

What Counts as Success?

Staggered Busing, Four-Day School Weeks, and the Costs Shifted to Families

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A school district can save money and still fail its families.

It can reduce the number of buses, consolidate routes, stretch the work of each driver, and produce a spreadsheet showing greater efficiency. At the same time, it can place elementary children at bus stops before sunrise, send students home hours later, separate siblings' schedules, require additional childcare, disrupt family employment, and leave parents reorganizing their lives around a decision they did not make.

A district can also adopt a four-day school week, watch teacher applications increase, hear overwhelming praise from students and staff, and conclude that the change worked. Yet test-score growth may slow, the promised savings may amount to only a small fraction of the budget, working parents may inherit another day of childcare, and vulnerable children may lose a day of meals, supervision, instruction, and contact with trusted adults.

That is the central problem with the word “success.” Success for whom, measured by what, and over what period?

This review does not assign a final verdict. It places the measurable results, district claims, family reactions, and documented consequences beside one another so readers can decide whether each program succeeded.

A Note on Scope

“Staggered busing” generally means a tiered transportation system in which the same bus and driver complete two or more consecutive routes. Schools must therefore begin and end at different times. Although tiered transportation is common, there is no comprehensive national registry identifying every district using it or recording whether it succeeded.

Four-day school weeks are easier to count but impossible to examine individually in one article. As of the 2024-2025 school year, more than 2,100 public schools in 26 states used a four-day schedule. Approximately 90 percent of participating districts were rural. This review concentrates on districts with published operational data, formal surveys, community votes, substantial reporting, academic research, or a decision to reverse course. ([NWEA](#))

Part One: Staggered Busing

What Staggered Busing Actually Does

Under a single-tier system, many buses operate at approximately the same time. Under a two-tier or three-tier system, one driver may transport high school students, complete that route, and then begin an elementary route. The district can transport more students with fewer drivers and fewer buses, but only by spreading school opening and closing times across a longer part of the day.

The efficiency comes from reusing the bus.

The burden comes from moving the clock.

A district evaluating staggered busing should therefore distinguish among at least four different questions:

1. Did it reduce the number of buses, routes, miles, drivers, or transportation costs?

2. Did students arrive safely, predictably, and within a reasonable amount of time?
3. Did the new bell times improve or damage sleep, instruction, employment, childcare, athletics, and family life?
4. Did the district and the affected families reach the same conclusion about whether the program worked?

The record shows that these answers are often different.

Boston, Massachusetts: The Routes Succeeded, the Bell-Time Plan Failed

Boston provides perhaps the clearest demonstration that transportation optimization and family success are not the same thing.

In 2017, a routing algorithm allowed Boston Public Schools to eliminate 50 buses, approximately 8 percent of its fleet. Buses traveled approximately one million fewer miles, and the district reported annual savings of about \$5 million. The federal Intelligent Transportation Systems program described the computerized route map as 20 percent more efficient than the routes previously produced by hand. The savings were redirected to classroom initiatives. ([U.S. DOT ITS](#))

Measured as a route-optimization project, Boston was a substantial success.

The district then attempted something more ambitious. Researchers developed a plan changing start times at approximately 85 percent of Boston schools. The plan would have allowed the district to remove as many as 120 buses while attempting to improve adolescent sleep and address inequitable bell times. ([Kellogg Insight](#))

The Boston School Committee approved the plan unanimously. Families then learned that some schools would move by nearly two hours. Some elementary students would have begun school as early as 7:15 a.m. and been dismissed as early as 1:15 p.m. Parents warned that the change would threaten jobs, increase childcare costs, strain young children, and reduce evening family time. ([Boston Magazine](#))

Deb Putnam, an advocate for later high school start times, rejected the idea that younger children should bear the cost: “That’s not at all what was intended here.” ([WBUR](#))

Superintendent Tommy Chang reversed the decision, acknowledging that the changes caused “a more significant disruption to family schedules than we intended.” ([Boston Magazine](#))

Researcher Sebastien Martin later summarized the democratic reality: “In the end, you fight for your kids.” ([Kellogg Insight](#))

The District’s Apparent Verdict

The route-optimization component was successful. It reduced buses, mileage, planning time, and costs.

