

Alternatives to Traditional Scheduling

Prepared for Arlington Public Schools

In the following pages, we briefly summarize alternatives to traditional schedules employed at U.S. school districts. The alternative scheduling measures profiled in this report aim to reduce crowding, provide educational benefits, and cut costs.

Overview

Hanover's review of alternatives to traditional scheduling in school districts across the nation indicated the following trends regarding scheduling decisions:

- ❖ **District Motivations for Alternative School Schedules:** The districts' alternative schedules profiled in this report appeared to be designed to address the needs of parents and students, to counteract overcrowding issues, and to be a cost-cutting tool.
- ❖ **Impact of District Size:** School enrollment does not seem to significantly impact decisions to adopt alternative schedules; this report profiled large and small districts' alternative schedules. However, demographic variables like location seem to hold some sway among the districts profiled, with one district noting that it thought that a four-day school week would be easier to implement in a rural district than an urban district. Interestingly, none of the school districts that were identified as using the four-day schedule had above 7,100 students enrolled, although without more comprehensive analysis it is difficult to draw conclusions about the relationship between school size and four-day school weeks.
- ❖ **Popularity of Scheduling Types:** By far, the four-day school week came up most often in our searches of alternative schedules. This may be due to the budget crunches now occurring in many states. We could not find any mention of districts that employed four-day weeks to relieve crowding in its schools.

In the following pages, we review the alternative scheduling policies of a number of school districts located around the nation. All data regarding total students, student-teacher ratios, and total schools in the district were gathered from the National Center of Educational Statistics.¹

¹ All district statistics included in this document are from the National Center for Education Statistics and cover the 2007-2008 school year. <http://www.nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/index.asp>

Options for Alternative Scheduling

Before profiling school districts' alternative schedules, we summarize two articles in order to provide a foundation for our review of school districts across the nation. The first article examines **flexible schedules in the context of overcrowded schools**, most pertinent to Arlington Public Schools, while the second article presents a number of **issues school districts should consider** during the implementation of an alternative schedule, as well as some **common alternative scheduling options**.

“Making a Problem and Opportunity”²

([Click on link to article](#))

This article from *School Planning & Management* addresses crowding issues for school districts at which building additional space is not feasible. Its author proposes the following **alternative scheduling ideas for reducing crowding**:

- ❖ **Compressing Advanced Courses:** Advanced Placement and other courses that meet five times a week traditionally could condense that time into fewer days – three, two, or even one – and allow independent study time for research and writing.
- ❖ **Creating an In-school “Senior Center”:** Allot library or other space to seniors for independent study and work time, overseen and coached by teachers and tutors outside of class instruction. The author encourages this as preparation for tertiary education and notes that the National Association of Secondary School Principals approve of it as well.
- ❖ **Encouraging Dual Enrollment:** Students are able to participate in high school activities while gaining college credit and pursuing their interests.
- ❖ **Other Methods:** Schools could adopt partial block or six-day rotational scheduling. Additionally, grouping students together could “free up space.”

The author also notes that **flexible scheduling must be created to suit individual buildings and programs**: “Good ideas in the wrong setting won’t work.” Teacher support is also required to implement these options. Finally, the article notes that expanding the physical space may be unavoidable in some circumstances.

² Abramson, Paul, “Making a Problem an Opportunity,” *School & Planning Management* (October 2007).
http://www.peterli.com/spm/resources/articles/archive.php?article_id=1623

“Implementing High School Flexible Scheduling”³

([Click on link to article](#))

This overview was compiled by Davis Baker, principal of Glynn Academy, part of the Glynn County School District, Georgia.⁴ Baker details **benefits of flexible scheduling** specific to high school communities, including the fact that alternative scheduling can be similar in intention to the Smaller Learning Communities Program, a project supported by the Department of Education that aims to improve academic achievement through the restructuring of high schools,⁵ in that it is focused on the students’ needs. Additionally, it facilitates team teaching and dual enrollment options, while also allowing for the maximum use of building and facilities.

