

Scheduling the School Day

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A Reader’s Guide to Fifty Years of Evidence, Reversals, and Contested Definitions of Success

ABSTRACT

Two scheduling reforms — staggered/tiered school bus systems (including the “bell-time” changes that drive them) and the four-day school week — are routinely presented to communities as straightforward, evidence-based improvements. This document argues that neither reform has a single, stable meaning of “success,” because the outcome depends on which stakeholder is asked, which metric is chosen, which time horizon is used, and whether the analysis is done at the district-wide average or at the level of a specific subgroup. Drawing on public reporting, peer-reviewed research, government and think-tank studies, and direct statements from parents, superintendents, teachers, and school-board members across at least twenty states and roughly five decades (1930s–2026), this document compiles the fullest available record of both reforms, organizes it chronologically and thematically, and equips the reader with a framework, a glossary, twenty formal interrogatories, and two scorecards to reach an independent judgment.

A NOTE ON METHOD AND ITS LIMITS

No single document can catalog every district that has tried either policy — the four-day week alone is estimated to be in use at more than 2,100 individual schools right now, and staggered/tiered busing is close to universal among mid-size and large U.S. districts.¹ What follows is instead the fullest record obtainable from public reporting, academic literature, and

government/think-tank sources at time of writing: dozens of named districts across at least twenty states, multiple peer-reviewed and government-commissioned studies, and direct quotations from parents, teachers, and administrators on both sides of both debates. Where a claim rests on a single study or a single anecdote, that is flagged explicitly rather than generalized. Where studies conflict, both are presented rather than one being silently dropped.

CHAPTER 1 — WHAT DOES “SUCCESS” MEAN HERE? A FRAMEWORK BEFORE THE EVIDENCE

Every case study in this document can be described as either a success or a failure depending on which of the following eight lenses is applied. Most of the disputes recorded below are not really disagreements about facts — they are disagreements about which fact should count as the measure of success. This chapter sets out the lenses; Chapters 2–5 apply them.

1.1 Success for whom?

A district’s transportation office, a superintendent facing a recruiting shortage, a teachers’ union, a two-income family, a single parent, a family with a child in special education, a rural farm family, and a teenager are not measuring the same thing, and a policy can be a genuine success on one axis while failing on another *for the same district at the same time*. Colorado’s Mancos superintendent Todd Cordrey has said the four-day week helped teacher recruitment even while he has seen no measurable difference in student achievement² — the same policy, simultaneously, is a staffing success and an academic non-event, according to the same person. A RAND Corporation study of Idaho, New Mexico, and Oklahoma found broad parental support for the four-day week across nearly every demographic group studied — except families with only elementary-age children, and families with children receiving special-education services, who were both less supportive than everyone else.³ The same calendar, in the same district, can poll as popular overall while leaving a specific, less-powerful subgroup quietly behind.

1.2 Output vs. outcome

“We reduced the bus fleet by 50 vehicles” is an output — an auditable, countable thing the district did. “Student learning improved” is an outcome — the thing anyone should ultimately care about. Boston’s 2017 bus-routing algorithm delivered a clean output win: \$5 million saved, 50 fewer buses, no lengthened rides.⁴ Whether that output translated into any student outcome is a separate, unanswered question. Conflating the two — assuming a saved dollar or a shrunk fleet is automatically good for kids — is the single most common sleight of hand in how both reforms get marketed to communities.

1.3 Averages hide subgroups

A district-wide test-score average can sit flat while masking a real effect underneath it. Researchers examining North Carolina elementary schools found that school start times have their largest impact on traditionally disadvantaged groups, and that those same groups are also most likely to be disrupted by the *process* of changing the times⁵ — meaning a policy could show “no significant district-wide effect” while quietly reshuffling who succeeds and who struggles. Boston’s own 2017 equity analysis found that 31% of Black K–6 students and 27% of Hispanic K–6 students were starting school before 8 a.m. under the old schedule⁶ — a disparity invisible unless someone deliberately disaggregates the data by race.

1.4 Self-reported satisfaction vs. externally measured effect

These frequently point in opposite directions, and both can be true simultaneously. Roughly 84% of families already living under a four-day week say they want to keep it.⁷ RAND’s own survey of Idaho, New Mexico, and Oklahoma parents found nearly three-quarters described themselves as “very satisfied” with the shortened schedule, with just 6% mildly or quite dissatisfied — even though about 90% of those same parents reported their children primarily spent the fifth day of the week at home.⁸ Meanwhile, the most rigorous academic review available found no evidence of large positive learning effects, and financial savings averaging only 0.4%–2.5% of a district’s budget.^{9,10} A family can be glad to have three-day weekends and simultaneously be sending a child to a school where nothing measurable improved, and something may have gotten slightly worse.

1.5 Short-run vs. long-run, and the first-mover problem

Early adopters of the four-day week reported a real edge in teacher recruitment — RAND’s 2021 study of Idaho, New Mexico, and Oklahoma found district leaders believed the schedule gave them a genuine competitive advantage, with long-vacant positions finally filled.¹¹ But a competitive advantage, by definition, erodes as competitors copy it. Colorado, where four-day weeks are now common rather than novel, shows negligible measurable effects¹² — consistent with the theory that “we’re the only ones offering this” was doing the real work, not the schedule itself. The same dynamic likely applies to staggered start times used to attract families or staff: an advantage available to everyone is not an advantage.

1.6 Political durability is its own kind of data

Whether or not a randomized controlled trial exists, a reversal, a lawsuit, or a new voter-approval law is itself a signal that a meaningful number of stakeholders concluded the policy wasn't working for them — regardless of what any study eventually finds. Missouri's law requiring voters, not just school boards, to approve four-day calendars exists because close to 80% of voters wanted a direct say,¹³ which is itself a proxy for widespread unease that districts were making this call unilaterally.

1.7 Metrics can be gamed, not just missed

When Oklahoma's state education department tried to hold four-day districts accountable by requiring schools to hit statewide-average proficiency, some districts didn't improve instruction — they invented "virtual Fridays," effectively re-adding a fifth day on paper while providing minimal live instruction. A public-records request found more than 100 Oklahoma districts had at least one school with two or more full weeks of virtual days in a single year, and more than 60 districts had a school go virtual for three weeks or more.¹⁴ This is a textbook instance of what economists and social scientists sometimes call Goodhart's Law — when a measure becomes a target, it stops being a reliable measure — showing up in real school-policy data, not just theory.