The bell-time restructuring was not successful because it was withdrawn before implementation.

The Families’ Apparent Verdict

Many families believed the bell-time plan transferred the district’s transportation costs to parents through lost work flexibility, added childcare, disrupted sleep, and altered family routines.

The Reader’s Question

Can Boston’s transportation program be called a success when the routes improved but the corresponding bell-time solution was politically and socially unacceptable?

Bismarck, North Dakota: Operational Gains With Unresolved Family Costs

Bismarck Public Schools implemented a two-tier transportation system in August 2025 after several years of study and community discussion.

The district's stated objectives included limiting normal bus rides to no more than one hour, preventing elementary pickups before 6:30 a.m., reducing the fleet by nine buses, placing more buses at schools by dismissal time, separating elementary and secondary riders, and redirecting transportation savings to instructional aides. ([Bismarck Public Schools](#))

The initial operational comparison was favorable. Morning routes fell from 52 to 39. The number of transported students increased from 5,063 to 5,490. Projected transportation costs fell from approximately \$6.85 million to \$6.21 million, a projected reduction of about \$635,000. Average route mileage also fell substantially for district-operated buses. ([Bismarck Public Schools](#))

The results, however, contained an important contradiction. The district had said no student would be picked up before 6:30 a.m. Yet the number of students picked up before 6:30 increased from 10 to 29. The earliest pickup improved from 6:00 to 6:14, but the district did not accomplish its categorical promise. ([Bismarck Public Schools](#))

Bismarck conducted family and staff surveys in November 2025 and continued revising bell times. The district described the system as providing "efficiency and benefits," but its continuing changes show that the operational figures did not end the argument. ([Bismarck Public Schools](#))

The District's Apparent Verdict

Bismarck regards the program as an operational improvement. It transported more students with fewer routes and projected lower costs.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

The district's continued surveys, refinements, and bell-time adjustments indicate material family concerns. Publicly accessible district pages do not provide enough detail to claim either broad family approval or broad rejection.

The Reader's Question

Does saving approximately \$635,000 and eliminating 13 morning routes constitute success when the number of children boarding before 6:30 nearly tripled?

Seattle, Washington: Limited Changes, Significant Projected Savings

Seattle Public Schools considered a broad three-tier system in 2022 but remained with two tiers after family opposition and concerns about very early and very late schedules.

The district later pursued a narrower restructuring. Twelve schools received different start and end times so drivers could complete two or more routes. Seattle estimated that the transportation changes would save more than \$6 million without changing every school in the district. ([Seattle Public Schools](#))

For families at the affected elementary and K-8 schools, the changes meant reorganizing morning routines and after-school childcare around shifts of approximately an hour. Seattle estimated substantial savings, but the available public record does not establish whether the projected amount was independently verified after implementation. ([Axios Seattle](#))

Seattle's larger history also shows that bell-time changes can produce genuine educational benefits. When the district moved high school start times from 7:50 to 8:45 a.m., researchers found that students slept approximately 34 minutes longer per night and grades increased by about 4.5 percent. ([Education Next](#))

The District's Apparent Verdict

Seattle considered the limited 2023 restructuring an efficiency measure capable of producing major savings while avoiding a systemwide upheaval.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

The response was mixed. Some families accepted the financial necessity. Others faced changed childcare arrangements and worried about younger students or middle school students adjusting to earlier schedules.

The Reader's Question

Should success be measured by the projected transportation savings, by the educational benefits of later secondary starts, or by the burdens placed on the smaller number of families whose schools were moved?

Tacoma, Washington: A Million-Dollar Claim and a Divided Community

Tacoma Public Schools changed most school bell schedules for the 2024-2025 year. The district said the restructuring would reduce the number of bus routes and save approximately \$1 million annually. ([Tacoma Public Schools](#))

High schools moved to a later start, while middle schools and some elementary schools started earlier. The changes therefore produced two competing family reactions.