The article then goes on to propose a **number of questions that schools and districts should consider** when reviewing alternative scheduling options. These questions focus on feasibility issues in regards to teacher unions and district policies, motivations for the alternative scheduling, and other considerations, including teacher preferences, transportation, and security issues.

Finally **possible flexible school schedules** are reviewed:

- ❖ **Early Bird Class:** May meet on alternating days for half-credit or four or five days a week before school starts. Common classes include accelerated courses, independent projects, and strengthening/conditioning class.
- ❖ **After School Class:** May meet on alternating days for half-credit or four or five days a week after school hours. In addition to accelerated coursework, activities such as band are common as well.
- ❖ **Eighth Graders taking High School Class:** Motivated and/or gifted and talented students could move up to a high school for more challenging course work.
- ❖ **Evening or Saturday Class:** A class at these times may meet one night a week or Saturday morning for various amounts of credit depending on the class schedule.
- ❖ **Specialty Class:** For courses offered outside the school’s options.

³ Baker, Davis E., “Implementing High School Flexible Scheduling: Meeting the Diverse Educational Needs of Today and Tomorrow’s High School Students,” Glynn Academy.
<http://helpdesk.glynn.k12.ga.us/goals/2009/ga3.6.pdf>

⁴ For more information, please see: “Glynn Academy,” Glynn County School District.
<http://glynn.schooldesk.net/Default.aspx?alias=glynn.schooldesk.net/academy>

⁵ For more information, please see: “Smaller Learning Communities Program.” U.S. Department of Education.
<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/index.html>

❖ **Summer School Class:** Commonly used, often for “intervention classwork.”

Baker also includes a discussion of supporting flex time schedules, including those for “academic coaching,” volunteering, and student services that could open early or after school, when students have more availability to use them.

Alternative Scheduling Practices in School Districts

Over-Crowding/Capacity Scheduling Measures

Broward County School District, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

[\(Click on link to article\)](#)

[\(Click on link to article\)](#)

Total Students: 258,893

Student/Teacher Ratio: 17.3

Total Schools: 319

On an annual basis, Broward County requires that its schools **evaluate their capacity** due to issues with overcapacity.⁶

Tactics employed by the district to ease overcrowding include adding classrooms in external buildings, enrollment capping, changing individual school boundaries, and reconfiguring schools by grade (i.e., altering the traditional K-5, 6-8, 9-12 groupings), in addition to flexible school scheduling. Broward County schools suggest the following alternative schedules, although schools are free to develop others:⁷

- ❖ Dual enrollment programs with institutions of higher learning
- ❖ Extended school day
 - Multiple period high school day
 - Double sessions
 - Merging of regular school day and community school schedule
- ❖ Half-day kindergarten
- ❖ Multi-track year-round education program
- ❖ School-Within-A-School: Involves flexible scheduling, team planning, and curricular and instructional innovation to organize groups of students with groups of teachers as smaller units, so as to functionally operate as a smaller school.
- ❖ Other school-wide day, week, month, or year models that may be identified

⁶ "School Boundaries: Frequently Asked Questions," School Board of Broward County (updated 17 November 2009). <http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/schoolboundaries/FAQ.shtml>

⁷ "Memo: School Capacity Conferences," School Board of Broward County, Florida (16 August 2006). <http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/SCHOOLBOUNDARIES/Discussions/Sept26DiscussionII/SchoolCapacityConferenceMemo0607.pdf>

Davis School District, Farmington, Utah

[\(Click on link to article\)](#)

[\(Click on link to article\)](#)

Total Students: 70,323

Student/Teacher Ratio: 24.3

Total Schools: 103

Students at six elementary schools in the district **go to class year-round**. Administrators say that the schedule stretches limited resources and eases crowding in shared areas such as libraries, lunchrooms, and recreation areas.⁸ At a year-round school, **Friday instruction time is shorted two hours**.⁹

Academic Improvement Scheduling Measures

Mesquite Independent School District, Mesquite, Texas

[\(Click on link to article\)](#)

[\(Click on link to article\)](#)

Total Students: 36,640

Student/Teacher Ratio: 15.4

Total Schools: 46

Texas offers its school districts the opportunity to use an **“optional flexible year”** program, which allows students who pass both the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and their classes to **attend classes for fewer days in the school year**. The idea behind this measure is that high school students who haven’t passed would be able to receive more intensive help in a smaller class size environment after their peers who met requirements left school early. Students who didn’t pass the TAKS or their classes would complete the entire academic year, and those still behind at the end of the school year would then go to summer school.