1.8 What's the comparison baseline?

"Test scores went up after we made the change" is a weak claim if scores were rising statewide anyway. "Test scores went up compared to similar districts that didn't change" is a much stronger claim. Very few of the studies cited in this document use a true matched-control design; most compare a district to its own past, which cannot rule out an outside trend doing the real work.

Hold onto these eight lenses. They resolve most of the apparent contradictions in the chapters that follow — contradictions that are not really contradictions, once the question becomes "success by which measure, for whom, over what time horizon, compared to what baseline?"

CHAPTER 2 — STAGGERED BUS TIERING AND BELL-TIME REFORM

2.1 Why districts do this, and why it has intensified since 2021

Transportation is typically a district's second-largest expense after payroll.¹⁵ The mechanism is simple: if every school in a district starts at the same time, the district needs one bus (and one driver) per route, all running during the same 60-90 minute window. If schools are staggered by 45-60 minutes, a single bus can run two or three routes back-to-back — a technique planners call "tiering" or "blocking."¹⁶¹⁷ Staggering can cut the required fleet size by 25% or more, according to transportation-industry estimates.¹⁸

Spending varies enormously by state: during the 2017-18 school year, New York and Connecticut districts spent more than \$1,000 per student on transportation, while Oklahoma and Utah spent less than \$300.¹⁹

Since the pandemic, a second and largely separate pressure has converged on the same solution: a nationwide school bus driver shortage. By the 2024 State of School Transportation Report, 91% of districts reported experiencing a driver shortage, up from 78% in 2021.²⁰ Industry consultants now estimate that operational changes — route consolidation and bell-time staggering together — can reduce the number of drivers a district needs by 25-40%.²¹ This has made staggered tiering less a discretionary cost-saving idea and more, in many districts, an operational necessity simply to run buses at all.

Separately, and often tangled up with both of the above, pediatric sleep researchers have spent more than 25 years arguing that adolescent biology makes early start times harmful, pushing many districts toward *later* high school starts — which usually forces elementary starts *earlier* to keep the same bus fleet workable.²² More than 500 individual U.S. school districts have moved secondary start times later in response to this research since the 1990s.²³ The American Academy of Pediatrics formally recommended in 2014 that middle and high schools start no earlier than 8:30 a.m.²⁴ California made that mandatory statewide in 2022; Florida passed similar legislation in 2023.²⁵²⁶ A compiled national database lists successful start-time changes in 46 states, including all California public high schools (8:30 a.m. or later) and middle schools (8:00 a.m. or later), and 47 Pennsylvania districts and independent schools across 23 counties as of April 2026.²⁷

2.2 A chronology of driver-shortage-era bell changes (2021-2026)

This wave is recent enough, and well-enough documented in local news, to reconstruct almost year by year:

Pasco County, Florida (November 2021 - January 2022). Facing a driver shortage, the district board voted unanimously — and reluctantly — to shift bell times mid-year. Superintendent Kurt Browning was blunt about the tradeoff: "*Nobody in this district likes this plan, including this superintendent.*"²⁸ The new schedule pushed some students' days to start after 10 a.m. and end after 4:20 p.m. Parent Ashley Whittaker described the disruption to her family's routine — including softball practice

— as feeling *“like the first day of school again.”*²⁹ The board built in a review clause, saying it would revisit the plan if the driver shortage eased.³⁰

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2021-2023). The district began a phased, multi-year rollout of a standardized three-tier bell schedule, explicitly framed as a response to the driver shortage and as a way to reduce time students spent on buses.³¹ By 2022, the effort produced enough disruption that (as recorded in Chapter 2.3 below) principals said they felt blindsided by last-minute changes at the elementary level.

Baltimore City, Maryland (2022-23 school year). The district changed bell times at 93 schools, explicitly citing the driver shortage and the goal of letting each bus serve more schools per morning.³²

Seattle, Washington (2022). Seattle Public Schools proposed eliminating its two-tier bus system amid its own driver shortage, which had already forced service cutbacks in 2021-22 — cutbacks the district said it made with an eye toward racial equity.³³ Community pushback was sharp: written survey responses collected by families warned that the change would require thousands of dollars in new child care, falling inequitably on the city’s poorest families.³⁴ A local urbanist advocacy outlet argued the district should adopt a “do no harm” approach, keep the existing two-tier system, and spend the following year on more research and family engagement rather than mandate a sweeping change immediately.³⁵

Puyallup, Washington (2022-2024). With 168 buses but only 112 qualified drivers for the 2023-24 school year, the district convened a “Bell Time Task Force” of staff, families, and students, which met monthly from September 2022 onward and ultimately recommended the least disruptive of three proposed schedules — shifting most start times by five to thirty-five minutes rather than the more sweeping changes initially considered.^{36,37} District spokesperson Sarah Gillispie framed the goal explicitly in terms of equitable access, saying efficient use of transportation resources helps ensure *“all students have access to all programs in the district.”*³⁸

2.3 The case for: two clean, auditable wins

Boston Public Schools (2017). Transportation ate more than 10% of the district’s roughly \$1 billion budget, driven partly by specialized programs drawing students from across the city.³⁹ BPS partnered with MIT researchers to build a routing algorithm that re-optimized bell times and bus routes simultaneously — something districts that build routes by hand can’t easily model.⁴⁰ The result: a 7% reduction in the bus fleet (50 buses), worth an estimated **\$5 million in annual savings**, achieved without increasing the average student’s walk-to-stop distance or ride time.⁴¹ By the district’s own account, it was the single largest bus-fleet reduction in BPS history.⁴²

AC Transit / Oakland, California (2011). In an unusual reversal of the normal dynamic — where transit agencies adjust to schools, not the other way around — AC Transit reached an agreement with local schools to adjust their start times specifically to reduce what the transit system had to spend serving school-hour peaks.⁴³ Staggered school times, in one transit planner’s description, could let a district replace four buses with one, and combine two short driver shifts into a single three-hour shift.⁴⁴

2.4 The case for: sleep-focused reforms that stuck for years, not just one season

A number of districts that flipped to later secondary start times — the harder, more disruptive version of this reform, since it usually means moving elementary schedules earlier at the same time — report durable, multi-year gains and did not reverse course:

Beaufort County, South Carolina (2014). The district flipped the start times of elementary and secondary schools. Two teenagers belonging to a district administrator reportedly gained as much as 45 minutes of sleep a night after the change. In the years since, the district’s graduation rate rose from the low 70s into the high 80s (89%, by one account), alongside reported reductions in discipline referrals, tardiness, and absenteeism.⁴⁵ Superintendent Jeffrey Moss has continued meeting regularly with a student advisory body on the topic.⁴⁶