Parent Jay Spencer said the schedule was “hard for working parents.” He argued that elementary children require more adult supervision and that 9:00 a.m. starts can impose additional childcare expenses. ([The News Tribune](#))

Parent Leah Browning supported later secondary starts because of adolescent sleep needs. She urged the district to prioritize student health rather than treating every schedule change primarily as an inconvenience to adults. ([The News Tribune](#))

The District's Apparent Verdict

Tacoma described the change as necessary to create a more efficient route system and reduce annual costs.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Families were divided. The same schedule that helped high school students sleep later created work and supervision problems for some elementary families.

The Reader's Question

When one group of students benefits and another group of families absorbs the disruption, what level of net benefit is required before the policy can be called successful?

Fayetteville, Arkansas: A Limited Adjustment With an Incomplete Record

Fayetteville Public Schools moved its high school start time by 20 minutes for the 2024-2025 school year. The district said the additional separation between tiers would produce more efficient routes and help eliminate late afternoon buses. ([Fayetteville Public Schools](#))

The change was smaller than the Boston, Bismarck, or Tacoma restructurings. That limited scope may have reduced family disruption.

The public evidence presently establishes the district's objective, not the final result. A responsible evaluation would require actual before-and-after data on late buses, route mileage, student ride time, family complaints, driver overtime, and transportation costs.

The District's Apparent Verdict

The district expected improvement and implemented a modest change.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

No sufficiently detailed published family survey was located to support a clear conclusion.

The Reader's Question

Should a program be labeled successful because it was implemented without a public crisis, or only after the promised operational improvements have been documented?

Jefferson County, Kentucky: A Catastrophic Opening Followed by Partial Recovery

Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville redesigned routes and staggered school start times in 2023 to cope with a severe driver shortage.

The opening-day result was a logistical collapse. Some students were not picked up. Others remained at schools or on buses for hours. The final student was reportedly delivered shortly before 10:00 p.m. The district canceled classes while administrators attempted to repair the system. Superintendent Marty Pollio called it a “transportation disaster.” ([Associated Press](#))

Parent Berkley Collins said, “They had all summer to get this figured out.” ([Associated Press](#))

After a week of canceled classes, the district restarted service. Most students arrived home substantially earlier, although the final drop-off was still reported at 7:43 p.m. Pollio said the short-term changes were successful while acknowledging that longer-term work remained. ([Associated Press](#))

The failure was not that the district tried to use buses more efficiently. The failure was implementation without adequate route validation, driver preparation, contingency capacity, communications, and realistic timing.

The District's Apparent Verdict

District leadership acknowledged the opening as a failure but characterized the emergency corrections as a successful stabilization.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Families whose children disappeared into an unreliable transportation system for hours had ample reason to call the rollout a failure, regardless of later improvement.

The Reader's Question

How long must a repaired system operate reliably before a district can overcome the damage caused by an opening-day collapse?

Saratoga Springs, New York: A Proposal Defeated Before Implementation

In 2025, Saratoga Springs considered staggered start times to address its driver shortage. The proposal would have moved the high school to 7:30 a.m. and pushed several elementary schools to approximately 9:50 a.m.

Parents described difficulty getting children to and from school while maintaining employment. One neighborhood reportedly discussed creating a collective supervision system before buses arrived. Other parents said local childcare programs were already full. ([Times Union](#))

The district abandoned the plan and said future changes would require additional review and community input. ([Times Union](#))

The District's Apparent Verdict

The proposed arrangement was not acceptable enough to implement.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

The families who organized against it considered the childcare, employment, and sleep consequences unacceptable.

The Reader's Question

Is withdrawal evidence that the planning process failed, or evidence that public participation worked exactly as it should?