The District Administrator investigating the program says that research has shown that **school districts using the optional flexible year have experienced improved test scores**, although the Texas Education Agency has not completed any studies on the program’s effectiveness.

Mesquite is one of the larger districts in the state to implement the program, which is being used in its five high schools during the 2009-2010 school year, including Grand

⁸ Johnson, Alex, “Students learn hard lesson in school budgets,” *MSNBC* (12 August 2008).

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26012346/>

⁹ “Antelope Year Round Hours and Schedule,” Antelope Elementary School.

<http://www.davis.k12.ut.us/schools/antelope/hours.html>

Prairie and Lake Dallas districts. According to district officials, five districts that had used the flexible calendar for several years reported improved student test scores.¹⁰¹¹

Cost-Saving Measures

St. Lucie School District, Fort Pierce, Florida

[\(Click on link to article\)](#)

Total Students: 40,347

Student/Teacher Ratio: 17.5

Total Schools: 52

Schools in Florida's St. Lucie County have been **starting the school day at staggered start times** “for years.” In 2008-2009, the district moved start times at two schools from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. The change in start times reduced the number of buses needed and had the remaining buses make more runs, **saving the district approximately \$2 million**. Before- and after-school programs were expanded to help parents with child care.¹²

Unfortunately, more detailed information regarding this program was unavailable.

Hayward Unified School District, Hayward, California

[\(Click on link to article\)](#)

Total Students: 21,612

Student/Teacher Ratio: 19.9

Total Schools: 35

For the 2009-2010 school year, the Hayward Unified School District has **replaced its block scheduling** of four 90-minute classes per semester and eight completed courses per year. Instead, the district schools adopted the “traditional” six courses per year, and **gave students the option to taking additional courses by offering an extended day**. The reduced teaching staff will save about \$1 million.¹³

¹⁰ Holloway, Karel, “Mesquite schools’ proposal would let students score days off for passing TAKS, classes,” *Dallas Morning News* (11 May 2009). http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/education/stories/DN-messchoolyear_11met.ART.State.Edition1.4c7fd7f.html

¹¹ “For Parents: Optional Flexible Year Program,” Mesquite Independent School District. <http://www.mesquiteisd.org/parents/index.asp>

¹² Bazar, Emily, “Schools revamp schedules to save money,” *USA Today* (24 March 2009). http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2009-03-23-schoolschedules_N.htm

¹³ Ibid.

Custer School District, Custer, South Dakota
([Click on link to article](#))

Total Students: 944
Student/Teacher Ratio: 12.7
Total Schools: 6

Custer School District piloted its **four-day school week** in 1995-96, and since that time has developed and evaluated their four-day school week. In the schedule, teachers work the same total hours, while teacher aides work four hours less a week. Interestingly, the school administration must work as long as it takes to “get the job done,” and custodians and the central office work five days a week. The instructional program is designed so that students’ time out of class is minimized, and the amount of contact time is increased.

The four-day school week has limited the practice time available for co-curricular programs and eliminated intramural sports, although participation in co-curricular programs actually increased. Interscholastic sports are focused on a Thursday through Saturday program, and sports administrators are told to avoid the scheduling of two day trips during the Monday through Thursday school week.

The **impact of the four-day schedule on the community** was multifaceted: not only was the building open for community use on Fridays, but the need for transportation and/or parent mileage was decreased.

