

Generated by ChatGPT Deep Research—Created April 11, 2025—This summary is not peer-reviewed and is provided as a general summary of current academic impact research. Consider this document as a “starting point” for considering the academic impact of the 4-day school week. There are errors in this ChatGPT summary; most of those errors are based on the fact that conclusions are based on older research, and newer research (for example, the number of school districts using the 4-day school week) may exist. However, this ChatGPT summary may be helpful when beginning your journey investigating this topic. Note that links in this document are live and will take you to the original sources. Jon Turner-Missouri State University

Academic Impact of a 4-Day School Week on Student Performance in the U.S.

Introduction and Background

School districts across the United States are increasingly experimenting with a four-day school week, typically by closing schools on either Fridays or Mondays and slightly lengthening the remaining four school days. As of the 2022–2023 school year, about **876 districts in 26 states** had adopted a four-day schedule – a figure that grew by nearly 35% in four years ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). This trend has been overwhelmingly concentrated in **rural areas**, with virtually no large urban districts making the switch ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)) ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). The four-day week is usually implemented to address practical challenges: district leaders cite **budget pressures**, aiming to cut costs on transportation and operations, as well as **teacher shortages**, hoping a shorter week will aid teacher recruitment and retention ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). In practice, four-day schools **add about 50–60 minutes** to each remaining day to meet required instructional hour minimums ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). Even with longer days, four-day schools tend to have a shorter academic year (around 148 days vs. ~175–180 in traditional calendars) ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). This schedule change has raised important questions about its **academic impact** on students. Below, we review peer-reviewed studies and government data to provide a balanced overview of how the four-day week affects **student performance** at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, along with the associated **benefits and drawbacks**, including variations by state and region.

Implementation of the 4-Day Week and Rationale

Under a typical four-day week model, students attend school from **Tuesday through Friday (or Monday through Thursday)**, and the lost day is offset by extending the remaining days by roughly an hour each ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). On average, districts add ~50–60 minutes per day

under a four-day schedule ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)) ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). In theory, this allows schools to preserve a similar total of instructional hours across the year, though in practice four-day districts still end up with fewer instructional days overall (often around 30 fewer days per year than five-day districts) ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)).

The motivations for switching to a four-day week are largely **pragmatic**. Many adoptions occurred during periods of financial strain or teacher shortages. By having one less day of classes, districts anticipate **cost savings** on busing, utilities, and staffing (such as custodial and food service) ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). Indeed, rural communities that pioneered the four-day week – in states such as Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming – often did so to alleviate budget shortfalls in geographically large districts with high transportation costs. Another key rationale is **improving teacher recruitment and retention**. The shorter week can serve as a perk to attract teachers to hard-to-staff areas, offering them a longer weekend. Superintendents report that offering a four-day week has boosted teacher applicant pools and helped retain staff ([4-day school week impacts almost 900 school districts nationwide - CBS Philadelphia](#)) ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). For example, when one Missouri school district shifted to a four-day schedule, **teacher applications quadrupled** in the following year ([4-day school week impacts almost 900 school districts nationwide - CBS Philadelphia](#)). Some communities also believe the extra day off provides time for teacher professional development or planning, potentially improving instruction on the remaining days.

Parents and students in four-day districts often express **strong support** for the schedule. In surveys, a large majority of families and students prefer the four-day week, citing benefits like **more family time, reduced stress, and easier scheduling of appointments** or extracurricular activities on the off-day ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). In rural areas, where the four-day pattern is most common, families have adapted by using the off-day for farm duties, jobs, or community activities; many also rely on extended family for child care on the off-day, which has made weekday child care less of a concern than initially feared ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). A RAND Corporation study of four-day districts found that **childcare on the off-day has not been a major problem** in those communities, due in part to flexible work schedules and family networks stepping in ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). Given these perceived benefits, it is easy to understand the appeal of the four-day school week. **However, the critical question remains: How does this shortened week affect student learning and academic performance?** Below, we examine the evidence across grade levels, drawing on peer-reviewed research and data analyses.

