled sports games so schools could use the fifth day for game travel. Teachers and students who need to attend to personal appointments may need to take an entire day off because of travel; in districts with four-day schedules, they are encouraged to use the fifth day for their appointments.

Providing students with additional learning opportunities

Some districts use the fifth day for additional programming to enrich student learning. These programs are generally voluntary and provided by community partners, teachers, or parents. Depending on the district and resources available, they may include arts activities, vocational/technical training, or field trips.

Some districts see the fifth day as a time for targeted intervention. Students who are falling behind in class or at risk of not performing well on upcoming assessments can participate in targeted, small group instruction or complete assignments provided by classroom teachers in a monitored study hall.

Unintended Consequences and Observed Outcomes

Minimal cost savings to the district

One of the main ways to reduce spending is to reduce the salaries and benefits of contract workers, such as custodians, lunchroom staff, bus drivers, and paraprofessionals. But they are often members of the community, and some districts are not willing to make these kinds of reductions. Instead, districts save costs through reduced utilities, gas, and bus maintenance. In some cases, reduced teacher absences have resulted in paying for fewer substitute teachers.⁸ However, cost savings from the four-day schedule have been found to be minimal.⁹

While the district may save some money from the four-day schedule, parents may also end up absorbing costs related to transportation, child care, and meals on the fifth day.¹⁰ And the costs of fifth-day programming can cancel out what a district saves.

While districts often initially consider the four-day schedule for financial reasons, they typically decide to implement the program with the intention of achieving secondary goals.¹¹

Impacts on the local and state economy

As more districts adopt the four-day school week, neighboring districts may feel pressure to move to the same schedule. In our interviews in Oregon, we heard that local businesses throughout the region had begun to close on Fridays in response to the four-day schedule. A study in Minnesota found that the four-day schedule created a statistically significant increase in family day trips and a reduction in longer vacations, which could have an impact on the state's tourism industry.¹²

Quality of life tradeoffs

Adding Fridays to the weekend may allow families and friends to spend more time together, which can lead to happier families and closer communities. Conversely, some education leaders expressed concern that additional, unsupervised time for older youth could lead to an increase in crime or pregnancy rates, though there have been no studies to confirm this.

Changes to the learning environment

The four-day schedule causes a global change in school-level instruction. The school schedule, the organization of classes, and the minutes of instruction time for each course change as each is adjusted to account for the longer school days.

In our interviews, we heard the following scenarios in various districts:

- The quality of instruction improves because the schedule change forces teachers to focus their instruction.
- Entire courses were cut and teachers no longer have time to fulfill curriculum requirements.
- The three-day weekend is used to assign additional homework to students.
- Teachers report that the longer days make it harder for students to complete daily homework assignments, so students use the “free day” to complete regular weekly work.

We also heard concerns that some students may be affected differently than others by a longer school day and a three-day break. There is no conclusive data that the four-day schedule has a greater negative impact on certain student populations, but teachers and administrators fear this may be the case, especially for elementary school students, ELL students, special education students, and students who struggle academically.

Impact on student achievement

There are no experimental or quasi-experimental studies that identify the four-day schedule’s impact on student learning. Some studies find no effect while others have found a slightly positive effect.¹³ A recent study looking at the impact over time found that in the first year, students in four-day week schools outperformed their peers on state assessments, but proficiency rates subsequently declined, resulting in a 10 percentage point gap on math assessments six years after implementation.¹⁴

Alternatives to the Four-Day School Week

Some districts that initially consider a four-day schedule decide to address their underlying goals through other means. Two of the most common solutions are described below.

Strategic budgeting

For districts considering the four-day schedule, leaders should consider all options for saving money. Here are examples of how some Idaho districts that had considered a four-day schedule found other ways to cut spending:

- One district consolidated its two elementary schools into a single building, reduced administrative staff, moved the district offices into the second school building, and sold the district building.
- One district made the superintendent’s position part-time and reduced the number of administrators.
- One district weathered budget shortfalls by being very conservative. It used an in-house contractor to build the school auditorium and was aggressive about pursuing grant funding. The superintendent hired a principal who could also run the special education program.

