



Date: August 16, 2018

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Purpose: Explore learning time and the effects of a four-day school week

Expected Outcome: Understanding the issue of extended learning time and the potential impact of the four-day school week

Instructional Time and Four-Day School Weeks

Background and History

According to the National Center on Time & Learning, school calendars in the United States have remained largely unchanged from the standard calendar in place for roughly the last century – 180 six-and-a-half-hour days per year – despite significant changes in both curricula and the expectations placed upon public schools. However, 25 states have school districts operating on a four-day weekly schedule, most prevalent in western states. In the majority of states that use a four-day week, between 2 and 20 percent of their schools use that calendar.

Expanded school time has the potential to increase learning, particularly for students who are economically disadvantaged or otherwise at risk. It should be noted, while additional instructional time is important and useful, scholarly review of learning time issues generally emphasizes that it is high-quality time that contributes to increased student achievement.

An example of improved student performance accomplished at least partly through increased instructional time can be found in the Recovery School District of Louisiana, a legislatively created school district designed to turn around underperforming schools. Then-Superintendent Paul Vallas increased the school year by five weeks and lengthened the school day to 8.5 hours, which resulted in improved test scores. However, the increased instructional time also reportedly depleted the school district budget, suggesting that the lengthened school calendars are unsustainable, long-term without appropriate funding.

Four-Day School Week Calendars

In the mid-19th Century, states began introducing compulsory school attendance laws, with many adopting a school calendar similar to the ones used today. Those

2018 PARCC Proficiency Rates in School Districts

	ELA	Math		ELA	Math
SCHOOL DISTRICTS			Roy	41-58	60-78
Animas	50-58	20-26	San Jon	45-54	30-39
Capitan	45	22	Springer	35-44	6-14
Carrizozo	28-33	5-11	Tatum	45	25-27
Chama	26	10-12	Texico	55	35
Cimarron	37	22-24	Tucumcari	25-26	16-17
Cloudcroft	62	32	Vaughn	20-29	0-10
Corona	56-63	35-43	Wagon Mound	11-29	20-39
Cobre	26-27	14-15	CHARTER SCHOOLS		
Dora	40-53	30-36	ACE Leadership	20-29	30-43
Elida	45-49	35-39	Abq. Talent Dev.	0-4	0-4
Floyd	27-31	20-26	Alice King	39	28-30
Grady	46-53	35-44	Anthony	20-29	10-19
Hondo	15-24	15-24	ASK Academy	55	40
House	30-39	15-24	Christine Duncan	16-18	9-11
Jal	9-10	8-9	DEAP	11-29	11-29
Jemez Mountain	25-31	15-21	Gordon Bernal	20-39	
Jemez Valley	14-16	3-5	The Great Academy	10-16	5-11
Logan	54	32-34	Health Leadership	5-11	0-4
Lordsburg	29	18-19	Horizon	33-35	29
Loving	25-26	18	Las Montanas	15-21	0-4
Magdalena	16	12-14	Lindrith Heritage	40-49	40-49
Maxwell	20-29	15-24	Moreno Valley	31-48	11-29
Melrose	55-63	25-31	New America (APS)	10-16	3-6
Mesa Vista	22-26	3-6	New America (LCPS)	20-29	0-10
Mosquero	20-39	20-39	Red River Valley	15-24	15-24
Mountainair	20-26	5-11	Roots and Wings	30-49	20-39
Penasco	28	12-14	Taos Academy	55-63	35-41
Quemado	25-29	20-29	Taos Integrated	35-43	20-26
Questa	20-26	14-16	Tierra Encantada	12-14	3-5
Reserve	36-43	20-29	Statewide Avg.		

