



# Implementing a Four-Day School Week

A proposal for a Single-Item School Improvement Plan  
EDLD 655 University of Oregon, 2009

## Introduction



### Premise: A Longer Day and a Shorter Week :

A move outside the traditional structure can **improve student learning and save money** (that can then be spent to improve student learning in other ways). A move to a four-day week would preserve total instructional hours, but restructure their delivery, and comprise a move that is good for kids.

### Recent Headlines:



- Schools eye four-day week to cut fuel costs (Reuters, Jul. 24, 2008)
- Oregon City schools consider four-day week, other cuts (Portland Tribune, Jan. 13, 2009)
- Oregon school switches to four-day week (AP, Feb. 5, 2009)
- Four day school week still on board's table (Coastal Curry Pilot, Feb. 21, 2009)

**Finances are driving a lot of districts to look at this system right now, but are not the only consideration. This structural modification is a specific example of a larger ongoing exploration that questions the mode of delivery of instruction.**

**This is not a new idea, and the advantages and challenges identified 20 years ago are the same ones being uncovered today.**

**The typical district that finds success with a four-day week and stays with it is in a relatively small, possibly isolated rural community.**

**Our current calendar has 14 of 36 school weeks with four (or fewer) days already, with holidays, in-service and curriculum days.**

## Some Oregon Schools Districts using a Four-Day Week

- Central Linn School District (Ed Colton School District (Linda Johnson, Superintendent)
- Corbett School District (Bob Dunton, Superintendent)
- Days Creek School District (Laurie Newton, Superintendent)
- Glide School District (Don Schrader, Superintendent)
- Oakridge School District (Donald Kordosky, Superintendent)



A growing number of schools in Oregon are using a four-day week. Oregon was the first state in the Pacific Northwest to experiment with a four-day week, in the 1980's. Currently about 40 schools in the state are using a four- or four-and-a-half day week. Because the state has mandated a minimum number of hours, not days, for public schools to be in session, this configuration is a possibility here – that is not the case in all states, but the movement is nation-wide, with Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona leading the way along with Oregon.

## Advantages and Benefits of a Four-Day Week

A meta-analysis of studies (past and present) along with conversations with implementers yields common themes:

### Potential cost savings (8-12% in practice):

- One fewer round trip bus run per week
- One less day of food service
- Lower energy costs (it costs more to heat building for the day than keep it warm for the extra hour, for example)
- Lower custodial expense



### Higher student attendance and lower teacher absenteeism:

Appointments are scheduled on the "off day," psychologically easier to "make it" through four days a week; increased quality family time an added benefit.

**Increased instructional time:** with longer periods available for instruction, set-up and transition time are minimized. At the elementary level this is counteracted somewhat by the need for breaks and "down time." Additionally, for high school athletes, by scheduling contests on the off day, there can be a substantial reclamation of lost instructional time for travel and athletics—the effect is particularly evident when distances and times are great, as they are in our league at present.



**Statistics show a gain in achievement,** or at least no loss in achievement as measured by assessment scores as a result of the four-day week.

**Increased time for professional development:** Our study team identified the need for regular, sustained professional development around best practices and particularly in the area of technology implementation; a four-day week allows the opportunity to use the off day extensively for such activities.

**A more consistent, predictable schedule:** With curriculum days, in-service days, and Monday holidays, a good number of four-day weeks exist in our current calendar; every week being predictably four days makes planning easier for families.

**Higher positive morale:** When implemented with community support, successful districts report that their parents, teachers and students simply "like" the four-day week.

**Dropout rates decline, behavior improves:** statistics over time show that these are measurable effects, though, anecdotally not all schools see this benefit.



*"The teacher recruiting is a dream. People don't leave here and go someplace and teach five days a week. The retention has been really remarkable." – Bob Dunton*

*"No one's asking me to change it, and no one has since I came here." - Linda Johnson*

*"Our scores continue to go up; they have not gone down." - Linda Johnson*

*"The decision was based on student benefit, not money." - Don Kordosky*

## Disadvantages and Challenges of a Four-Day Week

Similarly, themes emerged around the real and potential negatives:

**Difficult to go back:** As with program cuts, once the budget is built around the savings, if we change our minds it is more challenging to "reclaim" the extra day.