Kanawha County, West Virginia: A System That Operated, but Not Without Pain

Kanawha County changed school start times in 2018. The district needed fewer buses and drivers to cover a territory involving as many as 18,500 miles of daily transportation. Officials said that under the previous bell schedule, a shortage of approximately 30 drivers might have prevented the district from operating school at all. ([Education Next](#))

Some parents liked the change. One wrote, “Love the start times, we can get to work on time.” Other parents reported children boarding buses at approximately 6:00 a.m., increased parent driving, traffic congestion, fatigue, and reduced evening family time. ([Education Next](#))

The district therefore appears to have solved an operational problem that might otherwise have prevented transportation service, but it solved that problem by imposing substantially different burdens on different families.

The District's Apparent Verdict

The schedule allowed the district to operate despite a driver shortage and reduce fleet requirements.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Mixed. Some families benefited from earlier hours. Others believed the schedule was unreasonable for young children.

The Reader's Question

Is an unpleasant schedule successful when the alternative may have been canceled routes or an inability to open school?

Fort Wayne, Indiana: Adaptation Rather Than Enthusiasm

Fort Wayne moved from two transportation tiers to three, partly to reduce transportation expenses. High schools started later, while the district also restricted some bus eligibility and reduced students' ability to use different return routes for after-school plans. ([Education Next](#))

The schedule affected athletics, jobs, family routines, and route flexibility. Yet community partners adapted. Some teams and clubs moved activities before school. A YMCA official eventually reported that families had generally adjusted, saying, “most people just make it work.” ([Education Next](#))

That is not the language of celebration. It is the language of accommodation.

The District's Apparent Verdict

The district retained the system and appears to have accomplished its transportation objective.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Families adapted, although adaptation should not be mistaken for proof that the schedule imposed no burden.

The Reader's Question

Does a policy succeed when families learn to endure it, or must they affirmatively believe it improved their lives?

Saint Paul, Minnesota: Slow Implementation and Deliberate Mitigation

Saint Paul studied later secondary start times for years, delayed action in response to opposition, tested the idea at individual schools, worked with community partners, considered safety lighting, examined childcare capacity, and provided a long transition period.

At one pilot high school, students reportedly had greater participation in clubs and jobs and a record number of students on the honor roll. One initially opposed parent changed her position after seeing that her son had an easier time waking and concentrating. ([Education Next](#))

Saint Paul did not obtain universal agreement. Officials instead treated family disruption as a problem requiring mitigation rather than a public-relations obstacle requiring dismissal.

The District's Apparent Verdict

The extended process produced enough confidence to expand later secondary start times.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Still mixed, but some opposition softened after families observed actual student benefits.

The Reader's Question

Was Saint Paul successful because it chose the correct schedule, or because it tested, delayed, explained, and mitigated before imposing it broadly?

What the Staggered-Busing Cases Establish

The cases do not prove that staggered busing is inherently good or inherently bad. They establish five narrower conclusions.

First, tiered schedules can produce genuine operational savings. Boston eliminated buses and mileage. Bismarck reduced routes and projected lower costs. Seattle and Tacoma expected millions in savings. Kanawha County used staggered times to operate despite a driver shortage. ([U.S. DOT ITS](#))

Second, fleet efficiency does not measure the effect on families. A bus reused for a second route may be an operational asset, but the required schedule may mean a 6:00 a.m. pickup, an elementary dismissal before working parents are available, or additional paid childcare.

Third, implementation quality matters as much as theoretical efficiency. Jefferson County's failure was not proof that route consolidation can never work. It was proof that an unvalidated plan can place children and families into chaos.

Fourth, later secondary starts may produce measurable student benefits, but those benefits may be achieved by assigning earlier or later hours to younger students. Seattle's students slept longer and improved their grades, but Boston showed that families may reject the trade when the costs are placed elsewhere. ([Education Next](#))

Fifth, public acceptance cannot be manufactured after the decision. Boston announced a technically sophisticated solution and lost the public. Saint Paul spent years testing and adapting. Saratoga withdrew when the family consequences proved unacceptable. The process was not incidental to the outcome. It was part of the outcome.