The actual percent of students proficient at these school districts and charter

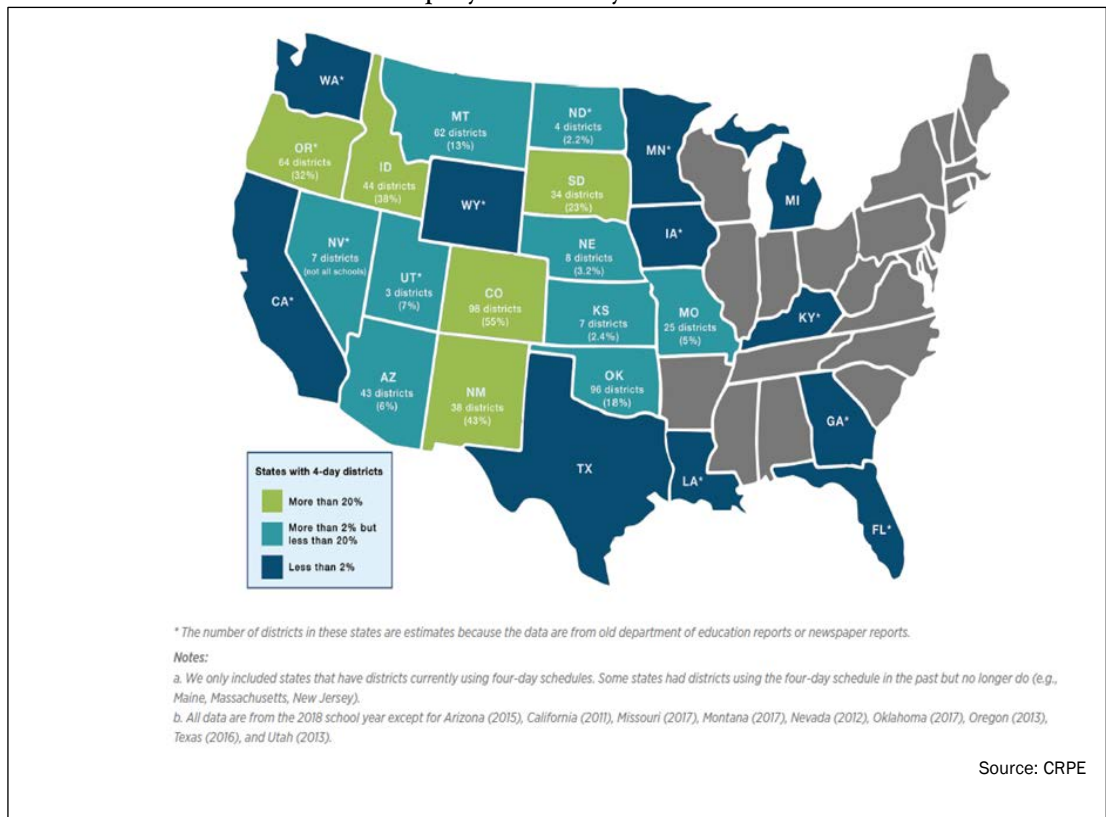
Source: PED

Notably, there are almost no east coast states with school districts operating on a four-day school week, likely because most schools on a four-day schedule are rural, which are less common on the east coast. Colorado, however, has announced that in FY19, School District 27J will become the first in the Denver metropolitan area, and one of the first urban school districts in the nation, to fully transition to a four-day school week, in an effort to address budget issues.

calendars, still rooted in an agrarian society, freed children to work on farms during the busy summer months prior to harvest, incorporating a five-day school week for the other nine months each year. The first schools to implement a four-day school week were in South Dakota in the 1930s, although more recently, during the energy crisis of the 1970s, more schools started to experiment with the four-day school week, in an attempt to conserve resources.

Some schools and school districts in Colorado have employed a four-day school week since its legislature changed instructional time requirements for school calendars from days to hours in 1985. Now, 58 percent of Colorado's 178 school districts utilize a four-day week, although this figure only represents a small percentage of the state's student population, reflecting the fact that most schools which utilize this schedule are in rural or sparsely populated school districts. In New Mexico, 38 local school districts report at least some of their schools operate under a four-day schedule, along with 21 charter schools, an increase of 10 school districts and four charter schools since FY12. While school districts utilizing a four-day week are mostly rural in nature, 13 of the 21 charter schools in New Mexico using that calendar are in urban school districts. Approximately 4 percent of New Mexico students attend schools that employ a four-day week.

The Variable School Calendar Act, Article 22 of Chapter 22 NMSA 1978, permits schools to operate under a calendar that extends beyond the normal nine-month school calendar to 10 or 11 months, or even a full year. While requirements for instructional days under Laws 2009, Chapter 276 were never implemented, four-day school weeks could be accomplished with a longer school year under provisions of the act, rather than by extending the length of school days.



Legislative History of Instructional Time in New Mexico.

Historically, instructional time in New Mexico has been measured in hours per year, under Section 22-2-8.1 NMSA 1978. For full-day kindergarten through sixth grade, 990 hours per year are required, and 1080 hours per year are required for seventh through



12th grades, similar to national averages. Subsection (D) of Section 22-2-8.1 NMSA 1978 permits the secretary of PED to waive minimum daily requirements — 5.5 hours for kindergarten through sixth grade and 6 hours for seventh through 12th grades — when those requirements create “undue hardships as defined by the department” and the school year is structured so that students receive the required minimum hours annually.

Statute permits 33 hours of full-day kindergarten and 22 hours from first through sixth grades to be used for home visits or parent-teacher conferences, while 12 hours from seventh through 12th grades may be used for parent-teacher conferences.