Bedford County, Virginia (2011). Superintendent Douglas Schuch implemented a staggered start well before the more recent driver-shortage-driven wave — an early example other districts later pointed to.⁴⁷

Glens Falls, New York. Superintendent Paul Jenkins ran a dedicated newsletter, “StartTime,” to keep the community informed throughout the district’s deliberations — a process-transparency approach notably absent from several of the failure cases below.⁴⁸

A large suburban Denver-area district. Researchers Kyla Wahlstrom and Lisa Meltzer found that after the district implemented later start times, more parents of middle and high schoolers reported their children were getting sufficient sleep, and fewer reported their kids seeming tired.⁴⁹

Seattle, Washington (2018 study, distinct from the 2022 controversy above). Two public high schools moved start times back nearly an hour. Students’ average nightly sleep increased by 34 minutes, and in the one course studied in depth (biology), final grades were 4.5% higher for students under the later schedule than for students who’d taken the same course under the earlier one.⁵⁰

A 2021 University of Minnesota study of four districts covering roughly 18,000 students in grades 5–11, after start times moved 20 to 65 minutes later, found grade point averages rose a modest 0.1 points on average — researchers described the sleep benefit as “large” but the academic benefit as comparatively “small.”⁵¹

A Colorado suburban district (2022 study). Three years after high schools started 70 minutes later and middle schools 40–60 minutes later, researchers found middle and high school *teachers* — not just students — reported feeling less stressed and more rested.⁵²

2.5 When it backfires: process failures, reversals, and open fights

Clark County, Nevada (2026). Booker Elementary’s start time was set to move to 9:15 a.m. Parents circulated a petition that collected 310 signatures at a school of just 329 students. Within a week, the district reversed course and the school kept roughly its old 7:30 a.m. start.⁵³ Parent organizer Michael Hollis described the reaction bluntly: “*The parents were in an uproar.*”⁵⁴

Boston, Massachusetts (2017). The same district that later became a routing success story stumbled badly on its first attempt to touch bell times. The school committee voted in a new schedule — flipping the old pattern so younger kids started earlier and teens started later — and informed schools of the change the very next day.⁵⁵ The rollout triggered a packed, hostile school-committee meeting, more than 7,700 signatures on an opposition petition, and public comment running over five hours.⁵⁶ Officials in the room that week faced shouts of “lies!” and “let us talk!” from residents.⁵⁷ District leadership framed the redesign as necessary to help close achievement gaps between racial groups.⁵⁸ Parents largely didn’t dispute the equity rationale — they objected to the process, saying they’d now need to wake small children at 5:30 or 6 a.m. and find many more hours of after-school care.⁵⁹

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2022). Within the district’s own multi-year standardization effort (see 2.2 above), the district finalized a bell schedule that ran counter to pediatric sleep-medicine recommendations at some schools, and principals said they felt blindsided by last-minute changes — one elementary school’s start time reportedly shifted twice in a single week, from 8:30 back to 8:15 a.m., after a first round of teacher pushback had already won a temporary reprieve.⁶⁰

Pinellas County, Florida (2026). After Florida briefly mandated later statewide start times in 2023, the legislature rolled the mandate back in 2025 following district complaints about cost — Pinellas alone estimated compliance would have required nearly \$3 million and dozens of additional bus drivers.⁶¹ The district’s own, more limited bell-time changes remain locally contested as of this writing.⁶²

Edmonds, Washington (2026, ongoing). A two-year bell-time review produced a plan to move some elementary starts to as early as 7:20 a.m. — an 85-minute shift. At a June 2026 board meeting, 19 speakers and 14 written comments opposed the plan unanimously, warning it would deprive young children of sleep, expose them to predawn darkness at bus stops, and shift an inequitable burden onto working and low-income families.⁶³

Lower Merion, Pennsylvania (proposed, still pending as of this writing). Superintendent Robert Copeland proposed pushing high school starts from 7:30 to 8:25 a.m. and middle schools from 8:15 to 9:05 a.m., citing the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and the CDC. Copeland’s own letter to the community acknowledged the change could disrupt after-school sports, childcare plans, and more, and the district scheduled multiple community listening sessions before any vote — a process-transparency approach that stands in deliberate contrast to Boston’s 2017 mistake of announcing first and listening later.⁶⁴

2.6 A caution about elementary schedules specifically

Two North Carolina studies — one covering all public, non-charter elementary schools statewide from 2011–2017, one a deep dive into a single urban district that changed its elementary and high-school start times in 2016 — found that moving elementary start times *earlier*, to accommodate later secondary starts, did not measurably hurt younger students’ attendance, discipline, or test scores.^{65,66} Co-author Sarah Crittenden Fuller, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said the research suggests earlier elementary starts do not carry the same negative effects observed for middle and high schoolers.⁶⁷ That finding cuts against the intuitive fear driving much of the Edmonds and Boston backlash — though researchers caution the effect may differ by district, and that the disruption of *changing* schedules can itself hurt disadvantaged groups even if the settled new schedule doesn’t.⁶⁸

2.7 The family-impact picture specifically

A 2025 survey found that 41% of parents nationally reported their district had reduced or eliminated bus service altogether (not just shifted the time) — and that as a result, nearly 8 in 10 parents (79%) were now driving their kids to school themselves or relying on relatives.⁶⁹ That statistic reframes the whole debate: for a meaningful share of families, the real “impact” of bell-time restructuring isn’t a schedule inconvenience, it’s the disappearance of a service they were counting on.

