

Four-Day School Week
Report
in Montana Public Schools
October 2009



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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Montana Code Annotated	1
Districts Operating 4-days per Week	2
Survey	3
Information from States in the Region	6
Accreditation Reminders	7
Initial Conclusions/Recommendations	8
4-Day School Week Survey	Appendix A
Research Brief: The Four-Day School Week	Appendix B



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Introduction

The 2005 Montana Legislature passed a bill that changed the pupil instruction time during a school fiscal year from a required minimum of 180 school days to a required minimum number of aggregate hours.

SB170 was introduced by Sen. Jeff Mangan: AN ACT PROVIDING FLEXIBILITY TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN SETTING THEIR SCHOOL CALENDARS BY ELIMINATING THE REQUIREMENT THAT A SCHOOL DISTRICT CONDUCT AT LEAST 180 SCHOOL DAYS DURING EACH SCHOOL FISCAL YEAR; DEFINING “MINIMUM AGGREGATE HOURS”; REQUIRING A SCHOOL DISTRICT TO CONDUCT SCHOOL FOR A MINIMUM NUMBER OF AGGREGATE HOURS EACH SCHOOL YEAR; REQUIRING SCHOOL DISTRICT TRUSTEES TO SET THE LENGTH OF THE SCHOOL TERM, SCHOOL DAY, AND SCHOOL WEEK; MAKING THE REVISIONS NECESSARY TO REFLECT THE ELIMINATION OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR 180 SCHOOL DAYS;

Since the passage of this legislation, 18 public school districts and one nonpublic district (Two Eagle River) are operating a four-day school week. This report provides information, through a survey conducted during the spring of 2009, 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.

Montana Code Annotated

The following are the primary codes affected by SB170:

20-1-301. School fiscal year. (1) The school fiscal year begins on July 1 and ends on June 30. At least the minimum aggregate hours defined in subsection (2) must be conducted during each school fiscal year, except that 1,050 aggregate hours of pupil instruction for graduating seniors may be sufficient.

(2) The minimum aggregate hours required by grade are:

(a) 360 hours for a half-time kindergarten program or 720 hours for a full-time kindergarten program, as provided in [20-7-117](#);

(b) 720 hours for grades 1 through 3; and

(c) 1,080 hours for grades 4 through 12.

(3) For any elementary or high school district that fails to provide for at least the minimum aggregate hours, as listed in subsections (1) and (2), the superintendent of public instruction shall reduce the direct state aid for the district for that school year by two times an hourly rate, as calculated by the office of public instruction, for the aggregate hours missed.



20-1-302. School term, day, and week. (1) Subject to [20-1-301](#), [20-1-308](#), and any applicable collective bargaining agreement covering the employment of affected employees, the trustees of a school district shall set the number of days in a school term, the length of the school day, and the number of school days in a school week and report them to the superintendent of public instruction.

(2) When proposing to adopt changes to a previously adopted school term, school week, or school day, the trustees shall:

(a) negotiate the changes with the recognized collective bargaining unit representing the employees affected by the changes;

(b) solicit input from the employees affected by the changes but not represented by a collective bargaining agreement; and

(c) solicit input from the people who live within the boundaries of the school district.

Districts Operating Four Days per Week

The following are the 18 public school districts and one nonpublic school that are currently operating on a four-day school week schedule:

Beaverhead County

Lima K-12 Schools

Reichle Elementary

Carter County

Alzada Elementary

Custer County

Trail Creek Elementary

Cottonwood Elementary

SY Elementary

SH Elementary

Lake County

Swan Lake-Salmon Elementary

Two Eagle River High School (Accredited Private School)

Meagher County

Lenep Elementary

Mineral County

Alberton K-12 Schools

Powder River County
South Stacey Elementary

Powell County
Ovando Elementary

Ravalli County
Victor K-12 Schools

Rosebud County
Birney Elementary
Ashland Elementary

Sanders County
Noxon Public Schools

Sweet Grass County
Greycliff Elementary

Yellowstone County
Custer K-12 Schools

Survey

During the 2006-07 school year, eight school districts adopted a four-day school week. By extending the hours of the school day, these schools changed their school calendar from 180 pupil instruction days to 145 pupil instruction days. All of the schools did not have instruction for students on Friday and one of the schools used Friday as a day for professional development and staff meetings for the teachers. Six of the eight districts were small, K-8 rural schools administered by the county superintendent. One district was a K-8 school with a part-time principal. The other school was Victor, a larger Class C school with a full-time district superintendent.