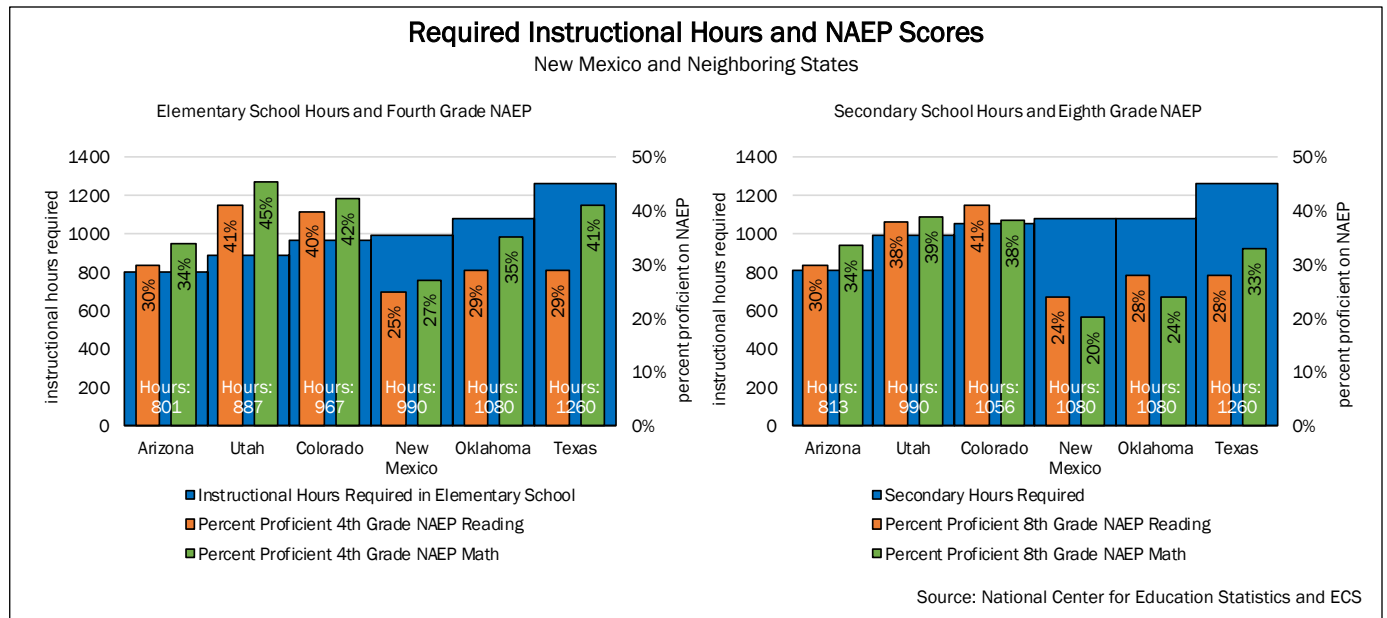
The General Appropriation Act of 2008 included sufficient additional funding —\$ 14 million — to support increasing the school year by one full instructional day, which was explicitly not to be substituted by an equivalent number of hours or days. During the 2009 legislative session, the Legislature passed and the governor signed Laws 2009, Chapter 276 (House Bill 691), which required school calendars comprise a minimum number of school days per year, rather than hours. “Regular” school years, consisting of five-day weeks, were to include at least 180 instructional days, while “alternative” school years comprising four-day weeks were to consist of a minimum of 150 instructional days, although implementation of the law was delayed until the 2011-2012 school year. During the 2011 legislative session, however, the requirements of Laws 2009, Chapter 276 were repealed without ever having been implemented. A 2010 study from PED and the Department of Finance and Administration concluded that, at that time, most school districts and charter schools would fail to meet required instructional days, with the average five-day per week school having 176 instructional days, and the average four-day per week school having 149 instructional days.

Part 5 of 6.10 NMAC allows schools to operate four-day school weeks under a condensed calendar, so long as students receive the minimum number of annual instructional hours. The General Appropriation Act of 2018 halted expansion of four-day weeks in FY19 for schools not already operating on condensed calendars. During the 2018 legislative session, upon recommendation by the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC), the House Appropriations and Finance substitute for House Bill 2 (HB2/HAFCS) proposed to reduce by 5 percent the total program units of any local school district or charter school operating under a four-day week. Senate Finance Committee amendments to HB2/HAFCS changed this line-item to a general moratorium on new four-day-week schools by prohibiting PED from approving the operating budget of any school district or charter school electing a four-day school week that had not already been operating under such a calendar; this language was included in the final version of the General Appropriation Act of 2018.