Alternative scheduling

Many districts are attracted to having additional time on the fifth day for professional development or student enrichment. However, other options can achieve this:

- Early release half-days one day per week that can be used for teacher planning, student enrichment or intervention, or sports travel.
- Four-day weeks only during the winter months.
- Four-day weeks combined with a year-round schedule.

Two Stories of the Four-Day School Week

With no clear planning process or evaluation cycle, the four-day school week can easily lead to unanticipated changes over time. These stories demonstrate some of the dangers and opportunities.

Rural District, Idaho

This district of about 600 students is in a small farming town within five miles of several other school districts—many of which have four-day school weeks—and is only 30 minutes from a city with a community college. Despite its proximity to resources, it has high unemployment and 80 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Twenty percent of the adults are foreign-born.

The superintendent says the four-day schedule has been a success (though there is no formal data collection process): teacher and student attendance rates improved, community feedback is positive, and discipline problems declined. The middle and high schools improved, increasing from a three-star to a four-star state rating (a state rating system used prior to the 2015-16 school year).

The district saved money by cutting the salaries and benefits of classified staff such as bus drivers, lunch staff, and paraprofessionals. The superintendent encouraged the district to implement the four-day schedule, but was careful to align it with the district's strategic plan. The district met teacher collaboration and professional development goals by adding nine professional development days throughout the year. The district also offers enrichment activities for students every fifth day—Friday—sometimes partnering with local businesses; Hispanic youth are the most likely to attend these programs. A group of upper high school students takes dual enrollment courses at the school as part of a program called College Fridays. Teachers are available in case students need extra help.

An elementary school teacher in the district noted that there had been drastic changes in her school's schedule. She said the quality of instruction had improved, but that the elementary school had dropped from a four-star to three-star rating even while the middle and high schools improved.

Remote Rural District, Oregon

This district has a single charter school that serves a large, remote region where ranching is the primary occupation. The population is largely white and very poor, with an estimated median income at nearly half the state average.

The superintendent inherited the four-day school week when he came to the district 10 years ago. Prior to that, he worked in another district that had implemented the four-day schedule in the 1980s. (Many small districts in Oregon moved to the four-day schedule in the 1980s in response to changes in the state's tax structure.) The superintendent feels the four-day schedule is compatible with the realities of remote rural living: many rural districts are competitive in sports, and the long distances students must travel for sporting events causes many middle and high school students to miss instructional time. Also, parents like having their children at home to help with chores. Some students have a 1.5 hour commute to school each way on dirt roads, so they appreciate the four-day schedule. So many districts in eastern Oregon have moved to a four-day schedule that banks and doctor's offices also close on Fridays.

In the past, the district has used the additional day for intervention. Recent budget cuts eliminated this, so the district currently uses the additional day for detention, sports travel, and in-service professional development five times a year. Teachers give more homework now than they did with the five-day school week. The district uses homework for direct instruction and classroom time for assignments and intervention.

The superintendent has been an educator for nearly 40 years and will soon retire. But he imagines a future rural school schedule where students attend school four days a week year-round. He admitted that as a teacher, he didn't like it when his previous district moved to a four-day schedule because he lost instructional time and found it challenging to bring students' focus back after the three-day break.

HOW TO ASSESS DISTRICT READINESS

Moving a district to a four-day school week is a complex change with many moving parts. We recommend that before making this decision, district leaders conduct an initial self-evaluation. The goal is to anticipate potential outcomes, make plans for success, and put structures in place that will help address unintended consequences.

