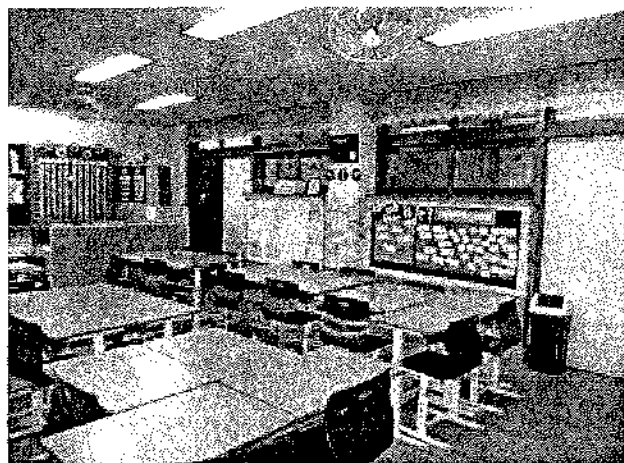




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## Four-day School Week Improves Academic Performance and Saves School Districts Money

By Sarah Handyside



According to research from Georgia State University and Montana State University, switching to a four-day school week improves academic performance in elementary school students and helps school districts save money on transportation and overhead.

The **study**<sup>1</sup>, published this July in the journal *Education, Finance and Policy*, analyzed about a decade worth of 4th and 5th grade reading and math scores from the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). Contrary to their expectations, researchers found that, following the switch to a four-day week, reading scores stayed the same and math scores improved.

An Aug. 27 **EurekaAlert! press release**<sup>2</sup> quotes Mary Beth Walker, dean of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State, as saying;

**"We thought that especially for the younger, elementary school kids, longer days on a shorter school week would hurt their academic performance because their attention spans are shorter. Also, a longer weekend would give them more opportunity to forget what they had learned."**

The study says that as of 2008, districts in 17 states, had adopted the 4-day week. It is most prevalent in Colorado, where 60 of 178 school districts have made the switch. In 2011, **CNN reported**<sup>3</sup> that Florida's Marion County school district made the switch, and the **Springfield News-Leader**<sup>4</sup> reported that Missouri's Miller and Pierce City school districts decided earlier this year to adopt the four-day school week.

According to the study, budget cuts were a major motivator. Kentucky's Webster County school district saved on transportation, utilities and insurance, while Georgia's Peach County school district saved on transportation, utilities, and pay for custodial and cafeteria workers. School districts in **Arizona**<sup>5</sup> and Oregon are also considering adopting the four-day school week.

Researchers say that experimentation with the four-day week began in South Dakota in the 1930s, and when the energy crisis of the 1970s drove transportation costs sky-high, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico and Washington tried it out too. Colorado school districts began switching to the four-day week in 1985, when the

legislature decided that the minimum school year requirement for elementary students would be measured in hours rather than days. This allowed for longer days and shorter weeks.

When asked why a shorter school week translated to higher test scores, researchers had no definite answers. They speculated that longer class periods allowed for curriculum continuity and gave teachers the flexibility to better organize lessons and employ a wider variety of teaching methods.

The four-day week also allowed students and teachers to schedule doctor appointments and take care of other personal business on Fridays. According to researchers, this led to a decrease in student and teacher absenteeism, which may have led to better morale, better behavior, and better standardized test scores.

Researchers also speculated that the three-day weekend gave students an extra day to do homework and prepare for class, and that students who faced longer commutes to school may have benefited from fewer trips.

**"My own personal hypothesis," Walker said in the EurekaAlert! press release, "is teachers liked it so much-they were so enthusiastic about the four-day work week-they did a better job. There's some evidence in other labor studies that four-day work weeks enhance productivity."**

Researchers pointed out that the four-day school week has been adopted mostly in less affluent school districts, and that their study applied only to small rural school districts. They said that economics and population may be factors in the success of the four-day school week if it were adopted in more urban school districts.

Image by Marie<sup>6</sup>

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