To maximize learning time, LPI recommends a multipronged approach including a focus on better time management, bell-to-bell scheduling, creation of more time for teacher professional development, and the adoption of alternative academic calendars.

Research on Learning Time

According to the Education Commission of the States, New Mexico’s annual instructional hour requirements are comparable to those of neighboring states, except Texas, which requires approximately 20 percent more time.



While learning time is important, research shows there seems to be no discernable difference between the effect of learning hours and learning days. The National Center for Time and Learning (NCTL) found that schools with 300 high quality learning hours more than the national average show stronger academic growth.

LPI notes that, in New Mexico, 27 percent of families have at least one child in a summer learning program, but 57 percent of parents would like their children to have the opportunity to participate. Ninety-one percent of parents support public funding for summer learning programs. Similarly, 21 percent of New Mexico children participate in afterschool programs, and another 33 percent would if one were available.

The Legislative Finance Committee evaluation, *Assessing “Time on Task” and Efforts to Extend Learning Time*, notes that, of the approximately 180 learning days available to most New Mexico students, much is lost to non-instructional time and student absence. Elementary students lose over a third of instructional time, even accounting for extra time schools have included above state minimum requirements. The Learning Policy Institute (LPI) indicates in-school learning time is often unevenly provided and not used optimally, resulting in less effective learning time. For example, in New Mexico, of 194 potential learning days, nearly a third, 62 days, are lost to a variety of administrative tasks and other disruptions, including non-teaching duties, assessment preparation, administration, student absences, and teacher absences. This lost time corresponds

directly with lower student achievement; most students in New Mexico do not perform at grade level.

This potential deficiency, LPI notes, is exacerbated for lower income students, whose parents often are not college-educated, as the amount of out-of-school learning time such parents can spend with their children has grown only half as fast as that of more affluent parents, an issue of particular importance when considering the loss of learning most students experience over summer break. While affluent students can spend time reading with family, attending preschool or summer camp, participating in after school activities or visiting museums, poorer children often miss these opportunities, resulting in a cumulative relative loss of 6,000 hours of learning time by sixth grade. This potential deficit can be broken down into: 220 fewer hours of reading time, 1,395 hours not spent in preschool, 3,060 fewer hours in grade school extracurricular activities, 1,080 hours not spent in camp or other summer enrichment

programs, and 245 fewer hours spent at zoos, museums, and other educational institutions.

Increased learning time also creates opportunities for students to receive a more well-rounded education, which may include exposure to classes outside of normal core curricula, such as music or art; this high-quality learning time, where teachers are engaging students using best practices is especially important. The National Center for Time and Learning (NCTL) found that schools with 300 high quality learning hours more than the national average of 1,170 hours show stronger academic growth.

A 2013 study of California elementary schools from the Education and Urban Society found a statistically significant, positive relationship between learning time and academic achievement, showing an increase of only 15 minutes of learning time a day — about one additional week of classes over the course of an academic year — raised overall academic achievement approximately 1 percent, and approximately 1.5 percent for disadvantaged students. Further, the additional 15 minutes resulted in a 37 percent gain in the average growth in achievement of socioeconomically disadvantaged students when compared with the previous academic year, suggesting it is likely that disadvantaged students have less access to high quality out-of-school time activities, making an increase in school time especially beneficial for them. Increasing instructional time in schools, therefore, may help in narrowing the achievement gap.

Instructional Time in High-Performing Countries

LESC has been focusing on educational practices and policy among countries with high-performing educational systems, and according to the National Center on Education and the Economy, New Mexico falls somewhere in the middle range of those countries for the average length of instructional days. The United States averages 180 required instructional days per year, though high-performing countries range widely in the number of days required, and the Center for Public Education (CPE) notes that there is no way to be certain that more instructional time is not reported in many of these countries or being offered outside of normal school hours and in different contexts such as night schools or enrichment opportunities. CPE notes, as does much of the literature, that additional and extended learning time is only useful when it is of high quality.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, in the 2014-2015 school year, instructional hour requirements for high performing countries were significantly lower than the average instructional hour requirements in the United States. Whereas the United States requires an average of 981 hours of instructional time for secondary school, Poland only requires 486 hours. Of the high performing countries mentioned in the *No Time to Lose* report, Canada requires the most instructional hours, with 743 for secondary and 797 for elementary.

Quality learning time, according to NCTL, includes high-dosage tutoring, consistent feedback from teachers, use of data to drive instruction, and high expectations. The National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) agrees, noting that additional instructional time should address students' needs and interests with more individualized instruction to improve students' educational experiences.