The following sections outline a process for district self-evaluation. It guides district leaders to first ask, *Is the four-day school week right for our district?* If the answer is yes, district leaders can then move to the next question: *Is our district ready to implement the four-day schedule?*

By answering the detailed set of questions below, a district can determine if the four-day schedule is the best fit for its schools and community. If the district decides to move forward, it can use the information gathered with the self-evaluation to guide program design, program organization, service delivery, and implementation.

Is the Four-Day School Week Right for Our District?

For the first round of questions, we recommend forming a small task force consisting of representatives from the district, school board, schools, and community. Districts that have gone through similar processes note that it is important to take the decision to the community only when they know it makes sense from an instructional and operational standpoint.

This first step will help you understand if the four-day school week is a good fit by exploring three questions:

1. What is the likelihood that we will be able to achieve our intended goals?
2. Is the four-day school week right for our students?
3. Do community, parent, and school resources align with our goals for the four-day schedule?

To answer these questions, plan to use data from school records, general community knowledge, and publicly available data and research.

1. *What is the likelihood that we will be able to achieve our intended goals?*

- What are the goals we hope to achieve?
- How well are the goals aligned with our district's strategic plan?
- What does the research say about the likelihood of meeting the goals?
- Are the goals reasonable for *our* district?
- Are there other ways to address the goals than through a four-day schedule?

These questions will help you establish a theory of action—an explanation of how a clear chain of events will lead to achieving the intended goals. The work done in this stage of the evaluation process will guide subsequent planning and evaluation.

The initial reasons that districts consider implementing a four-day school week are sometimes different from the reasons that ultimately lead them to make the decision. All districts we interviewed hoped the schedule change would result in cost savings. In reality, a district has to make tough decisions if it wants to save money, even with a four-day schedule. Most districts must cut the salaries and benefits of classified workers and limit the use of school buildings on the fifth day. Several districts have now transitioned to a four-day schedule with the intention not to save money, but to reinvest any money saved into new types of programming. However, districts with this goal must think critically about the likelihood that the new programs they invest in will achieve their intended purpose.

2. *Is the four-day school week right for our students?*

- How will the four-day schedule influence learning for our students, including low-achieving students, students who receive free or reduced-price lunch, ELL students, special education students, and elementary school students?
- Is our district able to choose which day to take off based on the best interests of student learning?
- What resources and preparation will our schools need to support students attending a four-day school week?

A four-day schedule requires longer school days, which can be challenging for students with special needs. These students may also be more affected than others by the learning lag over the extended three-day weekend. They also tend to struggle more with direct instruction or additional independent work, methods that teachers typically employ to cover the same amount of content in fewer days. There are several ways your district can counteract some of these negative consequences:

- Make Wednesday the “fifth day” to avoid a three-day weekend.
- Shift to a four-day week for middle and high schools but keep a five-day week for elementary schools.
- Incorporate interactive digital learning.
- Implement schoolwide project-based, experiential, internship, and/or competency-based instructional methods, with appropriate supports and training.
- Plan for social, vocational, and high-impact intervention services.
- Use the longer school day to institute block scheduling or to provide breakfast in the classroom for all students.

You must also make sure that your district has the resources in place to manage these school changes while maintaining instructional quality:

- Schools must provide training for teachers before the new schedule is implemented to help them change lesson plans and use the longer school day and fifth day effectively. This may include training in flipped classroom learning, personalized learning, and/or project-based learning.
- Teachers will also need significant time for collaboration and planning during the first year as they adjust to the new schedule.

3. Do community, parent, and school resources align with our goals for the four-day school week?

- How will parent resource levels affect our district's plan for the four-day schedule?
- What resources does our community have that can support the four-day schedule?
- What resources do our schools need to implement supplemental programs?

These questions guide you in making sure your theory of action aligns with existing resources. Fifth-day programs are voluntary. If your district hopes to use the fifth day for intervention, can you be sure that parents will be willing and able to bring students to school? Will parents drive their children to school, or can the district use community resources to provide transportation, or will schools run a bus route? If many of the families in your district rely on the school for meals, the district may need to provide food to those students for the day they will not be in school by either sending food home or partnering with a community resource to offer meals.