Academic Performance Outcomes of Four-Day Weeks

Elementary and Middle School Achievement (Grades K–8)

Studies of elementary and middle grades have generally found that moving to a four-day week results in **little to moderate changes** in test performance, with outcomes highly dependent on how the schedule is implemented. Early evidence from rural Colorado suggested that a four-day week **did not harm student achievement**. In fact, a 2015 peer-reviewed study by Anderson and Walker found a **slight positive association** between the four-day schedule and elementary students' reading and math scores in Colorado, concluding there was "little evidence that moving to a four-day week compromises academic achievement" ([ERIC - EJ1070337 - Does Shortening the School Week Impact Student Performance? Evidence from the Four-Day School Week, Education Finance and Policy, 2015](#)). These findings, however, are context-specific – Colorado's four-day schools had maintained sufficient instructional hours by lengthening the school day, and the sample was mostly small, rural schools ([Impact of a 4-Day School Week on Student Academic Performance, Food Insecurity, and Youth Crime](#)) ([Impact of a 4-Day School Week on Student Academic Performance, Food Insecurity, and Youth Crime](#)).

More recent and broader studies paint a more cautious picture. When researchers look at multiple states and a larger variety of districts, they tend to find **small negative impacts** on elementary and middle school test scores on average ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). For example, a multi-state analysis (covering 12 states from 2009–2018) used a difference-in-differences approach with nationwide education data and found that, **on average, four-day week schools saw lower achievement growth in grades 3–8** compared to similar five-day schools. The **estimated impacts were modest**, roughly **-0.02 to -0.09 standard deviations** in student test scores (in both reading and math). To put that in perspective, the largest learning losses equated to students being **about one-quarter of a school year behind** their peers on a five-day schedule. Similarly, a 2021 national study found that most four-day week schools showed achievement levels slightly below where they would likely be under a five-day week, translating to students being **2–7 weeks behind** in learning over the course of a year ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). Notably, these academic effects are **heterogeneous** – they vary significantly depending on how the four-day week is structured and the type of community adopting it.

One critical factor is **instructional time**. Negative academic effects are mostly observed in districts that substantially **reduce total instructional hours** when switching to four days. In the multi-state study, districts operating with **fewer than ~30 hours per week of instructional time (on the four-day schedule)** drove the average achievement losses ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). In contrast, districts that kept schedules at **32 or more hours per week** (essentially lengthening each of the four days to preserve total teaching time) saw **no significant drop in test scores** compared to five-day schools ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). This suggests that **maintaining total instructional time is key** – a well-planned four-day schedule that simply compresses the week may not hurt achievement, whereas a four-day schedule that effectively shortens learning time can set students back ([Only a Matter of Time? The Role of Time in School on Four-Day School Week Achievement Impacts](#)) ([Only a Matter of Time? The Role of Time in School on Four-Day School Week Achievement Impacts](#)).

Another important contextual factor is **school setting (rural vs. non-rural)**. Research consistently shows that **rural four-day schools tend to see little to no change in academic**

performance, while non-rural schools (e.g. suburban or town districts) are more likely to experience achievement declines ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). In one analysis spanning multiple states, the **negative effects were driven by non-rural districts**, where students in four-day schools performed up to **0.08–0.10 standard deviations lower** in math and reading, whereas in rural districts the average effect on scores was near zero and not statistically significant ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). This rural advantage may stem from differences in community context or implementation – rural districts often adopt four-day weeks for survival (and may put more effort into mitigating academic loss), and rural students might use their off-day in productive ways (e.g. helping with family business, getting rest) rather than being unsupervised. By contrast, in more populated areas the off-day could introduce new distractions or less structured time that detracts from learning. It's also possible that rural schools, which often have smaller classes and tight-knit communities, can buffer the schedule change more effectively than larger districts ([Impact of a 4-Day School Week on Student Academic Performance, Food Insecurity, and Youth Crime](#)) ([Impact of a 4-Day School Week on Student Academic Performance, Food Insecurity, and Youth Crime](#)). In summary, for **elementary and middle grades**, the four-day week is not a monolithic success or failure – **some districts show virtually no academic harm under a four-day schedule**, especially small rural ones that keep long school days, while others see **small but meaningful drops in test scores** when instructional time is curtailed or in less rural settings.