The Education and Urban Society study found that similar increases in achievement were found only with an increase of fully credentialed teachers by 7 percentage points in combination with other influences found important to academic achievement.

Generally, a year-round calendar spreads instructional days more evenly across the year, organized into terms punctuated by intercessions, or vacations of two or more weeks, rather than two long terms broken by a summer vacation of several months. Year-round schools usually run on either a single track, where all students and teachers attend school during the same times, or a multi-track, where different cohorts of students attend school on staggered schedules, so that only one cohort occupies the school at any one time.

Year-Round Schooling

Student Academic Achievement. Generally, research indicates student achievement slows or stops over the summer break, particularly for economically disadvantaged students who, in some studies, are shown to make academic gains similar to other students during the regular school year. Achievement gaps between low-income students and their more economically secure peers widen over the course of the summer, perhaps because low-income students can seldom afford the summer supplemental learning and enrichment opportunities available to their more affluent peers. Year-round schooling is one idea that has been advanced as a way to maximize learning time while avoiding annual summer learning loss, yet research is inconclusive on whether a year-round school calendar is an effective solution to the problem of summer learning loss.

The Congressional Research Service indicates research to date has shown mixed findings, and meta-analyses of studies on the effect of year-round schooling have sometimes revealed weak methodology that fails to account for other factors contributive to educational attainment, such as income level and the level of students' parental education. However, there were some indications that students in year-round schools do as well or slightly better than those attending schools under traditional calendars, and that year-round education may be more beneficial to low-income students. On the other hand, consistent with other research into effective learning time practices, the research also indicates that when year-round school results in higher academic achievement, the schools in question are doing more than just adjusting calendars. Schools that successfully narrow or close achievement gaps with year-round schooling tend also offer quality opportunities to maximize potential gains, such as providing remediation and enrichment activities to students during breaks, helping avoid learning loss and preparing students for the return to school.

In response to rapid population growth in the school system, Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina moved to a multitrack, year-round schedule, with different blocks of students attending school at different times. From 2004 to 2009, student population in Wake County grew more than 26 percent, outpacing projections and the addition of new and expanded schools, prompting the switch to save costs while still accommodating the larger student population.

The Southern Regional Education Board notes North Carolina widely uses a year-round schedule, with a preponderance of students attending year-round schools. A 2012 study reviewed the effects of conversion to a year-round school schedule in Wake County Public Schools, North Carolina's largest school district. There were 44 thousand students in Wake County on a year-round calendar at the time of the study, which found that, controlling for student and school characteristics, year-round schooling yields similar academic results to those of traditional school year calendars; dividing the traditional summer vacation into smaller, more frequent breaks did not have a positive impact on student achievement scores. Further, while this study was unable to disaggregate results for socioeconomic status, authors did find results were similar across racial subgroups.

Cost Savings. A study that reviewed both Wake County, North Carolina and schools in California found that multitrack year-round schools can realize savings as a result of facilities operating continually throughout the year, accommodating 20 to 33 percent more students than a traditional school calendar. Potential savings were found to include limited need for new school construction, use of shared materials

between students on different tracks, reduced absenteeism, and fewer capital outlay, staffing, and transportation costs, although this study was careful to note that these potential savings may be offset somewhat by increased utility and maintenance costs. The California Department of Education (CDE) suggests savings in these cases are related to crowding in schools; the more crowded a school is before initiating a year-round schedule, the greater the realized savings because the large cost is spread over more students, using the building more efficiently by employing a multitrack year-round schedule. According to CDE, a school with a capacity of 500 students but an enrollment of 635 will realize a savings of \$25 per pupil, or approximately \$15 thousand per school, when using a multitrack year-round school schedule. While savings estimates vary from study to study, the consensus is that savings can be substantial.

Implementation of the Four-Day School Week

National Trends

Research on the implementation of the four-day school week, while scant, indicates approximately 560 school districts in 25 states have one or more schools on a four-day schedule. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), more than half of these school districts are located in four states — Colorado, Montana, Oklahoma, and Oregon — where a significant portion of school districts have opted into the four-day week. While the number of school districts participating in these states is significant, as in New Mexico, the number of students attending school on a four-day week is relatively small. For example, Colorado has the largest proportion of school districts with schools operating on a four-day week, at 98 school districts, or more than half those in the state; yet this number represents only about 13 percent of the Colorado student population. Most states that permit schools to operate under four-day weeks do so through several methods, such as imposition of minimum instructional hour requirements over instructional days, explicit administrative rules, or waivers, although the level of legislative involvement in this process varies. Some states, such as California, impose stricter limitations on the four-day week, and only permit schools to adopt a four-day week if specific legislation is passed. Less is known or apparent from the research about trends in the adoption of four-day school weeks by charter schools. As noted above, New Mexico is not currently allowing any additional schools to adopt a four-day school week in FY19.