Think about whether your district plans to assign complex projects for fifth-day activities. Are there sufficient community resources, such as computers or library personnel, to support the students of working parents or parents for whom English is a second language? Does the community have the resources to offer child care for families who do not participate in fifth-day programming?

If schools plan to offer fifth-day or supplemental programs to students, do they have the means to pay teachers for the additional days? Will they be able to recruit parent volunteers or form partnerships with local businesses?

After answering these questions, you will either refine your district's goals for the four-day week or realize that the four-day school week is not a good fit. If your district decides to move toward a four-day schedule, the next step is to determine whether it is prepared to implement it successfully.

Is Our District Ready to Implement the Four-Day Week?

District leaders can determine readiness by answering three questions. The first addresses the concerns of school staff, teachers, and parents. The second explores the organizational structures and resources that a district must have in place to implement its plan, and the third addresses the need to correct course if negative consequences arise.

1. Does our district have the resources to address teacher and parent concerns?
2. Does our district have the structures in place to implement the four-day school week responsibly?
3. Can our district return to a regular five-day school week?

For this phase of the evaluation, you should bring an outside participant into the process to help your task force administer surveys and evaluate results. This person can be a formal consultant or a peer from a neighboring district. As your district asks for teacher, parent, and community opinions, it will be important to make it clear that your team is still gathering data and has not yet made any decisions.

1. Does our district have the resources to address parent and teacher concerns?

- What concerns do parents and teachers have about the four-day schedule, and is our district able to address them?

We recommend using anonymous surveys to collect this information. People have complex feelings about the four-day school week. In our interviews with teachers and administrators, we heard that some were “happy” about the four-day schedule but feared that it compromises instructional quality. Guaranteeing that feedback will be anonymous allows more people to be comfortable expressing their views.

You can structure the questions as open-ended if it is a small district, or use the common pressure points and consequences described in this guide to develop a drop-down menu of options. You should also plan to ask about components that are critical to your stated theory of action. You may want to follow up with a community meeting.

For example, parents should be asked about potential changes to family routines (such as meal times, child care, and transportation to fifth-day activities) and their ability to manage those changes. Teachers should be asked about the benefits and challenges they see in the four-day schedule (such as instruction, teacher planning, and school culture) and what they would need to prepare for it.

After learning about parent and teacher concerns, you will be able to assess whether your district’s current plan addresses these concerns. If there is a gap, you can identify what is missing and whether the district, schools, and community have the resources to appropriately address it.

2. Does our district have the structures in place to implement the four-day schedule responsibly?

- Does our district have the resources to operate the four-day schedule sustainably?
- Does our district have necessary assurances from participants?
- Does our district have regular planning and evaluation cycles in place?

These three questions help your district determine if it has the resources and organizational structures necessary to balance long-term stability with flexibility.

- Sustainable resources are most important for fifth-day programming. Some districts begin their four-day schedule using grant money to fund fifth-day programs, but if these programs are an essential part of your district’s reason for moving to a four-day schedule, you must have sustainable funding streams.

You must also make sure your district has assurances from teachers and the community.

- Changes to the teacher contract are necessary to reduce the number of absences a teacher is allowed: after moving to a four-day schedule, each absence will have a greater impact on student instruction.
- Districts that offer teacher professional development, enrichment, or intervention should also alter their teacher contract to include teacher commitments for these activities. Some districts require every teacher to plan two enrichment activities per year.
- Assurances from community partners and businesses are also necessary. If the community will provide resources such as child care or internship opportunities, these commitments should be detailed in a memorandum of understanding or other binding commitment.

District leaders should establish regular planning and evaluation cycles, preferably once a year, with standards for renewal based on the program's original theory of action. The next section in this guide provides suggestions on how to do this.

3. Can our district return to a regular five-day school week?

- Can the district implement the plan as a one- to three-year pilot?
- Can the district return to a five-day week if the results are not what was intended?