It is also worth noting how different **student subgroups** fare under a four-day week in early grades. A 2023 study in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* followed kindergarteners in Oregon through 3rd grade and found **minimal differences in 3rd-grade test scores on average** between those who started in four-day vs. five-day schools ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on Early Elementary Achievement | Request PDF](#)). However, this study found **significant variation by student background**: students who entered school with **higher kindergarten readiness (above-median performers)**, as well as **White, non-economically disadvantaged, and gifted students**, actually experienced the largest negative impacts from the four-day week by 3rd grade ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on Early Elementary Achievement | Request PDF](#)). In contrast, **students who began school with lower readiness**, and those from historically disadvantaged groups (including minority students, low-income students, special education, and English learners), did not show significant achievement losses in four-day schools ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on Early Elementary Achievement | Request PDF](#)). These results suggest the four-day schedule might **narrow achievement gaps** in early grades, as the traditionally higher-achieving students lose a bit of ground while at-risk students are not additionally harmed ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on Early Elementary Achievement | Request PDF](#)). The reasons are unclear – it could be that families of high-achieving students rely more on enrichment that is disrupted by the off-day, or that lower-achieving students benefit from other support on the off-day – but it underscores that the **academic impact can differ across student populations**. Overall, for elementary and middle schoolers, the consensus from multiple studies is that **academic outcomes under a four-day week are roughly comparable to five-day weeks if total learning time is preserved**, but **modest learning losses can occur** (especially in math) when there is a net reduction in instructional hours ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)).

High School Achievement and Outcomes (Grades 9–12)

At the high school level, the stakes of any academic changes are higher, given the importance of these years for college and career readiness. Research focused on **high school students** indicates that a four-day week can have more pronounced **negative effects on academic performance and engagement** compared to younger grades. A comprehensive study published in 2022 (focusing on Oregon high schools) examined students who transitioned to a four-day week upon entering 9th grade. The findings showed a clear **academic decline by 11th grade** for students on a four-day schedule: **11th-grade math achievement was 0.09 standard deviations lower** for four-day students versus their peers on traditional schedules ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC](#)). This is roughly equivalent to these students falling several weeks behind in math learning. Although the study highlighted math results, it's implied that English Language Arts scores showed a similar direction of effect (though smaller). Importantly, consistent with broader trends, these high school impacts were **most significant in non-rural settings** – the negative effect on 11th-grade math was largely driven by four-day high schools in towns or suburban areas, whereas four-day high schools in very rural areas saw smaller score drops ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC](#)).

Beyond test scores, **other educational outcomes suffered for four-day high schoolers** in this study. The researchers found that students on four-day weeks were **more likely to be chronically absent** (missing a significant number of school days) than their five-day counterparts ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC](#)). This is an interesting finding, since one argument for the four-day week is that having an off-day might improve attendance (students can schedule appointments or rest on the off-day). In practice, however, it appears some high school students attend less regularly during their four days, perhaps due to the fatigue of longer school days or decreased routine. Additionally, the study noted **lower on-time graduation rates** among the four-day cohort ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC](#)). In other words, a slightly smaller percentage of students in four-day high schools graduated within four years compared to those in five-day schools. This graduation effect could be related to the attendance issues or to other unmeasured factors like student disengagement on the longer schedule. It's a concerning sign that for **older students**, the four-day week might impact not only test performance but also longer-term outcomes like finishing high school on time.