Part Two: Four-Day School Weeks

What a Four-Day School Week Actually Changes

Most four-day districts hold classes Monday through Thursday or Tuesday through Friday. They lengthen the remaining days to satisfy state instructional-hour requirements.

The result is not ordinarily a 20 percent reduction in required classroom hours. It is a compression of instruction into fewer, longer days.

Four-day schools average approximately 148 school days annually, compared with approximately 179 in five-day schools. Districts add about 50 minutes to each remaining school day. That protects some formal instructional time, but students still lose school-day transitions, meals, recesses, advisory periods, access to staff, and other institutional supports that are not fully recreated by adding minutes to four longer days. ([NWEA](#))

The policy is often adopted for three reasons:

1. To reduce costs.
2. To recruit or retain teachers.
3. To improve morale, flexibility, attendance, or family time.

The research shows that the schedule can produce some of these benefits in particular communities. It also shows that many promised benefits are smaller, less consistent, or less measurable than the public is initially led to believe.

National Research: Popularity Is Real

Community satisfaction is one of the strongest findings in favor of four-day schools.

RAND researchers interviewed or surveyed thousands of parents, students, teachers, and administrators. Eighty-nine percent of elementary parents in participating four-day districts described themselves as mostly or very satisfied, and 85 percent of students said they liked the schedule “a lot.” More recent summaries report that approximately 84 percent of families and 95 percent of students in four-day districts would choose to retain the schedule. ([RAND](#))

Families frequently report less stress, more family time, increased scheduling flexibility, easier medical appointments, travel opportunities, and a day for work, farming, therapy, athletics, or other activities.

This popularity cannot be dismissed as imaginary. It is one of the policy’s most consistent documented results.

Popularity, however, is not the same as academic, financial, or social success.

National Research: Savings Are Usually Modest

National reviews place average district savings between approximately 0.4 and 2.5 percent of the annual budget. One estimate puts the maximum potential savings at about 5.43 percent, but most districts do not approach that maximum, particularly when they continue providing meals, childcare, tutoring, enrichment, transportation, or staff activities on the fifth day. ([National Conference of State Legislatures](#))

NWEA’s 2026 synthesis places average savings near 2 percent. The largest reductions generally come from transportation, food service, hourly staffing, utilities, and building operations. ([NWEA](#))

The policy may therefore save money, but it rarely solves a structural budget problem by itself.

National Research: Attendance Gains Are Difficult to Find

Districts often predict that students will schedule appointments on the off day and miss fewer classes.

The evidence has not consistently confirmed that claim. RAND and subsequent reviews found little or no statistically meaningful difference in student attendance between four-day and five-day districts. ([RAND](#))

A district may experience a local improvement. It should not present attendance improvement as an established national effect.

National Research: Academic Growth Is the Central Warning

A 2024 multistate, student-level analysis found statistically significant negative effects on spring reading achievement and on fall-to-spring growth in both reading and mathematics. The effects were larger in non-rural schools. ([Economics of Education Review](#))

The broader research suggests that four-day students may grow the equivalent of approximately two to seven weeks less per year than comparable five-day students. The losses are not uniform. Districts preserving at least 32 instructional hours per week appear to perform better than districts offering fewer than 30 hours. Rural districts sometimes show smaller or statistically insignificant effects, while suburban and non-rural districts have shown greater losses. ([NWEA](#))

RAND found that scores did not necessarily collapse after adoption. Instead, students' achievement grew more slowly than in comparable five-day districts, causing the gap to accumulate over time. ([RAND](#))

Researcher Christopher Doss said many expected benefits could not be confirmed quantitatively, leaving communities to decide “what trade-offs they’re comfortable with.” ([RAND](#))

This is a crucial distinction. A district can announce that scores rose under a four-day week and still omit the relevant comparison. The proper question is not merely whether scores rose. It is whether they rose as much as they would have under a credible alternative.