During the 2008-09 annual data collection cycle, 18 public school districts and one accredited nonpublic district (Two Eagle River) indicated operating on a four-day week. Twelve districts are small rural schools administered by the county superintendent. The largest district has 328 students and the smallest district has two students. A survey was sent to the 18 public school districts, 17 of these districts returned the survey.



Survey Results (a copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A)

1. How long has your school operated on a 4-day school week?
 - Eight districts responded three years, four districts two years, and five districts one year
2. What were the reasons for the district to adopt a 4-day school week?
 - All 17 districts responded: cost savings
 - Districts reported they would save in transportation and utility costs
 - 13 districts reported that there would be an improvement in morale for both students and teachers
 - 11 districts reported there would be a decrease in absenteeism
 - 11 districts reported it would improve teacher/staff recruitment
3. Since the change to a 4-day school week what benefits has the district seen?
 - All 17 districts experienced cost savings
 - Transportation and utility costs were the areas of greatest savings
 - 14 districts reported there was an improvement in morale for both students and teachers
 - All 17 districts saw a decline in the student absentee rate
 - 10 districts saw an improvement in teacher/staff recruitment
 - Eight districts reported there were less instructional interruptions
4. How has the extra day during the week been used?
 - 15 districts responded no instruction for any students
 - Two districts responded that the extra days were used for field trips, rural education fair, and/or extracurricular trips
 - 12 districts responded that the teachers were not on duty
 - One district (Victor) responded that the teachers were on duty on all extra days Professional development, staff meetings, and interdisciplinary planning were conducted on these days
 - Four districts responded that the teachers were on duty some of the days. These days were used for professional development and end-of-the-term grade reporting
5. Before the change what concerns did the community have?
 - 11 districts responded that it would be too long a day for elementary students
 - 12 districts responded that they would not be able to cover the curriculum
 - 12 districts responded that there could be a decrease in academic performance
 - 10 districts responded that some students may have retention difficulties with an extra day off each week
6. After the change did the concerns in item 5 come to be realized?
 - Four districts responded that they had community members say it was too long a day for elementary students

- One district responded that it had community members say that some students may have retention difficulties with an extra day off each week
7. Does the district offer full-time kindergarten?
 - 10 districts responded yes
 - Seven districts responded no
 8. Are the elementary and the secondary schools on basically the same beginning and ending daily schedule?
 - Seven districts responded yes
 - 10 districts responded not applicable
 9. How was input solicited from the community?
 - All 17 districts utilized school board meetings
 - Nine districts conducted other public hearings
 - Nine districts conducted surveys
 10. Were there any difficulties in meeting the 225 minutes requirement for a unit of credit for 7-12 grade students?
 - Seven districts responded no
 - 10 districts responded not applicable
 11. How long did the decision making process take?
 - 16 districts responded 1 – 6 months
 - One district responded 6 months – 1 year
 12. Do the following constituents like the change to a 4-day week?
 - The students, administrators, and community all responded yes
 - In one district the teachers and the classified staff responded no
 13. Does the board of trustees plan to re-visit or re-consider the 4-day week in the near future?
 - Three districts responded yes
 - 14 districts responded no
 14. Please show any general comments that may help other school districts who are considering a change to a 4-day school week.
 - Encourage schools to visit a 4-day school and talk to students and teachers
 - In the rural schools, the teachers really like having the extra day to do errands in town
 - Positive for rural schools
 - Negotiate with the classified staff