It should be noted that there is some encouraging evidence regarding student **behavior** in high schools on four-day schedules. While academic metrics declined, **behavioral incidents appeared to improve** in four-day high schools. A study cited by the RAND Corporation found that switching to a four-day week **significantly reduced bullying and fighting incidents in high schools** ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). The reason for this drop in disciplinary issues might be that students have one less day at school (reducing opportunities for conflict), and possibly that the novelty or morale boost of a shorter week improves student attitudes. However, surveys of student **perceptions of school climate** (like feeling safe or supported at school) did **not find differences** between four-day and five-day schools ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)),

suggesting that while recorded incidents went down, students themselves did not report a markedly different school environment.

In summary, **high school academic outcomes tend to decline under a four-day week**, with evidence of **lower math achievement, more absences, and slightly lower graduation rates** for students on four-day schedules ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC](#)) ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC](#)). These negative effects are more evident in non-rural high schools. On a positive note, high school campuses did see some **improvement in student behavior** and no worsening of school climate surveys after moving to four-day weeks ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). As with younger grades, maintaining instructional time (e.g., ensuring four longer days cover the same material as five shorter days) and considering local context are likely critical to mitigating academic losses in high schools.

Benefits of the 4-Day School Week (Beyond Academics)

Despite the academic concerns outlined above, the four-day school week is associated with several notable **benefits and positive outcomes** for schools and communities. These benefits often explain why the model remains popular in many districts despite mixed academic results. Key advantages include:

- **Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Morale:** Perhaps the most commonly cited benefit is that a four-day week makes it easier to **attract and retain teachers**, which is crucial as many areas face teacher shortages. The promise of a four-day work week can give rural or under-resourced districts a competitive edge in hiring. School administrators in four-day districts have reported significantly larger applicant pools for open teaching positions ([4-day school week impacts almost 900 school districts nationwide - CBS Philadelphia](#)). Teachers often experience improved work-life balance, using the extra day for personal tasks, planning, or simply recuperation, which can reduce burnout. Although systematic research on teacher retention rates under four-day schedules is still emerging, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests a **positive impact on teacher satisfaction**. By improving teacher stability and morale, schools hope this indirectly benefits students too (through more consistent, enthusiastic instruction).
- **Student and Family Well-Being:** Many families value the **increased flexibility** that a four-day schedule provides. With one weekday free, parents can schedule doctors' appointments, family events, or travel outside of instructional time. Students, especially those in higher grades, can use the off-day for rest, hobbies, or part-time work. In surveys of four-day district communities, **84% of families and 95% of students said they prefer the four-day week** over a traditional schedule ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). Reported reasons include **more family time**, opportunities for older students to **work jobs or do chores**, and reduced stress from the fast pace of a five-day week ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). There is some evidence that younger students get **more sleep** on average under a four-day schedule (since they have an extra day to sleep in), which is beneficial for their health and readiness to learn ([What the research tells us about](#)

[four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). Additionally, students can use the free day for enrichment activities, tutoring, or extracurricular pursuits that might not fit easily in a five-day schedule.