National Research: Teacher Recruitment May Be Local and Temporary

Four-day schedules are attractive to many teachers. That preference can increase applications in a district that becomes the only four-day employer in its labor market.

Independence, Missouri, found that 63 percent of surveyed applicants ranked the schedule among their three leading reasons for applying. Twenty-seven percent ranked it first, and 61 percent said the schedule would make them much more likely to accept one of two otherwise similar offers. ([PRiME Center](#))

National and multistate research, however, has found no consistent evidence that four-day weeks materially improve teacher recruitment or retention over time. The advantage may erode as neighboring districts adopt the same schedule. ([CALDER Center](#))

A schedule can therefore function as a competitive advantage when it is unusual and lose that advantage when it becomes ordinary.

National Research: Behavior May Improve Inside School

Oklahoma high schools operating four-day weeks experienced substantial reductions in reported bullying and fighting. The same research found no detectable effect on attendance or ACT performance. ([National Conference of State Legislatures](#))

Some districts also report calmer teachers, fewer office referrals, and improved morale. These effects may be genuine, particularly where the off day provides planning or recovery time.

They must still be weighed against what happens outside school.

National Research: The Fifth Day Is Not Empty

A Colorado study found that juvenile crime among high-school-aged youth increased by approximately 20 percent following adoption of a four-day week, with the strongest effect in property crime. The researchers found no corresponding increase in violent crime. ([Economics of Education Review](#))

The result should not be used to claim that four-day students become criminals. It shows that supervision and routine matter. A full weekday without school creates different risks for different students.

The fifth day may become:

- Family time.
- A therapy or medical appointment day.
- A workday for an older student.
- A teacher-planning day.
- A childcare bill.
- A day without school meals.
- A day without special-education services.
- A day without a trusted adult.
- A day of unsupervised isolation.
- A day for delinquency.
- A day of rest.

The result depends heavily on the child, the household, the community, and the services provided.

Four-Day School Week Case Studies

Colorado District 27J: Popular, Stable, and Academically Contested

Colorado's 27J Schools adopted a Tuesday-through-Friday schedule in 2018 after struggling to compete with neighboring districts on teacher salaries.

A district survey of nearly 5,000 parents, students, staff members, and community members found 78 percent favorable toward the four-day week. Parents gave the schedule especially strong ratings. A separate youth survey found that 77 percent of responding students agreed that they received more sleep under the four-day schedule. ([27J Schools](#))

District surveys later showed nearly 80 percent parent support and approximately 85 percent teacher support. Superintendent Will Pierce summarized the feedback: "Quality of life is what they're reporting." Fewer than 300 of approximately 20,000 students used the district's off-day childcare program. ([Associated Press](#))

Those findings strongly support a conclusion that the district and most responding families considered the policy successful.

The academic record is more complicated. Research found slight test-score declines compared with neighboring districts, along with an apparent effect on home values. Broader Colorado research has not found consistent improvements in attendance, recruitment, or retention. ([Associated Press](#))

The District's Apparent Verdict

Success. The schedule remains in place, surveys show strong support, and district leaders cite quality-of-life and staffing benefits.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Predominantly favorable, based on district survey responses.

The Reader's Question

Should strong family satisfaction outweigh comparatively slower academic growth?

Independence, Missouri: A Recruiting Success and a Family Argument

Independence became Missouri's largest four-day district when it adopted the schedule for the 2023-2024 school year.

The district reported increased teacher applications and fewer retirements. A formal applicant study found that the schedule played a major role in attracting candidates. ([PRiME Center](#))

The district offered optional Monday programs and childcare, but not every family considered those measures adequate. Parent Brandi Prunte objected to the idea that families should be forced to purchase care for a day that had previously been a school day. She acknowledged the recruiting benefits but warned that the policy "can't be at the expense of the community or families." ([Associated Press](#))

The community later had the opportunity to render a direct verdict. In November 2025, Independence voters approved continuation of the four-day schedule under a Missouri law requiring voter authorization in larger districts. ([Missouri Independent](#))

The District's Apparent Verdict

Success, particularly as a recruitment tool.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Mixed at the household level, but the electorate ultimately approved continuation.