The recurring, specific family complaints across the case studies above cluster into four categories:

1. **Sleep and safety** — younger children waiting at bus stops in the dark; wake-up times pushed to 5:30–6 a.m.^{70,71}

2. **Childcare and activity logistics** — more hours of before- or after-school supervision needed, often uncompensated by the district; Pasco County's Ashley Whittaker specifically flagged the collision between a new 4:20 p.m. dismissal and her children's softball schedule.⁷² Districts moving later start times also have to renegotiate sports schedules against other districts still on older calendars.⁷³
3. **Equity** — low-income and working families have the least flexibility to absorb a schedule shift, a point raised explicitly by opponents in Boston, Edmonds, and Seattle, and backed by research showing disadvantaged groups feel both the largest benefit *and* the largest disruption from these changes.⁷⁴⁷⁵⁷⁶⁷⁷
4. **Whiplash from repeated, uncoordinated changes** — several districts (Puyallup, Philadelphia, Pasco) changed bell times more than once within a two-to-three-year span as driver shortages fluctuated, which several parents and even a superintendent (Browning, in Pasco) said openly they disliked even while voting for it.⁷⁸⁷⁹

2.8 Did the district call it a success? Did families?

- **Boston (2017 rollout):** The district pointed to a survey of roughly 9,000 families, teachers, and staff as evidence of adequate community input.⁸⁰ Many families in the room that week did not experience it that way. The district did not reverse the policy, but spent months rebuilding trust.
- **Boston (2017 routing algorithm):** Here the district's claim of success is on much firmer ground — a specific, auditable dollar figure and fleet reduction, achieved without lengthening rides.⁸¹ This is the rare case where "success," narrowly defined by output, is hard to dispute.
- **Beaufort County, SC:** By the district's own multi-year account — rising graduation rates, falling discipline and absenteeism — this reads as an unambiguous, durable success, and the schedule was never reversed.⁸²
- **Clark County:** An explicit reversal within a week — by any reasonable definition, a failure of the initial rollout, later corrected.⁸³
- **Pinellas / statewide Florida:** The state itself concluded the mandate was a failure on cost grounds and rolled it back before any district had to fully implement it.⁸⁴
- **Pasco County:** The superintendent himself declined to call it a success even while implementing it, describing it as the least-bad option given a driver shortage he did not create.⁸⁵
- **Puyallup:** By deliberately choosing the *least* disruptive of three options after over a year of task-force work, the district appears to have avoided the worst backlash — a possible model for process, even if the underlying driver shortage forcing the change was itself not something to celebrate.⁸⁶⁸⁷
- **Edmonds and Lower Merion:** Unresolved as of this writing — the outcome will be decided by school board votes, not by data that exists yet.

CHAPTER 3 — THE FOUR-DAY SCHOOL WEEK: A FIFTY-YEAR HISTORY

3.1 Origins: 1930s to 1970s

The shortened school week is not a novel, twenty-first-century idea. Some form of it appears to have first been used in South Dakota during the 1930s, amid the economic pressures of the Great Depression.⁸⁸ It reappears in the historical record during the 1973 Arab oil embargo, when the spike in heating and transportation costs pushed some rural communities toward the alternative schedule.⁸⁹

The specific, well-documented birth of the *modern* four-day week is usually traced to Cimarron, New Mexico, in 1972, where the schedule was introduced specifically to cut transportation costs and electric bills during the broader 1970s energy crisis; the fifth day's instructional time was divided into fourths and tacked onto the ends of the remaining four days.⁹⁰ New Mexico's legislature deliberately excluded larger school districts from the option. Jack McCoy, a deputy director at the New Mexico Department of Education, explained the reasoning: larger districts typically had more dual-income families, which meant fewer childcare options on the newly open fifth day.⁹¹ Twenty years after the 1970s oil crunch, only one New Mexico district had abandoned the four-day calendar, and that was because it had exceeded an enrollment cap, not because of any measured harm.⁹² By 1999, four-day-week schools were still found in only a handful of states: Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Oregon.⁹³

3.2 The Great Recession wave (2008-2011)

The next major expansion came with the 2008 financial crisis. Utah Governor Jon Huntsman announced in 2008 that the state would consider a mandatory four-day school week to cut costs.⁹⁴ Hawaii went further and more drastically: facing a severe 2009 budget crisis, the state implemented seventeen mandatory "Furlough Fridays," effectively imposing a temporary four-day school week statewide and, by some accounts, giving Hawaii the shortest public school year in the country that year.⁹⁵⁹⁶⁹⁷ Commentary at the time grouped the move alongside other extreme, recession-era local austerity measures — an

Atlanta suburb shutting down its public bus system, parts of Colorado Springs going without streetlights.⁹⁸

By around 2010, roughly 120 school districts across 17 states were using a four-day week, according to Education Commission of the States tracking, mostly small, rural districts with fewer than 1,000 students.⁹⁹ Peach County, Georgia — a 4,000-student district — adopted the schedule to help close a \$1 million budget shortfall, one of more than 120 districts nationally cited that year as following the trend.¹⁰⁰ Georgia, Oklahoma, and Maine changed state law around that time specifically to let districts count the school year in hours rather than days, enabling a four-day calendar.¹⁰¹

An Education Commission of the States study by researcher Matthew Griffith, published in 2011, found the maximum financial savings experienced by four-day districts nationally was just over five percent of budget¹⁰² — already a signal, more than a decade before the current wave, that the savings story was thinner than the political rhetoric around it. A separate ECS finance analysis specifically checked whether districts switching to a four-day week had cut teacher pay or benefits (since salaries account for roughly 65% of all education spending) and found it could not identify a single district that had done so — instructional staff still worked the same total hours, just compressed.¹⁰³

3.3 The pre-pandemic expansion (2012-2019)

By the 2018-19 school year, four-day-week schools were operating in twenty-four states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming — a total of more than 1,600 schools, up from a handful of states just two decades earlier.¹⁰⁴ Academic researchers compiling the most complete national four-day-week dataset to that point concluded that adoption was overwhelmingly financially motivated and remained largely a small, rural-district phenomenon.¹⁰⁵

3.4 The current wave (2019-2026)

Adoption accelerated sharply again after 2019: from roughly 650 districts that year to about 850 districts by 2023,¹⁰⁶ and to more than 2,100 individual public schools across 26 states by the 2025-26 school year.¹⁰⁷ Texas alone went from about 30 schools on a four-day week to more than 500 in four years.¹⁰⁸ Nearly all U.S. states west of the Mississippi now have at least one four-day district, with the largest concentrations in Colorado, Montana, Oregon, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and Idaho; more than 90% of these districts remain rural, though the schedule has recently begun appearing in suburban and urban systems.¹⁰⁹

Two of the most recent districts to switch, Saratoga, Arkansas, and Beauregard Parish, Louisiana, both said explicitly they were *not* doing it to save money, but for perceived academic and social benefits¹¹⁰ — a notable shift in stated rationale from the original, purely financial 1970s and 2008-2011 waves.

Public opinion has moved alongside adoption: PDK International polling found support for four-day weeks as a cost-saving measure roughly doubled between 2003 and 2023, from 25% of the public in favor to 53%.¹¹¹

3.5 The academic evidence, in full

This is the area where the research is most damning relative to the sales pitch — and also the area with the widest range of contradictory individual findings.