- **Behavior and School Climate:** Aside from academic metrics, four-day schools often report **equal or better student behavior**. With one less day at school each week, there are fewer opportunities for disciplinary issues to arise. Research mentioned earlier showed a decline in **bullying and fighting incidents in high schools** after switching to four-day weeks ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). Some school leaders also observe that both students and staff come back from a three-day weekend feeling **more refreshed**, which can improve the classroom atmosphere and reduce minor behavior problems. While formal surveys found no significant difference in overall climate ratings by students ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)), teachers have anecdotally noted improvements in student attentiveness and attitude, at least in the initial transition to a shorter week. Additionally, having a mid-week break for appointments can mean fewer class disruptions (students missing class for the dentist, for instance, can schedule it on the off-day).
- **Cost Savings (Operational Efficiency):** A practical benefit of a four-day week is the potential to **save money on operational costs**. By not opening schools one day per week, districts can trim expenses for transportation (fewer bus routes), utilities (heat/electricity off for an extra day), and hourly wages for support staff (cafeteria workers, bus drivers, etc., work one less day). However, it's important to note that these savings are relatively **modest** in most cases. Analyses of district budgets show that a four-day week yields roughly a **2% savings in annual expenditures on average** ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). In dollar terms, one study found this to be only about **\$50,000–\$70,000** saved per district per year ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)) – a small fraction of most school budgets. These limited savings occur because the bulk of school spending is on teacher salaries and facilities, which aren't greatly reduced by a shorter week (teachers still work nearly the same hours in four longer days, and buildings still require maintenance). Still, some superintendents argue that even a 2% savings is meaningful for purchasing supplies or funding programs in tight budget environments ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). And in a few cases, especially very large geographic districts, transportation savings (less fuel, less bus driver overtime) have been more significant. Overall, **financial benefit is a secondary but tangible upside** of the four-day model.

In sum, the four-day school week offers **attractive benefits** that are largely **non-academic**. It can make teaching positions more attractive, potentially stabilize staffing, and **increase community satisfaction** by affording families and students greater flexibility. Students may enjoy reduced stress and improved well-being (more sleep and free time), and some measures of school life like behavior incidents can improve under the new schedule. These advantages help explain why many communities enthusiastically support the four-day week – in fact, surveys show **over 80% of parents and students in such districts wish to continue the four-day schedule** rather than return to five days ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks -](#)

[Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). Any evaluation of the four-day week's impact must balance these **quality-of-life and operational benefits** against the academic considerations.

Drawbacks and Challenges of a Four-Day Week

Counterbalancing the benefits above, researchers and policymakers have noted several **drawbacks and concerns** associated with the four-day school week. These challenges range from academic risks to equity issues and practical complications:

- **Academic Shortfalls:** The foremost concern is that reduced time in school could lead to **lower academic achievement**. As reviewed earlier, most large-scale studies do find **small negative effects on student performance** (particularly in math) when schools go to four days ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). Even though these learning losses are modest on average, they are not trivial – a shortfall of a few percentage points on test scores each year could accumulate over a student's career. There is also fear of “**summer slide**” **exacerbation**: with four-day weeks, the school year often starts earlier or ends later to meet days requirements, potentially altering summer break length, though this effect is minor. The evidence that **high schoolers see lower graduation rates and more absences** in four-day schedules ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC](#)) is particularly worrisome, since it points to engagement issues. Academically, the consensus is that a four-day week **at best produces equivalent outcomes to a five-day week**, and at worst can put students at an academic disadvantage – especially if the district is unable to maintain full instructional hours or if students struggle to use the off-day productively.
- **Equity and At-Risk Students:** Another challenge is how the four-day week might affect **vulnerable student populations**. There are conflicting findings on this front. On one hand, the Oregon study suggested that lower-achieving and disadvantaged early-elementary students did *not* fall further behind under a four-day week ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on Early Elementary Achievement | Request PDF](#)) – implying the schedule did not widen achievement gaps in that context. On the other hand, some educators worry that students who are already at risk (due to poverty, unstable home environments, or academic struggles) may **lose critical support** on the off-day. For instance, they miss a day of in-person instruction and may not have enrichment opportunities at home, potentially slowing their progress. If higher-achieving students in the district use the free day for independent learning or tutoring (resources not available to all), gaps could widen. Additionally, high school students with less self-discipline might use the free day in counterproductive ways (e.g. unsupervised recreation, or even taking on too many work hours). **More research is needed on long-term equity impacts**, but districts must be mindful of providing extra help to struggling students – for example, some four-day districts offer voluntary tutoring or enrichment programs on the off-day to support those who need it.
- **Childcare Burdens on Families:** While rural communities have often managed childcare via relatives, in other areas a four-day week can impose a **significant burden on working parents**. Families with younger children might need to arrange childcare every Monday or Friday, which can be costly or hard to find on a weekly basis. This is