**Cost savings not always evident:** Some districts report minimal savings in practice. For example, the greatest savings potential is in transportation and food service. These costs are largely reimbursed through federal and state formulas, minimizing net savings for the district.

**Some districts have failed to see the benefits** outlined in the previous section—many different factors play in.



**The cost savings come at the expense of classified staff,** hard-working community members who can ill-afford the loss of wages.

**The longer day is fatiguing, for younger students especially,** but also for older students and staff.

**The burden of child care** for the off day falls to families, many of whom cannot afford the expense.

**The "Monday Effect"** of increased behavior/disciplinary issues with students returning from an unfavorable home situation, is amplified; similarly, student retention of instruction can be affected by the regular three-day weekend.

*"You've reduced the workload among people hardest to find and retain in the education world, which is your bus drivers: If you have a contractor doing your buses, all of a sudden your rate per mile just went up". -Bob Dunton*

*"While kids would rejoice in more days off, how can schools claim to have kids' best interests at heart when they seek to push them to exhaustion four days a week and increase unsupervised "latch-key" time on the day off without any expected financial or test score benefits? In fact, the only real benefit...is three-day weekends for teachers. – Mary Beth Miller, Beaver parent*

*"(We) didn't save a dime." -Bob Dunton*

### Selected Sources:

- Beasley, A.D. (2007). The four-day school week: information and recommendations. *The rural educator*, 29 (1) 48-55.
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- Fagir, J. (1997). *Scheduling alternatives: options for student success*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory.
- Kingsberry, K. (2008). Four-day school weeks. *Time*, Aug. 14.
- Reeves, K. (1999). The four-day school week. *The school administrator*, Mar 1.
- Rienke, J. (1987). *More with four: a look at the four-day week in Oregon's small schools*. Salem, Oregon: Oregon Department of Education.
- Yarbrough, R. & Gilman, D.A. (2006). 4 Days a week. *American school board journal*, 193 (3) 43-45.

(numerous newspaper articles)  
(numerous conversations with administrators in districts currently or formerly implementing a four-day week)

## Sample Plan

### Current:

- 7:30 am: Buildings open and staff reports
- 8:00am: School day begins at high school
- 8:15am: School day begins at elementary school
- 3:00pm: School day ends at elementary school
- 3:10pm: School day ends at high school
- 3:30pm: Teacher day (contractually) ends
- 4:00pm: Offices (officially) close for day

HS instructional minutes per regular week (50 minutes; 7 periods) = **1750**

### Example four-day week:

- 7:15am: Buildings open and staff reports
- 7:45am: School day begins at high school
- 8:00am: School day begins at elementary school
- 3:15pm: School day ends at elementary school
- 3:30pm: School day ends at high school
- 4:00pm: Teacher day ends; offices close

HS instructional minutes per regular week (63 minutes; 7 periods) = **1764**

**Staffing implication:** ignoring transportation, which is contracted, the four-day week would call for at least 140 fewer classified man-hours (clerical, IA, and custodial) than current, which would translate to over \$60,000 annually.

## Implementation Imperatives and Timeline

Community support is the critical factor in successful implementation of a four day week, thus, an initiative to move in this direction must involve the community at every stage. For our district, this exploration fits well with the proposed charter school implementation. Should the board choose to move ahead, the following timeline is suggested:

- **May 2009:** Board resolution to investigate four-day week in response to study team recommendation (CIP process).
- **June – September 2009:** Administrative exploration; meta analysis of studies; specific local feasibility data gathered.
- **September 2009:** Community forum / open discussion
- **October – December 2009:** Survey available to community
- **January – February 2010:** Task force makes implementation plans; presents to board.
- **March 2010: 2010-11:** calendar implementing four-day week finalized and publicized.
- **March – September 2010:** Community capacity (day care, etc.) ramped up
- **September 2010:** Four-day week trail year begins; ongoing analysis and study continues.

**Recommendation:** our district shares enough similarities with successful implementers to warrant serious exploration and a trail four-day week for the 2010 school year.