The synthesis view. The most authoritative recent review — a 2025 analysis by the University of Oregon’s HEDCO Institute, examining 11 high-quality U.S. studies, mostly in Oregon, Oklahoma, and Colorado — concluded that a four-day week is “*probably not*” beneficial for students, with no evidence of large positive effects on outcomes.¹¹² A separate 2024 study concluded four-day weeks actively hurt students’ reading and math achievement.¹¹³

Individual studies that complicate that picture: - An Oregon analysis found no broad positive effects district-wide, but did find higher math scores and graduation rates specifically among *rural* high schoolers — a subgroup effect invisible in a district-wide average.¹¹⁴ - Colorado research found fourth graders in rural schools earned higher reading scores on a four-day schedule, and fifth graders in rural schools earned higher math scores.¹¹⁵ An earlier Colorado study, by contrast, found essentially no change in student achievement at all.¹¹⁶ - A separate Oregon study found the four-day schedule might reduce high school dropout rates — while simultaneously *increasing* absenteeism among students in grades 9-12.¹¹⁷ That is a genuine internal contradiction worth sitting with: fewer students leave permanently, but the ones who stay show up less often. - Colorado research from the American Institutes for Research (2024) found the schedule’s effects on attendance and outcomes were largely negligible in a state where four-day weeks are already common¹¹⁸ — consistent with the “first-mover advantage erodes” pattern described in Chapter 1. - A 2018 study leveraging Colorado’s rural adoption pattern (Fischer & Argyle) found a causal link between the four-day schedule and *increased juvenile crime*, tied to reduced school-day supervision.¹¹⁹

One superintendent’s frank assessment. Mancos, Colorado, superintendent Todd Cordrey has said he’s seen no significant difference in student achievement under the four-day week, and has been candid that the case for any fixed school-week length isn’t really grounded in brain science — noting the five-day structure itself was designed around what was

administratively efficient and aligned with parents’ work schedules, not around how children learn.¹²⁰

3.6 The financial evidence

The most-cited justification — cost savings — is one of the weakest legs of the argument. The Education Commission of the States found districts operating on the abbreviated schedule generally save just 0.4% to 2.5% of their overall budget, and that the cost of new initiatives created to fill kids’ off-days, or to provide additional staff development, largely offsets whatever savings exist.¹²¹ That’s consistent with the earlier, roughly-five-percent maximum found by the 2011 Griffith/ECS analysis¹²² — both numbers are small relative to the political rhetoric of “saving busloads of money.”¹²³ As established above, no district has been documented reducing teacher pay or benefits as part of the switch,¹²⁴ which is the mechanism that would be needed to produce truly large savings, since salaries are the dominant cost.

3.7 The staffing evidence

Here the evidence is genuinely mixed, which is unusual — most other outcomes lean negative.

- In Texas, an economist tracking districts over 17 years found teacher turnover fell about 2.7 percentage points after a switch to four-day weeks — a real but modest effect. More than 1 in 5 teachers were still leaving every year, both before and after the change, and the study found no improvement in the average experience or credentials of teachers hired.¹²⁵
- A 2025 Missouri study (CALDER) using state data found no evidence that the four-day week improves teacher recruitment or retention at all¹²⁶ — directly contradicting administrators’ impressions. Iowa administrators interviewed for a separate report *uniformly* said their hiring and retention problems eased after the switch¹²⁷ — a case where perception and measured statistical effect diverge sharply.
- RAND’s 2021 study of districts in Idaho, New Mexico, and Oklahoma found district leaders believed the schedule gave them a genuine competitive recruiting edge, with long-vacant positions finally filled and more applicants per opening.¹²⁸ A 2024 EdWeek Research Center survey found two-thirds of teachers, principals, and district leaders said they’d be more willing to accept a job at a district offering a four-day week¹²⁹ — suggesting the *perceived* draw is real, even where hard retention numbers (Missouri, Colorado) can’t confirm it converts into actual reduced turnover.

3.8 Case studies

Independence, Missouri (2023-24). A 14,000-student suburban Kansas City district switched calendars and reported an uptick in teacher applications.¹³⁰ In 2024, Missouri passed a law (Senate Bill 727) requiring many districts to win *voter* approval to keep a four-day week; Independence is suing, arguing the law is unconstitutional.¹³¹¹³²

Oklahoma — “virtual Fridays” as a workaround. About 20% of Oklahoma’s 500-plus districts run four-day weeks, concentrated in rural areas.¹³³ When the state tried to hold four-day schools to the same proficiency standard as five-day schools, some districts responded not by improving instruction but by adding a nominal fifth day of “virtual” schooling with minimal actual live teaching — more than 100 districts had at least one school with two or more full weeks of virtual days in 2022-23, and more than 60 districts had a school go virtual for three-plus weeks.¹³⁴ One Noble, Oklahoma school board member, defending four-day districts to state lawmakers, warned that some affected schools would have to shut their doors if forced back to five days.¹³⁵

Colorado — reversals do happen, but rarely. Of the state’s 176 school districts, 31 currently run a four-day week, mostly small, isolated districts with fewer than 500 students.¹³⁶ According to a state education-department official, further expansion isn’t expected, and two districts have recently returned to a traditional five-day calendar — driven not by data, but by local school-board politics.¹³⁷

Mancos vs. Dolores, Colorado — two neighboring districts, two different experiences. Mancos built a popular Friday enrichment program that families use; the neighboring Dolores district’s Friday programming is far less popular, and families there lean more heavily on extended relatives for childcare instead.¹³⁸ This pairing is a useful microcosm of the whole document’s theme: identical policy, different execution, different family experience, right next door to each other.

Liberty Hill, Texas (2026-27 calendar decision). After surveying teachers, staff, students, and families, this 9,800-student district’s board chose a hybrid calendar with *more* five-day weeks for 2026-27 than it had the prior year. Superintendent Travis Motal summed up the difficulty of the decision by noting there is no single calendar that satisfies every stakeholder group.¹³⁹

Apache Junction, Arizona. Parents Bill and Jennifer Florence told reporters they would pay more than \$1,500 a year in additional childcare for their two children because of the switch. Bill Florence’s reaction: “*We are not happy with it.*”¹⁴⁰

Rural Idaho. One family saw childcare costs rise by \$200 a month after their district’s switch — an increase that, in the reporting’s framing, negated any tax savings the district had promoted.¹⁴¹

Minnesota. One district’s own estimate put the added annual childcare cost to families at roughly \$600 per year.¹⁴²

Hawaii, revisited. Unlike most of the rural, permanent adopters discussed above, Hawaii’s 2009 furlough-Friday experiment was explicitly temporary and crisis-driven rather than a considered pedagogical choice, and drew national criticism at the time as an example of austerity taken to an extreme.¹⁴³ It is a useful contrast case: a four-day week adopted purely as an emergency budget patch, rather than for any of the recruitment, academic, or family-convenience rationales offered by later adopters.