In contrast to most claims, one national study asserts that veteran staff are often concerned about how longer school days may affect younger students, also noting concern that longer school days means a student who misses a day loses more educational content. On the other hand, according to the Hobbs News Sun, a parent in the Jal Public School District, which also recently decided to switch to a four-day calendar, said that his special needs child used the three day weekend to decompress, and did better when the week started again.

Effect of the Four-Day School Week on School Culture

According to NCSL, school district administrators often claim the appeal of a four-day work week helps recruit teachers in areas where it is difficult to attract new staff. Some literature indicates teachers and staff take advantage of the fifth school day for medical and business appointments, increasing attendance among staff for the shorter school week. Indeed, in New Mexico, several school districts that have recently moved to a four-day school week have cited teacher recruitment and retention as impetus for the change, but without further information, it is difficult to be certain if a four-day school week prompts these teachers to remain.

After Mountainair Public Schools (MPS) transitioned to a four-day week in FY16, student attendance improved, with habitual truancy rates decreasing from 59 percent in FY15, before the change, to 19 percent by FY17. It is unclear if this change is due solely to the change in school calendars, or if MPS had been engaged in additional work to combat habitual truancy; MPS was not engaged in PED's Truancy Coach and Dropout Prevention program.

Some studies reviewing attendance at schools with four-day-week calendars tend to show improved student attendance, although two recent studies show no statistically significant decline in student absence rates. A 2015 study from the Association for Education Finance and Policy found only a 0.6 percent improvement in attendance at schools after transitioning to a four-day week. Similarly, a 2017 study From the University of Oregon found a reduction of only .17 absences per student, per year after switching to a four-day school week.

In New Mexico, attendance is scored as a component of a teacher's evaluation, based on a calculation of points. If a teacher is absent no more than three days, 100 percent of attendance points will be awarded to the teacher; anything more will result in deducted points. Leave that is excluded from the attendance calculation includes leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, bereavement, jury duty, military leave, religious leave, professional development, and coaching.

Available research also suggests that transition to a four-day school week may improve teacher attendance, though much of that evidence is anecdotal. Teacher attendance is directly linked to student academic outcomes, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, suggesting efforts to improve teacher attendance should also improve student outcomes although, as noted, in most studies, changing to a four-day school week has shown little if any increase in student academic achievement growth. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) reported in FY14 that 21 percent of New Mexico's teachers were absent for more than 10 days of regular classes, compared with the national average of 27 percent.

Some literature indicates that child safety may be a concern with the implementation of the four-day week, as parents often need daycare for younger children on the non-school day. Further, juvenile crime, particularly larceny, rises in areas with a four-day school week, although the increase is not specific to non-school days. Other studies, however, claim that because school days are longer when the school week is shorter, less daycare is needed, and youth are too occupied with longer school days to get into trouble.

Charter Schools. In New Mexico, most of the 22 charter schools operating under a four-day school week are in urban areas, primarily Albuquerque. At these schools, reasons cited for the shorter school week are related more to a particular charter school's mission or educational methods, rather than considerations due to the urban or rural nature of the community. For example, some charter schools use the fifth day for tutoring, remediation, or make-up work for missed days. One charter school head administrator informed LESC staff most of their teachers worked on the fifth day in some capacity, either assisting students with make-up work, or providing service learning. Other staff activities on the fifth day include parent-teacher conferences and professional development. Further, while all students could attend school on Fridays, some students were required to do so to stay on course for academic goals, potentially creating motivation for them to stay on task during the regular school week. Another Albuquerque charter school noted on its website that while school was not in session on Fridays, students often attended the mornings to work on interactive group projects. These examples beg the question if these schools are really working with a four-day school week, or some hybrid model that utilizes a fifth day for specific enrichment or remediation purposes.