Most importantly, your district should implement the four-day schedule as a pilot and be able to return to a five-day school week at any time if the new schedule does not function as intended.

To do so, your district must have technical structures in place:

- Regular evaluation cycles with clear standards for renewal.
- Assurances from the Board of Education, preferably in the form of a memorandum of understanding or contract, setting the terms of a limited pilot and conditions for continued use of the four-day schedule.

However, the superintendent and board must also make sure that the temporary nature of the four-day schedule has been clearly communicated to teachers, principals, families, and students. The popularity of the four-day school week makes it challenging for districts to return to a five-day school week, even when education leaders find that doing so is in the best interest of student learning.

HOW TO EVALUATE DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION

This section offers an evaluation guide for districts that have already begun implementing a four-day school week.

Districts want to know the impact of the four-day school week on student outcomes. The evaluation described below instructs you on how to track student grades, disaggregated based on student characteristics. However, this information can provide only descriptive information, and will not help you establish a causal relationship between the four-day schedule and student achievement.

The evaluation questions help you determine whether the four-day schedule is functioning as intended. To know that, your district must have carefully defined the goals it is trying to achieve, as outlined here earlier. These goals are the basis for evaluating whether the schedule was a success following implementation.

The data collection and analysis described here will take approximately one year. This includes creating and administering surveys, planning for data collection, and evaluating participant responses.

Evaluation Questions

Questions guide an evaluation process. We developed the three questions below based on research and our interviewees' experiences with the four-day school week.

You will need to adapt the sub-questions to address the goals that your district hopes to achieve by implementing the four-day week. For example, if your district plans to attract students and reduce absences, both of these must be added to question one and evaluated.

1. What effect did moving to the four-day school week have on our schools and community?

- Was the four-day schedule aligned with our district's strategic planning process?
- How did changes in the school schedule affect the quality of education for all students (disaggregated based on race/ethnicity, language, special education status, and grade level)?
- How did changes in classroom instruction affect the quality of education for all students (disaggregated based on race/ethnicity, language, special education status, and grade level)?
- How satisfied are teachers, parents, and students?
- How did the move to the four-day schedule affect local businesses?

2. Are our fifth-day programs effective?

- Are the fifth-day programs reaching the students who need them?
- Do teachers, parents, and students feel the fifth-day programs are meeting their intended purpose?

3. What was the cost of moving to the four-day school week?

- Did our district save money by implementing the four-day schedule?
- How much additional money do parents spend as a result of the four-day schedule?

Data Collection

Your district must gather data to answer the questions listed above by developing data collection tools. For a sample survey instrument please contact crpe@uw.edu.

Parent survey

Parent surveys should be distributed on paper and offered in English as well as other predominant languages in your district, with both closed- and open-ended questions. It is important to capture the responses of all parents, particularly working parents who may have to arrange extra child care, parents of ELL students, and parents of students who receive free or reduced-price lunch.

Aim to receive completed surveys from 75 percent of parents, and check to make sure that the parents who do not respond are not all from one particular group (for example, make sure the majority of non-respondents are not parents of ELL students).

Teacher survey

We recommend creating an online teacher survey with both closed- and open-ended questions. Ask teachers to complete the survey during an in-service day to increase the response rate. Aim to get responses from 90 percent or more of all district teachers.

Student survey

Teachers can administer student surveys with questions about satisfaction and learning. You want to be able to compare responses from students in the same and different academic levels and demographic groups, while making each student's response anonymous. To do this, have teachers hand out the surveys with a detachable cover sheet where students write their names. School staff can then code each survey based on student grade level, race/ethnicity, ELL, or special education designation, and any other designation deemed necessary.

Administrator and school board interviews

Your evaluation should include interviews with principals, the district superintendent, and the chair of the school board. Use your evaluation questions from this guide to get a description of district practice as a supplement to other types of data collection.