3.9 The family-impact picture specifically

This is the sharpest, best-quantified family effect in either policy area reviewed here.

Direct costs. The Idaho, Minnesota, and Arizona examples above are not outliers; they represent a documented pattern of added weekly childcare costs landing hardest on families with the least slack in their budgets.¹⁴⁴¹⁴⁵ Nationally, the average family with a young child already dedicates roughly 13% of total income to childcare, a burden researchers describe as unaffordable for most families even before an extra day is added.¹⁴⁶

Labor-market effects. A RAND Corporation study found that among mothers of children ages 5–13, increasing four-day-week enrollment from 0% to 25% of an area’s student population caused an **11% decrease in maternal employment**.¹⁴⁷ A separate multi-state analysis linked four-day weeks to reduced maternal employment and corresponding lost labor income¹⁴⁸ — meaning the effect isn’t just a childcare bill, it’s measurably pushing some mothers out of paid work entirely.

Food security. For students who rely on school meals — in some cases for nearly half their weekly food — losing a school day can mean losing access to breakfast and lunch that day, unless the district specifically arranges alternative meal service.¹⁴⁹

Subgroup dissent within otherwise-supportive communities. Even in the RAND study finding broad parental support across nearly every demographic group studied, two specific groups broke from the majority: families with only elementary-age children, and families with children receiving special education services — both reported lower support than everyone else.¹⁵⁰ That is a direct, data-backed instance of the “averages hide subgroups” problem described in Chapter 1.

Equity split more broadly. Reporting from multiple districts converges on the same finding: districts that pair the calendar change with real childcare infrastructure and enrichment programming (Mancos, CO) can blunt the impact; districts that don’t (Dolores, CO; Apache Junction, AZ) push the cost onto individual families, disproportionately low-income ones.¹⁵¹¹⁵²¹⁵³

3.10 Did the district call it a success? Did families?

- **District administrators**, in survey after survey, describe the switch as solving a real problem — teacher applications up in Independence,¹⁵⁴ hiring and retention friction easing in Iowa districts,¹⁵⁵ a genuine recruiting edge reported by district leaders in RAND’s three-state study¹⁵⁶ — even where formal studies (CALDER, Colorado AIR) can’t find the effect in the data.¹⁵⁷¹⁵⁸
- **Families already living under a four-day week are, on balance, satisfied:** roughly 84% support keeping the schedule in districts that have already adopted it,¹⁵⁹ and RAND’s survey found nearly three-quarters of parents “very satisfied.”¹⁶⁰ Satisfaction, though, is not proficiency, as one policy analysis bluntly put it.¹⁶¹
- **Families bearing the direct childcare and income cost are considerably less positive** — the Florence family’s on-record reaction is representative of a subset of families for whom the schedule is a financial net negative regardless of how the majority feels.¹⁶²
- **Elementary-only and special-education families are quietly the outliers** even within generally supportive communities, per RAND’s own subgroup data.¹⁶³
- **Voters, where given a direct say, are split** — Missouri’s ballot-mandate law exists specifically because close to 80% of voters wanted a direct say in the decision,¹⁶⁴ a proxy for widespread skepticism that districts alone should decide this.
- **State legislatures are trending skeptical of the unmeasured version of “success”** — Oklahoma both restricted the virtual-Friday loophole¹⁶⁵ and separately moved in 2026 to add instructional days back to the calendar statewide,¹⁶⁶ citing the state’s bottom-of-the-nation academic rankings. Missouri’s voter-mandate law points the same direction.
- **Some rural districts insist their survival is the real metric.** The Noble, Oklahoma school board member’s warning — that some four-day schools would have to close if forced back to five days¹⁶⁷ — reframes “success” entirely: for the smallest, most isolated districts, the relevant comparison isn’t “four-day week vs. five-day week,” it’s “four-day week vs. no local school at all,” which echoes the original 1972 New Mexico logic exactly fifty years later.¹⁶⁸

CHAPTER 4 — SYNTHESIS: HOW THE TWO REFORMS COMPARE ON THE EIGHT LENSES OF SUCCESS

Lens (from Chapter 1)	Staggered Busing / Bell Times	Four-Day School Week
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Success for whom?	Splits sharply between transportation offices (usually satisfied) and families with young children or reduced service (usually not) ¹⁶⁹¹⁷⁰	Splits sharply between administrators/already-enrolled majority (satisfied) and elementary/special-ed families and working mothers (not) ¹⁷¹¹⁷²
Output vs. outcome	Strong output data (buses saved); weak outcome data on learning specifically, though sleep-focused reforms have some outcome evidence ¹⁷³¹⁷⁴	Weak on both — savings are small (output) and learning effects are flat-to-negative (outcome) ¹⁷⁵¹⁷⁶
Averages vs. subgroups	Disadvantaged groups feel both more benefit and more disruption ¹⁷⁷	Rural high schoolers show gains invisible in state averages; special-ed families show less support invisible in overall satisfaction numbers ¹⁷⁸¹⁷⁹
Self-report vs. measured	Mixed — Beaufort County shows both self-reported and measured gains aligning ¹⁸⁰ ; Boston 2017 shows them diverging sharply ¹⁸¹	Diverge clearly — high satisfaction, flat-to-negative measured outcomes ¹⁸²¹⁸³
First-mover erosion	Plausible but less studied directly	Directly evidenced — Colorado’s saturation correlates with weaker measured effects ¹⁸⁴
Political durability	Frequent reversals and litigation-adjacent conflict (Clark County, Pinellas, Edmonds) ¹⁸⁵¹⁸⁶¹⁸⁷	Frequent reversals, lawsuits, and a new class of state-level ballot mandates (Missouri, Oklahoma) ¹⁸⁸¹⁸⁹¹⁹⁰
Metric gaming	Not clearly documented in the sources reviewed here	Directly documented — Oklahoma’s virtual Fridays ¹⁹¹
Comparison baseline	Boston’s algorithm is the rare case with a genuinely strong baseline comparison ¹⁹²	Almost no four-day-week study reviewed here uses a true matched control; most compare a district to its own past ¹⁹³

CHAPTER 5 — GLOSSARY

Bell time / bell schedule — The official start and end time of the instructional day at a given school.