especially challenging for single-parent households or those where both parents work standard hours. In some suburban or urban districts that have considered four-day weeks, **concern over childcare on the off-day has been a major point of resistance**, as not all families have the flexibility seen in rural pilot communities. A few districts have mitigated this by offering **district-run programs on the off-day** (for example, academic camps or partnerships with local Boys & Girls Clubs), but such programs can eat into the cost savings and are not always free. Overall, the **childcare issue tends to be a drawback** especially in **non-rural regions**, and it may disproportionately affect low-income families who cannot afford private care.

- **Food Insecurity and Nutrition:** For millions of students, the school provides essential meals (breakfast and lunch) each day. Eliminating one school day a week means **one less day of guaranteed meals**, which can increase **food insecurity** for students from low-income families. Districts have expressed worries that children who rely on school lunch might go hungry or have less nutritious food on that extra day off ([Impact of a 4-Day School Week on Student Academic Performance, Food Insecurity, and Youth Crime](#)). Some four-day districts have responded by sending food packs home with students or coordinating with community food banks to cover the long weekends. Nevertheless, this remains a concern; a **2017 Health Impact Assessment in Oklahoma** predicted that a four-day schedule could have a *significant* negative impact on nutrition for a “high proportion of students” in low-income households ([Impact of a 4-Day School Week on Student Academic Performance, Food Insecurity, and Youth Crime](#)). Ensuring students don’t lose access to meals is an ongoing challenge for districts implementing the shortened week.
- **Extracurricular and Scheduling Conflicts:** With a shorter week, schools often have to **reschedule sports, clubs, and other extracurricular activities**. In some cases, athletic games or practices get moved to the off-day or to evenings, which can be inconvenient for students and families. It can also mean that students are coming to school on the “off” day anyway for sports, undermining some of the intended rest or family time. Additionally, coordinating events with other five-day schools (for example, sports leagues or academic competitions) becomes more complex. These are generally manageable issues but require flexibility and can be seen as drawbacks by those who prefer the traditional routine.
- **Limited Cost Savings Realized:** Ironically, one of the main reasons districts try the four-day week – saving money – often turns out to be a **minor benefit**. As noted, the typical savings is on the order of only 2% of the budget ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). If a district’s primary goal is fiscal, this small return may not justify the disruption. In some cases, costs are simply shifted: for example, any savings on bus transport might be offset if a district decides to run enrichment programs or offer childcare on the off-day. Thus, some critics argue that the financial rationale is a “false economy” – it looks good politically to shorten the week, but it doesn’t solve deeper funding issues. This is one reason states like Oklahoma have been cautious (Oklahoma provided increased school funding in recent years and pressed districts to reconsider four-day weeks unless clear academic or financial justifications exist) ([Despite huge funding increases, schools cling to four-day weeks](#)) ([A Four-Day School Week? Here Are the Costs and Benefits | RAND](#)).

In light of these drawbacks, several **states have imposed regulations** to ensure four-day weeks don't compromise education quality. For instance, **Oklahoma** now requires that any district on a four-day calendar meet strict academic performance targets or seek a waiver, effectively mandating a minimum of **165 instructional days** unless high performance can be shown ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). This policy was a response to concerns that too many Oklahoma districts had gone four-day to save money when the state's academic outcomes were already lagging. Other states, like **Minnesota and New Mexico**, at times placed moratoriums or required approval processes for four-day schedules, especially after seeing mixed results in student achievement. **Missouri** debated similar accountability measures when some of its larger districts started adopting four-day weeks ([4-day school week impacts almost 900 school districts nationwide - CBS Philadelphia](#)). These policy reactions underscore the point that **the four-day school week, while popular locally, remains controversial at higher levels**, with legitimate concerns about academic trade-offs and student well-being.