Generally, **no significant impact has been found on students’ grades or attendance**, although ACT scores have been slightly raised and fewer disciplinary incidents have been documented. Teachers are also generally satisfied with the four-day week, as Friday may be used for preparation and administration activities.¹⁴

East Grand School District, Granby, Colorado
([Click on link to article](#))
([Click on link to article](#))

Total Students: 1,415
Student/Teacher Ratio: 13.5
Total Schools: 6

According to the National School Boards Association, more than 100 school districts in seven states (Oregon, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, South Dakota, Arkansas and Louisiana) employed a four-day week in 2002-2003. **Schools reap budget**

¹⁴ “Custer School District 4 Day Week Information – 4-Day Week General Powerpoint.” Custer School District.
<http://www.csd.k12.sd.us/files/website/administration/4%20Day%20Web/index.htm>

windfall, according to a superintendent of East Grand School District in Colorado: “You get an immediate 20 percent cut in your food services budget, 20 percent in transportation and some savings in energy and custodial costs.”¹⁵

The school calendar currently has 146 student-teacher contact days, exceeding the contact requirements set by the Colorado Department of Education. School is held from Monday to Thursday, from approximately 8am to 4pm, depending on the individual school.¹⁶ According to an elementary school principal on the shortened schedule, “we always schedule art, music, or PE as the last hour of the day, because the younger students do get tired.”¹⁷ Students learning under the four-day week have not shown any decrease in learning on aptitude tests in any of the states.

However, a Colorado school administrator believes that this system would be **less feasible in an urban area**: “It would be tough to make this work in a big-city district. There would probably be a lot of kids spending their Fridays hanging out on the street. But in these country towns, if a kid suddenly shows up on the street, phone calls will be made. People watch out for their neighbors. A Friday off is just an easier thing to manage in a rural district.”¹⁸

Oregon School Districts

[\(Click on link to article\)](#)

Hood River School District

Total Students: 3,966
Student/Teacher Ratio: 16.1
Total Schools: 10

Redmond School District

Total Students: 7,086
Student/Teacher Ratio: 20.5
Total Schools: 13

North Wasco School District

Total Students: 2,984
Student/Teacher Ratio: 18.6
Total Schools: 7

Central Point School District

Total Students: 4,696
Student/Teacher Ratio: 21.7
Total Schools: 12

Corbett School District

Total Students: 699
Student/Teacher Ratio: 21.5
Total Schools: 4

¹⁵ Reid, T.R. “Seven States Adopt Four-Day School Week; Fridays Off Help Systems Cut Costs,” Washington Post (26 December 2002). Accessed via Nexis.

¹⁶ “East Grand School District: District Description.” East Grand School District. Pg. 2.

http://mail.egsd.org/District_Description/District%20Description%2001.pdf?FCItemID=S008D9D77

¹⁷ Reid, T.R. Op.cit.

¹⁸ Ibid.

North Wasco, Central Point, Redmond, and Corbett School Districts use a four-day school week schedule. Additionally, the Hood River School District in Oregon recently considered adopting a four-day school week.

In a memorandum from Hood River to its Board of Directors, the **potential positive and negative consequences of a four-day school week** were outlined.¹⁹ Included in these consequences were the estimated cost savings from transferring to a four-day school week. The estimation assumed that teachers in the district would continue to work full-time, but would only work for four days and would have their pay reduced accordingly and that some experienced classified staff would leave for full-time positions elsewhere. Considering these and other assumptions, the estimated **cost savings ranged from \$538,424 to \$1,065,678**, based on salaries and benefits savings, reduced transportation costs, and reduced substitute teacher costs.²⁰

The report **provides implementation details from four school districts in Oregon**,²¹ including considerable information regarding Redmond and Central Point School Districts' adoption of the four-day school week.²²

¹⁹ "Memorandum: Four-Day School Week – Fact Finding," Hood River County School Board of Directors (16 November 2009). Pg. 2

<http://www.hoodriver.k12.or.us/169210417192310617/lib/169210417192310617/fourdayschoolweek/Fact-Finding-Four-Day-School-Week-Nov2009.pdf>

²⁰ Ibid. Pg. 3.

²¹ Ibid. Pg. 9.

²² Ibid. Pg. 13-51.

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