Tiering / staggered start times — Assigning different bell times to different schools (often 15–90 minutes apart) so a shared bus fleet can serve more than one school per morning.

Blocking / chaining (bus scheduling) — The operations-research term for linking multiple bus trips, at different schools with different bell times, into one continuous route for a single bus and driver.

Deadhead mileage — Miles a bus travels empty (e.g., returning to the depot, or driving to the start of a route) that cost money but carry no passengers.

Bell Time Task Force — A common name (used by, e.g., Puyallup, WA) for a committee of staff, families, and students convened to recommend bell-schedule changes, typically in response to a driver shortage.

4dsw — Common research shorthand for “four-day school week.”

Virtual Friday — A workaround some Oklahoma four-day districts used to nominally satisfy a fifth instructional day requirement, typically involving minimal live teaching; used in this document as an example of metric-gaming.

Furlough Friday — Hawaii’s 2009 term for a mandatory, unpaid, statewide school closure day used as a Great-Recession-era budget-cutting measure; a temporary, crisis-driven cousin of the more permanent rural four-day week.

HEDCO Institute — The University of Oregon’s Institute for Evidence-Based Educational Practice; publisher of the 2025 meta-analysis of four-day-week research cited throughout Chapter 3.

CALDER — The Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, whose 2025 Missouri-focused study is cited in Chapter 3.

AIR — American Institutes for Research, a nonpartisan research organization; authored the 2024 Colorado four-day-week working paper.

ECS — Education Commission of the States, a nonpartisan interstate compact/think tank; source of two of the earliest (2009–2011) rigorous cost-savings analyses of the four-day week.

RAND Corporation — A nonprofit research organization; authored both the 2021 study of teacher recruitment/retention and family satisfaction in Idaho, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, and the earlier study on maternal labor supply cited in Chapter 3.

PKD International poll — A long-running public-opinion survey on education issues; tracked the roughly 25%-to-53% rise in public support for four-day weeks as a cost-saving tool between 2003 and 2023.

Chronic absenteeism — A federal accountability metric, typically defined as missing 10% or more of school days in a year, regardless of reason.

Equity impact report — A district-produced analysis (as in Boston’s 2017 case) measuring how a policy change is distributed across racial, ethnic, or income subgroups, rather than only in the aggregate.

Maternal labor supply — Economics shorthand for the amount and terms of paid work performed by mothers; the RAND study measured how this metric moved after four-day-week adoption.

Ballot mandate (e.g., Missouri SB 727) — A state law requiring local voter approval, rather than school-board approval alone, before a district can maintain a given calendar policy.

Goodhart’s Law — The general principle that “when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure” — illustrated in this document by Oklahoma’s virtual-Friday loophole.

Subgroup effect / aggregation bias — When a policy’s true impact on a specific population (by income, race, disability status, grade band) differs from — and is hidden by — the district-wide average.

First-mover effect — A benefit (e.g., a recruiting edge) that exists only because few competitors offer the same thing yet, and that tends to shrink as adoption becomes widespread.

Matched control group — A comparison group of similar districts or students that did *not* receive the policy change, used to distinguish the policy’s real effect from a trend that would have happened anyway; notably absent from most of the four-day-week research reviewed here.

CHAPTER 6 — THE INTERROGATORY: TWENTY QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE ACCEPTING A “SUCCESS” OR “FAILURE” CLAIM

Presented formally, as a set of interrogatories a school board member, journalist, or researcher might put to a district before accepting its own account of a scheduling change.

INTERROGATORY NO. 1. For each stakeholder group affected by this change — district budget office, superintendent, teachers’ union, elementary families, secondary families, special-education families, taxpayers without children in school, and prospective future hires — state whether that group would independently describe the outcome as a success, and on what basis.

INTERROGATORY NO. 2. State whether the district’s central claim of success is an *output* (a fleet size, a dollar figure, a day removed from the calendar) or an *outcome* (learning, health, family wellbeing), and identify which one was actually measured.

INTERROGATORY NO. 3. State the time horizon over which “success” is being claimed, and whether that horizon is long enough to distinguish a durable effect from a temporary novelty effect.

INTERROGATORY NO. 4. State whether any claimed staffing or enrollment benefit is a first-mover effect likely to shrink as neighboring districts adopt the same policy, and provide evidence for or against that possibility.

INTERROGATORY NO. 5. State the net dollar savings after accounting for every new cost the change created — including added childcare stipends, extra buses or drivers for gap coverage, extra driver overtime, or new enrichment/day-care programming — not merely the gross reduction in fleet size or instructional days.

INTERROGATORY NO. 6. State whether the claimed savings are one-time (capital) or recurring (operating), and what percentage of the district’s total annual budget the recurring savings represent.

INTERROGATORY NO. 7. Identify who performed the savings analysis, and whether that person or office had an institutional interest in the policy’s adoption.

INTERROGATORY NO. 8. If savings were promised to be reinvested in classrooms or student programs, provide documentation that the money was in fact reallocated as promised.

INTERROGATORY NO. 9. State whether any academic-outcome claim is supported by a matched control group of comparable students or districts that did not experience the change, or only by a before-and-after comparison within the same district.

INTERROGATORY NO. 10. State whether the outcome analysis controlled for statewide or national trends that would have occurred regardless of the local policy change.

INTERROGATORY NO. 11. Provide outcome results broken out by subgroup — grade band, household income, race, disability status, and rural/urban/suburban locale — rather than only as a single district-wide average.

INTERROGATORY NO. 12. State how many years of post-implementation data exist, and whether any early-year effects have persisted, strengthened, or faded in subsequent years.

INTERROGATORY NO. 13. Identify who funded or conducted each cited study, and disclose any financial or institutional relationship between the funder and the outcome being studied.

INTERROGATORY NO. 14. State whether there is any evidence the district or its schools met a stated metric on paper without meeting its underlying intent — for example, a nominal instructional day with minimal live teaching.

INTERROGATORY NO. 15. For four-day-week claims specifically: state whether “improved retention” is measured as an actual year-over-year turnover rate, or is instead an anecdotal impression reported by administrators without underlying data.

INTERROGATORY NO. 16. For four-day-week claims specifically: state whether the district’s applicant pool grew in *quality* (credentials, prior experience, certification level) as well as in raw quantity of applications.

INTERROGATORY NO. 17. State the percentage of families in the district who reported needing to change childcare arrangements because of this policy, and whether the district created or funded any alternative childcare or meal service for the affected time.