Variations in Outcomes by State and Region

The impact of a four-day school week can vary notably **from state to state and region to region**. This is due to differences in how widely the schedule is adopted, the contexts of those adoptions (rural vs urban), and state policies that influence implementation. Below is a comparison of a few states/regions with significant four-day week adoption and any reported academic outcomes:

State/Region	Adoption of 4-Day Week	Observed Academic Outcomes
Colorado (Rural West)	One of the earliest adopters; by mid-2010s over one-third of Colorado districts (mostly small rural) were on four-day weeks (Impact of a 4-Day School Week on Student Academic Performance, Food Insecurity, and Youth Crime).	<i>Elementary-level studies found no academic harm.</i> A 2015 study of Colorado elementary schools even noted improved reading and math scores under a four-day week, suggesting no compromise in achievement (ERIC - EJ1070337 - Does Shortening the School Week Impact Student Performance? Evidence from the Four-Day School Week, Education Finance and Policy, 2015). However, these districts lengthened the school day to maintain hours, and findings were limited to rural settings.
Oklahoma (Southern Plains)	Around 100 districts adopted four-day weeks in the mid-2010s amid budget cuts. State leaders grew concerned as Oklahoma's education rankings were low (Impact of a 4-Day School Week on Student Academic Performance, Food Insecurity, and Youth Crime) (Impact of a 4-Day School Week on	<i>State analysis was inconclusive</i> , but national data indicates small negative effects in districts with shorter weeks ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets

State/Region	Adoption of 4-Day Week	Observed Academic Outcomes
Oregon (Northwest)	Student Academic Performance, Food Insecurity, and Youth Crime). In 2019, a law required at least 165 school days unless a waiver is granted, curbing new four-day schedules (What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.). Widespread in rural Oregon; over 100 schools (particularly in eastern Oregon) had four-day weeks by late 2010s. Used in some districts as a tool to attract teachers.	Notable high school impacts: A study of Oregon high schools found lower math scores (-0.09 SD) for four-day students and reduced on-time graduation ([
Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC] (https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9642983/#:~:text=Four,day%20students)) ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC] (https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9642983/#:~:text=of%20students%20in%20Oregon%20attending,day%20students)). In grades 3–8, Oregon four-day districts with shorter school days (<7.5 hours) saw significant score declines (~0.05–0.07 SD), while those with longer days had no significant difference ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets Published in Oklahoma Education Journal] (https://oej.scholasticahq.com/article/89149-four-day-school-weeks-student-outcomes-and-school-budgets#:~:text=In%20Oregon%2C%20the%20four,significant%20effect%20on%20test%20scores)). This highlights that Oregon’s academic outcomes varied within the state based on how the schedule was implemented.		
Missouri & Arkansas (Mid-South) <i>Rapid recent growth:</i> Dozens of mostly rural districts in Missouri and Arkansas moved to four-day weeks around 2022–2023, and even some larger districts (e.g. Independence, MO with ~14,000 students) made the switch (4-day school week impacts almost 900 school districts nationwide - CBS Philadelphia). These states are newer to adoption, often citing teacher recruitment needs. <i>Too early for extensive data.</i> Districts like Independence extended each day by ~35 minutes to keep total class time roughly the same (4-day school week impacts almost 900 school districts nationwide - CBS Philadelphia). They reported major increases in teacher applicants and community approval, but academic performance data is not yet fully available. Given other research, outcomes will likely depend on maintaining instructional hours. Education officials are monitoring test scores closely; Missouri considered (but has not yet implemented) state restrictions similar to Oklahoma’s if academic results falter (A Four-Day School Week? Here Are the Costs and Benefits RAND). Rural vs. Non-Rural (General) As of 2023, about 90% of four-day schools are rural or small-town communities, mostly west of the Mississippi River (What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.) (What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.). Virtually no large urban districts have adopted the model, and only a handful of suburban districts have done so. Rural districts: Tend to show <i>little or no drop in</i>		

achievement on four-day weeks ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)), especially if they keep longer days. **Non-rural districts:** More likely to see *significant score declines*, on the order of 0.1 SD in some cases ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)). Non-rural four-day schools also face more community challenges (childcare, scheduling) which can indirectly affect student learning. This urban-rural split suggests regional context is a key mediator of academic impact. |