Student Academic Outcomes

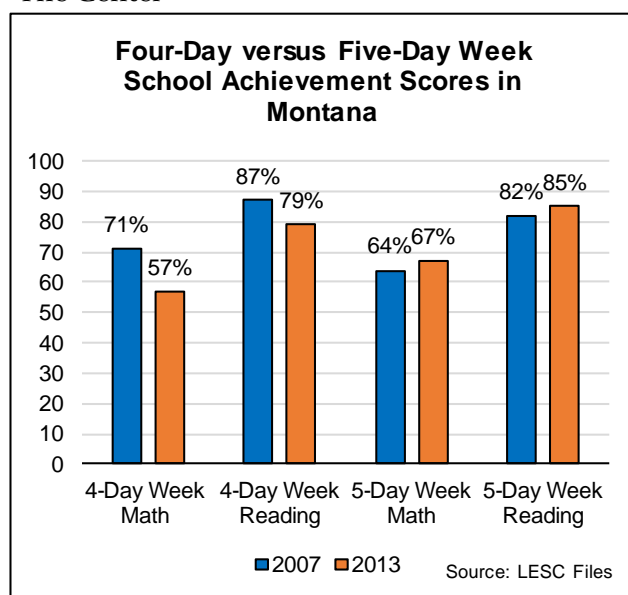
A 2011 study that the University of Arkansas conducted in Colorado, which at the time had 62 local school districts employing four-day school weeks, showed little difference in outcomes between students who attended a school operating a four-day week calendar and those who attended schools five days a week. The study compared third through 10th grade student assessment scores in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as composite scores in the three subject areas. Out of 12 score comparisons, 11 showed a very slight advantage to students on five-day week calendars, yet only elementary school writing was statistically significant. The study therefore concluded that academic achievement was not a relevant factor in determining the most advantageous school week calendar for student outcomes. The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy of Indiana University came to similar conclusions, issuing a policy brief in 2012 on the effects of the four-day calendar that found no strong effect, either positive or negative, with the implementation of the condensed calendar.

In contrast to these findings, however, one 2016 longitudinal study from the *Journal of Education and Training Studies* conducted over seven years in Montana indicated a four-day week was detrimental to students over time. This study looked particularly at achievement scores in math and reading, comparing scores from four- and five-day week schools over a period of seven years, between 2007 and 2013. Results of the comparison indicated scores in both math and reading declined over that period, relative to the achievement scores of students attending 5-day schools.

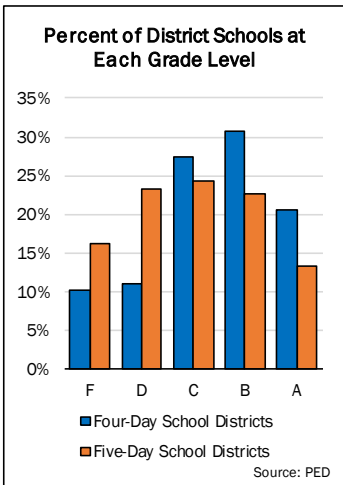
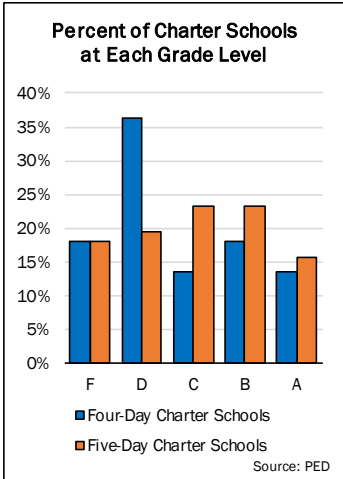
The authors note communities with schools that changed their calendars were concerned with student academic performance in the face of a 20 percent reduction in instructional days, despite required instructional hours being redistributed across the compressed calendar. While the authors note achievement scores at schools on four-day week calendars are better than those at five-day-week schools during the first two years of implementation of the condensed calendar, after the four-day school week became part of the local school district's permanent culture, those small gains were lost, and scores at the four-day week schools continued to decrease. It is unclear what may have caused this effect.

Most New Mexico charter schools that employ a four-day school week have done so since their inception, leaving no comparable data from five-day school weeks to compare relative outcomes. Using school grades, however, to compare existing four-day week charter schools with five-day week charter schools yields some indication that four-day charter schools generally perform at a poorer rate than their counterparts operating under a five-day school week. In contrast, traditional

The University of Arkansas study, while designed to compare Colorado school districts with four- and five-day schedules, matched the school districts based on similar enrollments and socioeconomic scores. Nevertheless, the authors noted, due to the small size of the schools in the study, results were not disaggregated for traditional subgroups such as ethnicity, English learners, and students with disabilities. Further research should disaggregate and examine results for these and other potentially disadvantaged subgroups.



The Montana study included annual review of 70 thousand students' assessment scores. The number of students attending schools four days per week increased over the course of the study from 207 to 2,685. The study apparently made no provision to accommodate differences among student subgroups, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education services, and English language acquisition.



school district schools on four-day calendars generally performed better than their five-day calendar counterparts. However, because so many factors can influence a school’s grade, the mere existence of a correlation between school grades and school week length cannot be assumed to be causal.