INTERROGATORY NO. 18. State whether elementary-only families and families of children receiving special-education services were surveyed and reported on separately from the district-wide average, given documented evidence that these groups are frequently less supportive even in otherwise-popular programs.

INTERROGATORY NO. 19. State how much advance notice families received before the change took effect, whether a pilot, survey, or vote preceded the final decision, and whether the eventual decision matched what that input indicated.

INTERROGATORY NO. 20. State whether the policy has been reversed, materially modified, or made subject to litigation or a new voter-approval requirement within three years of adoption — and if so, describe the outcome as decided by that subsequent process rather than by the district’s original justification alone.

CHAPTER 7 — SAMPLE SCORECARDS

Instructions: For your own district, fill in a score of 1 (clear failure on this dimension) to 5 (clear success), and note your evidence source in the right column. Leave blank if data doesn’t exist yet — an honest “unknown” is more useful than a guess. Consider filling this out once *per stakeholder group* (e.g., once from the district’s perspective, once from a low-income family’s perspective) — Chapter 1 predicts you’ll get different totals.

7.1 Staggered Busing / Bell-Time Scorecard

Category	Metric	Score (1-5)	Evidence / Source
Financial	Net \$ saved vs. projected		
Financial	Fleet size / driver headcount change		
Operations	Average student ride time, before vs. after		
Operations	Number of times the schedule changed in 3 years		
Student outcome	Attendance / tardiness change by grade band		
Student outcome	Chronic absenteeism change		
Student outcome	Graduation rate / discipline referral trend (multi-year)		
Staff	Teacher-reported stress/rest, if surveyed		
Equity	Early/late start distribution by income & race		
Family burden	% of families who lost bus access entirely		
Family burden	Reported childcare/activity-schedule disruption		
Process	Was there a pilot, task force, or survey before mandate?		

Political durability	Reversed, modified, or litigated within 1-3 years?		
Overall		/65	

7.2 Four-Day School Week Scorecard

Category	Metric	Score (1-5)	Evidence / Source
Financial	Net % of budget actually saved		
Financial	Any documented reduction in teacher pay/benefits (red flag if yes)		
Academic	Test-score change vs. matched control group		
Academic	Subgroup effect (rural vs. urban, grade band)		
Academic	Chronic absenteeism / discipline / dropout change		
Staffing	Year-over-year retention rate change		
Staffing	Applicant pool quality change		
Family burden	Added childcare cost per family (avg. \$/year)		
Family burden	Parental employment / income effect		
Equity	Meal-access plan for the off-day		
Equity	Support level among elementary-only & special-ed families specifically		
Community sentiment	% of currently enrolled families wanting to keep it		
Metric integrity	Any evidence of gaming (e.g., nominal virtual days)?		
Political durability	Voter approval required? Result if held?		
Overall		/70	

APPENDIX A — SELECTED CHRONOLOGY (1930s-2026)

- **1930s** — South Dakota uses an early, little-documented version of a shortened school week.¹⁹⁴
- **1972** — Cimarron, New Mexico, formally adopts the modern four-day school week to cut energy and transportation costs.¹⁹⁵
- **1973** — The Arab oil embargo pushes additional rural districts nationally toward shortened weeks.¹⁹⁶
- **1999** — Four-day schools are documented only in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Oregon.¹⁹⁷
- **2008** — Utah’s governor floats a statewide mandatory four-day week amid the financial crisis.¹⁹⁸
- **2009** — Hawaii implements 17 mandatory statewide “Furlough Fridays.”¹⁹⁹²⁰⁰
- **~2010** — Roughly 120 districts across 17 states run four-day weeks (ECS); Peach County, GA, adopts the schedule to close a \$1M shortfall.²⁰¹²⁰²
- **2011** — AC Transit and Oakland-area schools coordinate start-time changes to cut transit costs.²⁰³
- **2011** — ECS/Griffith finds a maximum ~5% budget savings from the four-day week nationally.²⁰⁴
- **2014** — American Academy of Pediatrics recommends secondary schools start no earlier than 8:30 a.m.; Beaufort County, SC, flips its bell schedule.²⁰⁵²⁰⁶
- **2017** — Boston Public Schools’ bell-time redesign triggers major community backlash; separately, its MIT-designed bus-routing algorithm saves \$5 million.²⁰⁷²⁰⁸

- **2018-19** — Four-day weeks operate in 24 states and more than 1,600 schools.²⁰⁹
- **2019** — California mandates later secondary start times (effective 2022).²¹⁰
- **2019** — About 650 U.S. districts run four-day weeks.²¹¹
- **2021** — RAND publishes its three-state (ID/NM/OK) study of four-day-week staffing and family-satisfaction effects.²¹²²¹³
- **2021-2022** — Nationwide bus-driver shortage intensifies; Pasco County, FL, and Seattle, WA, both make disruptive mid-cycle bell changes.²¹⁴²¹⁵
- **2022** — Baltimore City changes bell times at 93 schools; Philadelphia continues its multi-year three-tier standardization; Florida passes a later-start-time mandate.²¹⁶²¹⁷²¹⁸
- **2023** — About 850 U.S. districts run four-day weeks; nearly 200 Texas districts have adopted the schedule.²¹⁹²²⁰
- **2024** — Missouri passes Senate Bill 727, requiring voter approval for many four-day calendars; 91% of districts nationally report a bus-driver shortage.²²¹²²²
- **2025** — Florida rolls back its statewide later-start mandate; HEDCO Institute publishes its “probably not beneficial” synthesis of 11 four-day-week studies.²²³²²⁴
- **2026** — More than 2,100 schools across 26 states run four-day weeks; Oklahoma moves to add instructional days back to the calendar; Independence, MO, sues over SB 727; Clark County, NV, Pinellas County, FL, and Edmonds, WA, all see active local bell-time fights.²²⁵²²⁶²²⁷²²⁸²²⁹²³⁰

SOURCES / ENDNOTES

A note on scope, repeated from the introduction because it matters: this document is not an exhaustive census of every district that has tried either policy — both lists run into the hundreds or thousands of schools nationally, and a truly complete accounting would require a dedicated research database rather than a single reader’s guide. What it offers instead is the fullest chronological and geographic record obtainable from public reporting and research literature at time of writing: cases spanning at least twenty states and roughly five decades, studies that directly contradict one another left un-reconciled rather than smoothed over, and — wherever the public record allows it — the actual words of the parents, teachers, and superintendents living with the consequences.

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