



Jan. 29, 2024

Dear Education Stakeholders,

The discussions around a four-day school week have always been a controversial issue. And in a state that supports and touts local control, ideas on how to deliver education will always take different tones. Lately, I've been asked about my own thoughts and opinions on this issue. Some changes have more immediate and long-term implications than others. And, in the case of moving to a four-day school week, that decision is not easily unwound and will have a lasting impact on your community.

With any decision, there are pros and cons. I'd like to start with a more philosophical approach to thinking through these decisions. I ask you to start with "What is best for our students?" The discussion on whether to move to a 4-day week *must* start with what is best for your students. Please put your students first, middle and last while you work through the decision-making process. Your focus must be student growth and achievement and there are several considerations involved.

Now for my own opinions.

- I do not support districts moving to a four-day week if they are doing it as money-saving move. You will not save significant dollars going to four days, as evidenced by the many districts that moved to a four-day week and saw little to no cost savings in the long run.
- I do not encourage you to even consider a four-day week if your community is not willing to go longer into the school year or have longer school days. Whether it's four or five days of learning, your students deserve - and we expect them to have access to - the same high levels of learning. Without lengthening your school year, it's tough to maintain state-required student instructional days or ideal contracted teacher days.
- I do not encourage districts to move to a four-day week if they are doing it because staff are asking for it. Please decide based on what is best for your students, not what is desired by your adult workforce or what neighboring districts might do.

I attached a document designed to provide guidance should you consider moving to a four-day week. We respect these local decisions, and we are hopeful that the SDE can provide valuable information for your decision-making. I appreciate the work and efforts of our team at the SDE in putting this together.

Please involve your community in the front end of this important discussion if you are contemplating this change. Ask your families and education stakeholders to help you weigh what is best for your students. By nature, these types of decisions are not easy and should not be made lightly. If you engage your community and focus on student-centered decision-making, I believe you'll do what is right for your students, families, and for your community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debbie Critchfield". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Debbie Critchfield, Superintendent of Public Instruction

(208) 332-6800 | 650 W. State St., Boise, ID 83702 | sde.idaho.gov



Four-Day Considerations

The purpose of this document is to offer guidance to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) considering a four-day school week. Consideration and discussion around these best practices will help your LEA be thoughtful in their decision making.

- **Key Considerations:**
 - Weekly instructional hours and the duration of the school year should either match or exceed the time allocated in a five-day week schedule.
 - At least 32 hours per week of quality instruction significantly increases the chance of LEAs performing at higher levels.
 - LEAs should seek guidance from experts on curriculum, content, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and instructional strategies as they consider what's best for students and learning.
 - If you choose to move to a 4-day week, commit to continuously evaluating the outcomes of the four-day week on student achievement and adjust strategies and approaches accordingly.
- **Complete Implementation of Professional Learning Communities:**
 - When fully implemented, PLCs significantly increase student outcomes in both 4-day and 5-day settings. Many successful 4-day LEAs focus on PLCs at least twice per month on the 'off days.'
 - PLCs can be created by organizing teachers and administrators into content or grade-level focused teams to prioritize and unpack standards, share expertise, discuss teaching strategies, and work collectively towards common goals.
 - These groups should meet frequently (at least monthly) when students are not in session to develop curriculum, review data, and build interventions and extensions.
 - They should also engage regularly (weekly) in ongoing, data-driven discussions regarding teaching practices, commons assessments, student learning outcomes, etc. Evidence and assessments can be used to inform instructional decisions and improve student achievement.

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- PLC members should hold themselves and each other accountable for the success of the group and the achievement of shared goals. This accountability fosters a sense of collective responsibility for student outcomes.

- **Elementary Instruction for Kindergarten Through 6th Grade:**

- Includes 115 minutes of **ELA** instruction daily.
- Includes 90 minutes of **mathematics** instruction daily.
- Includes 60 minutes of instruction daily in **arts, humanities, physical education, health, social studies, and/or science.**

The duration of additional instructional time required for tier 2 and tier 3 students will vary based on the student's needs. Extended blocks of uninterrupted instruction will also result in higher student achievement

- **Curriculum Alignment:**

- LEAs should thoroughly review standards in core subjects, critical for each grade level and content area.
- LEAs should create pacing guide lessons, mapped to the school calendar.

Both processes must be concluded before transitioning from a five-day calendar to a four-day calendar.

- **Extended Learning Opportunities:**

- LEAs can offer extracurricular activities, targeted instruction, and enrichment programs on the fifth day. This may include in-person and virtual tutoring for secondary students.
- LEAs can also utilize technology to extend the classroom with activities that can be accomplished with minimum to no guidance from an adult.

- **Parental and Community Involvement**

- LEAs should communicate effectively with parents about student progress and ways parents and guardians can support learning at home.

In summary, best practices enhance the overall quality of education in both 4-day and 5-day settings. Furthermore, this collective impact contributes to an increased likelihood of high academic achievement for students. If transitioning to a 4-day week, the use of the fifth day is a key piece to continued student success.