Fiscal Issues Associated with Four-Day School Weeks

Schools that move to four-day school weeks often claim finances as a reason for doing so, but generated savings are generally much less than anticipated. Overwhelmingly, studies show that the financial benefits of a four-day school week are minimal because the largest amount of school expenditures goes to staff and facilities, which are fixed costs. Generally, the average savings of moving to a four-day school week is approximately 1.5 to 2 percent, although it is difficult to produce a cost savings estimate applicable to all schools because of the unique characteristics of each school district. Schools anticipate saving on transportation, utilities, and food services, although the latter can be problematic in states like New Mexico, due to issues of food insecurity for economically disadvantaged students. If schools offer food services for the long weekend, it could counter any savings, and failure to do so may leave students hungry.

A review of operational and transportation fund spending at three New Mexico school districts that switched to a four-day school week shows no clear pattern of savings. While Tatum Municipal Schools shifted about 3 percent of spending from transportation and operational expenses to instruction, student support, and administrative services, Chama Valley Independent Schools and Jemez Mountain Public Schools did not. While transportation expenditures were down across the state, neither Chama Valley nor Jemez Mountain were able to decrease funds going to transportation. However, all three school districts were able to either decrease the share of expenses going to operations and maintenance (which includes utilities) or saw a smaller increase than the statewide average.

Operational and Transportation Fund Spending Before and After Four-Day School Week

	Chama Valley			Jemez Mountain		
	FY09	FY12	Change	FY09	FY12	Change
Instruction & Student Support	55.6%	56.3%	0.7%	47.9%	46.4%	-1.5%
Administration	18.4%	16.9%	-1.5%	21.1%	22.2%	1.1%
Operations & Maintenance	18.1%	18.3%	0.2%	15.2%	14.5%	-0.7%
Transportation	6.7%	6.7%	0.0%	13.2%	15.9%	2.7%
Other	1.2%	1.9%	0.7%	2.6%	1.0%	-1.6%
	Tatum			State Average		
	FY09	FY12	Change	FY09	FY12	Change
Instruction & Student Support	61.5%	63.4%	1.9%	71.4%	71.5%	0.1%
Administration	15.5%	16.7%	1.2%	11.5%	11.3%	-0.2%
Operations & Maintenance	13.1%	12.7%	-0.4%	12.0%	12.7%	0.7%
Transportation	8.5%	6.0%	-2.5%	4.5%	4.1%	-0.4%
Other	1.4%	1.3%	-0.1%	0.6%	0.5%	-0.1%

Source: LESC Analysis

Even if these shifts in expenditures can be attributed to a change to the four-day school week, they are relatively modest in scope. For example, a one percentage point shift in operational and transportation fund budget represented about \$35 thousand in Tatum or Jemez Mountain and about \$50 thousand in Chama Valley. For savings to be more significant, district schools would have to close completely on the fifth day and refrain from providing food or transportation services. This means that, from a cost perspective, schools could not use the fifth day as an enrichment day, a teacher planning day, or a homework make-up day. However, several school districts that recently switched to a four-day week, citing financial reasons, noted that any savings, even small ones, are welcome.

Conclusion

Due to the general lack of empirical, verifiable evidence about the effects of the four-day school week, policy recommendations in this arena are problematic. However, states such as Colorado are experimenting more extensively with four-day school weeks, meaning more comprehensive and detailed data may be available in the near future. While current research suggests that transition to the four-day school week does not result in verifiable improved student achievement or significant cost-savings, what verifiable information is available indicates high-quality learning time is important, regardless of the format under which the hours are delivered. Local school districts, including some in New Mexico, have indicated their individual models work for their communities, despite the lack of empirical evidence either in support or opposition the four-day school schedule.

LFC staff currently are conducting an evaluation of instructional time in New Mexico that will address some of these issues and remaining questions in depth, and will be presented to LFC at their September meeting. That report should include more detailed review of extended learning and enrichment opportunities in the state, including opportunity gaps affecting low-income and other at-risk students. The evaluation should also include a review of how non-instructional days are employed in New Mexico schools, with review of teacher professional development and collaboration practices.

Some issues to consider as more data and evidence become available include:

- Identification of definitively quantifiable financial savings related to four-day school weeks, and of ways in which those resources may be reallocated;
- The effect of shorter school weeks on academic achievement when controlling for other factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and language status;
- Family and community impact of students being in school for fewer days, including childcare costs for parents and youth-related crime in the community;
- The effect of four-day school weeks on teacher recruitment and retention; and
- The use of the fifth day for professional development, collaboration, and professional learning communities.