Document review and data analysis

We recommend reviewing school records from two years prior to implementation of the four-day schedule through two years following implementation. School records should include the district budget, school schedules, student grades, and the district's strategic plan.

District leaders must evaluate state assessment results prior to and after shifting to a four-day schedule. This data will be descriptive only, but it can help your district identify general trends. School leaders should compare proficiency rates against general state trends, make sure to carefully track changes over time, and disaggregate results if possible.

What This Evaluation Can Tell You

Districts that are about to begin implementing a four-day school week should use surveys to collect baseline data before the schedule changes. This data will help with later cycles of self-evaluation. Districts that have been operating on a four-day week for several years can use these tools to conduct a formative evaluation of the general effect of the four-day schedule on your district's schools and community. The evaluation will provide district leaders with information about program design, service delivery, program organization, and implementation.

This evaluation captures information about district operations at one moment in time, rather than identifying how things change over time. However, your district can repeat the data collection after changes are implemented to determine whether those changes led to any service delivery improvements.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Whether your district has a clear plan for implementing a four-day school week or is working to adjust a current four-day schedule to better address student needs, we have a few recommendations. These recommendations come from lessons learned and practices that have worked for districts with a four-day school week.

Make a plan

- Align your goals for the four-day schedule with the goals in your district’s strategic plan.
- Carefully consider which day will be your fifth day. Some districts adjust the schedule on a week-by-week basis. When a holiday falls on a Monday, for example, the district will not take Friday off. Other districts choose the day that coincides with the most absences. We recommend using a day that is not Monday or Friday to avoid problems associated with the three-day weekend.

Address student needs

- Address fatigue that the longer days cause for students. Some districts plan core content courses in the morning. Others have short assemblies to reengage students on the day after a three-day weekend.
- Consider shortening the school day for elementary students by moving breakfast to the classroom instead of the cafeteria.
- Send a backpack of food home on the day before the day off to address the needs of families who rely on school to provide their children with breakfast and lunch.
- Plan for the learning loss of the three-day weekend. Use digital learning, additional homework, and fifth-day programming.

Focus on instruction

- Change schools’ curriculum and instructional practice intentionally. Some districts have instituted block scheduling to take advantage of the longer days.
- Move all special programming, such as assemblies, to the fifth day.
- Incorporate digital learning and flipped classroom models.
- Adjust the schedule as needed. Some schools operate five days a week for the month prior to state assessments.

Work with the community

- Use community resources to provide child care for those who need it.
- Work with the community to plan educational fifth-day programming.
- Gain assurances from the community that businesses will not shift to a four-day model as well. If the community adopts a four-day week, it will make returning to a five-day school week nearly impossible.

Use the fifth day effectively

- Use the fifth day for students. Assess fifth-day programs to see if they are achieving their intended purposes. Implement intervention programs; social programming for ELL students; College Fridays, internships, and vocational training; and extra enrichment to supplement the curriculum.
- Make sure the fifth day is being used effectively. Consider busing students to school for intervention programs to make sure the students who need the help will get it.
- Use the fifth day for *additional* teacher professional development and collaborative planning.
- Make sure funding streams for fifth-day programming are sustainable.
- Write the fifth day into teacher contracts so that enrichment or intervention services provided by teachers and paraprofessionals are included in their compensation.

ENDNOTES

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4. While 80 percent of Idaho's 44 districts and 13 charter schools that use the four-day schedule enroll fewer than 500 students, 5 districts have over 1,300 students; the largest enrolls 2,500 (2017 enrollment data): List of school districts on a four-day school week, [Idaho Department of Education](#), data for the 2017-18 school year. Retrieved September 18, 2017.
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8. Jonathan Plucker, Katherine Cierniak, and Molly Chamberlin, "The Four-Day School Week: Nine Years Later," *Center for Evaluation and Education Policy* 10, no 6 (fall 2012).
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| ABOUT THIS REPORT

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