- Schedule extra-curricular activities on days off
- No “down” time – hurts some students
- Limits the time for remediation
- More flexibility with a block schedule
- Be empathetic with parent concerns
- Help in the transition
- Not a cure all – don’t save as much money as you think
- Pay attention to the collective bargaining agreement
- Careful with the little ones

Survey Summary

Schools planning to change to a four-day school week did so thinking that the district would experience cost savings. After the change the districts did experience cost savings but not as much as they had anticipated. The savings occurred in two areas, transportation and utilities. Schools discovered other benefits, however, in the drop in student absenteeism and an improvement to student and staff morale.

Most of the students who go to a four-day school have no instruction on Friday. A couple of the schools use Friday for field trips. Most of the schools, particularly the very rural, scheduled no work activities for the teachers on Friday. Some of the schools would use Friday for professional development and one school, Victor, had the teachers working on Friday. Most of the concerns from the community before the change occurred centered on the days being too long for the younger children and for the teachers not being able to cover as much of the curriculum. After the change, only a few districts believed the days were too long for the younger children and no districts believed the curriculum was not being covered. The survey indicated that there was relatively no change in academic performance of the students in changing to a four-day school week.

All schools communicated with constituents through board meetings and most conducted additional public meetings and solicited input by using surveys. Most schools made the decision to make the change within a six-month time period. The survey indicated that all schools and their constituents like the change to a four-day school week.

Information from States in the Region

Many states in our region have passed legislation similar to Montana. The following is a brief report from states in our region.

Wyoming

Nine out of 48 school districts representing 23 of 326 schools have some form of a four-day school week. The smallest school has four students and the largest school has an enrollment of 215 students. Like Montana most of the schools are smaller, rural schools.

Idaho

Idaho has 14 school districts and two charter schools. There are 115 school districts and 31 charter schools that have changed to a four-day school week. The smallest school has an enrollment of four and the largest has an enrollment of 1,634 students. Idaho requires 990 hours of pupil instruction days which translates to 165 days of school for six hours of instruction and 142 days of school for seven hours of instruction. Many schools switched to a four-day school week to try to save money. The cost savings have not been substantial but they have discovered other benefits to the changeover. There has been a dramatic improvement in the attendance rates of both students and teachers. Schools have seen a decrease in dropout rates and disciplinary referrals. There are less classroom interruptions, fewer distractions from extracurricular activities, and the morale of both students and faculty has improved. The Idaho Department of Education has graphed student achievement that shows no significant improvement or decline. Child care issues have not been a significant problem either.

North Dakota

There is legislation in North Dakota that does not allow four-day school weeks.

South Dakota

Twenty-one of 156 districts have a four-day school week. The largest district has 1,297 students and the smallest district has 22 students. The schools that have chosen to go to a four-day week are larger in comparison to the districts in Montana that have a four-day school week. The median size school has 291 students and the average size school is 396 students. Custer Public Schools has been on a four-day schedule since 1995. It is estimated that the district saves approximately \$70,000 per year, primarily in transportation costs. Tom Creal, the current superintendent is quoted as saying “we tell people it was originally adopted for financial savings, but we’re not staying with it for savings, we do it because it is best for kids.

Colorado

Sixty-two school districts, constituting 34 percent of 178 school districts in Colorado, serving 2.7 percent of students, utilize the four-day week. Districts utilizing the four-day week tend to be rural and sparsely populated. Many have great distances for students to travel with long bus routes. Many also have major distances to travel to athletic events, as they participate in different sports, conferences, and leagues. Satisfaction surveys indicate that 80 – 90 percent of the community members favor continuing the four-day week. The opposition seems to come from members of the community not directly associated with the school, and from those who feel that school employees should work a traditional week.