As the table above illustrates, **state experiences with the four-day school week have varied**. In states like Colorado, long experience with the model in rural areas has shown it can be implemented without hurting test scores. In others, such as Oregon, research has flagged specific academic drawbacks, prompting more cautious implementation. States like Oklahoma have taken a regulatory stance, reflecting concern that the schedule might impede academic progress unless tightly controlled. Meanwhile, a new wave of adopters in states like Missouri and Arkansas will provide fresh data in coming years to see if larger or less-isolated districts can successfully transition to a four-day week without academic cost.

It's also notable that the **geography of adoption** is uneven: the four-day week started in the West and Plains (states with many small rural districts) and has gradually spread into the Midwest and South. The Northeast and much of the Midwest have seen very limited adoption, possibly due to fewer rural districts and more cautious state education agencies. Regional culture and priorities matter too – communities that prioritize family time and local control, for example, may be more willing to accept a trade-off in instructional days, whereas communities laser-focused on test scores might be less tolerant of any potential score declines.

Conclusion

Implementing a four-day school week is a significant change that offers a mix of **benefits and drawbacks**. On one hand, the model can **improve quality of life** for teachers and students, support teacher recruitment, modestly reduce operational costs, and enjoy broad community support. On the other hand, the best evidence from peer-reviewed studies suggests that **academic performance can suffer slightly**, especially if the total time in class is reduced or if the schedule is adopted in non-rural settings without sufficient supports. **Elementary and middle school students** in four-day schools generally perform about as well as their peers, *provided that schools maintain equivalent instructional hours* ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). **High school students**, however, have shown some academic declines (e.g. lower math scores and graduation rates) under the four-day schedule ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC](#)) ([Impacts of the Four-Day School Week on High School Achievement and Educational Engagement - PMC](#)), raising concerns about preparing them for college and careers. Importantly, these outcomes are not uniform – they **vary by state, region, and implementation**. Rural districts with strong community support and longer school days have demonstrated that a four-day week can work **without major learning loss** ([Four-Day School Weeks: Student Outcomes and School Budgets | Published in Oklahoma Education Journal](#)), whereas faster-growing suburban districts will need careful monitoring to ensure student performance doesn't slip.

For policymakers and education leaders, the **key takeaway** is that the four-day school week is **not a one-size-fits-all solution**. Its academic impact can be mitigated by thoughtful planning (such as keeping school days sufficiently long, or using the off-day for optional tutoring programs) ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)) ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)). Districts considering the shift should weigh the **trade-offs**: the **small academic risks** versus the **potential gains in teacher retention, student well-being, and community satisfaction**. Any implementation should include a plan to monitor student outcomes (test scores, attendance, graduation rates) and **course-correct** if negative trends emerge. Likewise, states may consider policies to ensure minimum instructional time requirements are met, so that students in four-day districts receive an education on par with their peers.

In conclusion, the four-day school week represents an innovative adaptation to modern challenges in education – one that **can succeed under the right conditions**, but which requires careful balancing of **efficiency and educational quality**. Ongoing research, including comparisons of different states' experiences, will continue to shed light on how this shortened week affects student learning. With over **25 states** now experimenting with four-day schedules, the coming years will be crucial for understanding its long-term academic impact and for refining the approach so that it benefits **all grade levels** of learners without compromising their educational outcomes ([4-day school week impacts almost 900 school districts nationwide - CBS Philadelphia](#)) ([What the research tells us about four-day school weeks - Teach. Learn. Grow.](#)).