Summary

Information from area state education departments seems to indicate the same results as the 17 Montana districts that responded to the survey for changing to a four-day school week. The financial savings have not been substantial. There



are other benefits to the changeover. There has been an improvement in the attendance rates of both students and teachers. Schools have seen a decrease in dropout rates and disciplinary referrals. There are less classroom interruptions, fewer distractions from extracurricular activities, and the morale of both students and faculty has improved. Student achievement shows no significant improvement or decline. Child care issues have not been a significant problem. The responses from the Montana districts is also congruent to a research brief published by The Principals' Partnership entitled "The Four Day School Week." The brief also contains recommendations for implementation for schools considering a four day school week. A copy of that brief can be found in Appendix B of this document.

Accreditation Reminders

Due to reports that additional school districts were considering a change to a four-day school week for the 2009-10 school year, the Accreditation Division of the Office of Public Instruction sent an Official E-mail to all districts on March 17, 2009.

Districts considering a change to a four-day week will need to consider the following:

- For high schools and 7 – 8 programs that are funded at the high school rate, the equivalent of at least 225 minutes per week for one school year must be allocated for each unit (credit) of study.
- Districts should pay particular attention to the time allotted for the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades. These grades fall under the 1,080 hours requirement but because of later start times, morning and afternoon recesses, and longer lunch periods, these grades may not meet 1,080 hours.
- Lunchtime may not be counted toward meeting the standard school day nor minimum aggregate hours required.
- Unstructured recess periods may not be counted as part of the mandated hours of pupil instruction. However, recess periods, for which there has been an identifiable effort to provide guidance and structure, and which are directly or indirectly under supervision of the certified teacher, may be counted as pupil instruction under MCA 20-1-101(11), 20-1-302 and ARM 10.15.101(41). The OPI defines structure as having daily planning for activities at recess and all students are expected to participate.
- Although passing time between classes may be counted toward meeting the standard school day and the minimum aggregate hours required, passing time may not be counted as instructional time needed to meet the requirements of a "unit" of time. (ARM 10.55.902, 904-906)
 - This information can be found in Appendix D-1 of the ***Montana School Accreditation Standards and Procedures Manual***.

Initial Conclusions / Recommendations

Data does not confirm that the change to a four-day school week is best for all students. Almost all schools have reported an increase in attendance rates. Most schools have enforced fundamental rules to protect “instructional time” during the four days of school and hence have seen an overall increase in instructional time. Less instructional time is used for extracurricular activities as well. Morale has improved and discipline referrals have declined in the schools that have made the change to a four-day week. Academic achievement has remained about the same level for schools that have changed. The parents of the schools that have changed to a four-day school week overwhelmingly like the change because it allows more time with their children.

There appears to be concern for high-risk students, students with disabilities, and young students because the longer days may not be beneficial to them. The OPI must consider the “turnaround schools”, schools that have been designated by ESEA/NCLB as in need of restructuring because of their continued failing status. Research shows that more instructional time is necessary, not less, for the at-risk student. If four-day schools become more predominant in the state the Office of Public Instruction may consider “rules” for the “turnaround schools.”

To date, most of the Montana districts that have changed to a four-day week have been the small, rural schools. The change appears to be beneficial to the rural schools due to the remote characteristics of these districts. Larger districts, such as Jefferson County High School and Arlee Public Schools, will be making the change next year. The Office of Public Instruction will need to continue to survey these larger districts to determine if any unique difficulties or benefits arise.

For districts considering a change to a four-day school week the Office of Public Instruction recommends the following:

1. Take enough time to make an informed decision.
2. Research the issue thoroughly.
3. Make a point to visit and talk to districts that have made the change. Seek comments from a variety of people (students to community members).
4. Communicate, communicate, and communicate. Use various forms of communication to dialogue with all the different constituents in your community.
5. Make the process as transparent as possible.
Do not surprise anyone.



For further information please contact Kelly Glass, Accreditation and Accountability Specialist by telephone, (406) 444-0716 or by e-mail, KGlass@mt.gov.

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