The Reader's Question

Does a majority vote settle whether the program succeeded, or must the district separately account for the minority of families bearing disproportionate childcare and employment costs?

Saydel, Iowa: Strong Local Reports, Limited Long-Term Evidence

Saydel Community School District gradually adopted a four-day schedule during the 2024-2025 school year.

One parent reported that her son could schedule therapy on Fridays without missing instruction and had made substantial reading progress. District educators reported improvements in behavior, English-language arts, morale, and preparation. A teacher said office behavior calls fell by more than 50 percent. ([Nebraska Public Media](#))

These reports are meaningful, but they represent a short observation period and largely local testimony. They do not yet establish whether the results will persist or whether Saydel outperformed comparable five-day districts.

Researcher Emily Morton warned that national evidence generally shows "small, negative effects on achievement." ([Nebraska Public Media](#))

The District's Apparent Verdict

Early success, based on behavior, morale, scheduling, and locally reported academic improvements.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

At least some families report significant benefits, particularly those needing recurring appointments or therapy.

The Reader's Question

How many years of comparative achievement, attendance, staffing, and family data should be required before early enthusiasm becomes a defensible verdict?

Martensdale-St. Marys, Iowa: Culture and Morale as the Leading Measures

Martensdale-St. Marys adopted a four-day schedule and reported improved morale, stronger open enrollment, fewer behavioral problems, and greater teacher preparedness. The district offered childcare and sent food home with students for the fifth day. ([Nebraska Public Media](#))

Superintendent William Watson said, "It changed our culture. People smile in our building." He also acknowledged that the model "doesn't work everywhere." ([Nebraska Public Media](#))

The district's account presents a credible local success story. The remaining question is whether the cultural gains are accompanied by sustained academic growth and whether the childcare and food programs reach every family needing them.

The District's Apparent Verdict

Success.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

The available reporting indicates broad acceptance, although no comprehensive independent family survey was located.

The Reader's Question

How much weight should community morale receive when the long-term academic record remains incomplete?

Cardinal, Iowa: Better Scores, but an Unproven Cause

Cardinal Community School District reported increased English and mathematics proficiency during the first year of its four-day schedule. Those increases exceeded statewide growth in the same measures. ([Nebraska Public Media](#))

That is favorable evidence. It is not proof that the calendar caused the improvement. Scores may also be influenced by curriculum, student composition, teacher changes, interventions, testing participation, or other reforms.

Cardinal's superintendent candidly rejected academic improvement as the logical reason for reducing the number of school days.

The District's Apparent Verdict

The district reported favorable first-year outcomes.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

The available record does not provide a sufficiently detailed independent family verdict.

The Reader's Question

Should a single favorable year be treated as success, or should a district be required to demonstrate several years of comparative growth?

Clearwater R-1, Missouri: Community Opposition Redirected the Debate

Clearwater R-1 considered a four-day calendar partly to improve teacher quality of life.

Parents organized around academic research and opposed the proposal. When the strength of opposition became clear, community discussion shifted toward a bond or tax measure to increase teacher compensation directly. ([Nebraska Public Media](#))

The District's Apparent Verdict

The calendar proposal was not accepted as the preferred solution.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Opposition was strong enough to redirect the community toward addressing compensation rather than reducing school days.

The Reader's Question

Was this a failed four-day proposal, or a successful public process that identified the underlying problem and demanded a more direct solution?

Washington Community School District, Iowa: A Divided Survey and a Unanimous Rejection

Washington Community School District studied a four-day schedule for approximately a year.

Family surveys reportedly showed nearly equal support and opposition, with a substantial group expressing no strong preference. The school board voted 5-0 against adoption. ([Nebraska Public Media](#))

An elementary librarian summarized the concern: childcare, food insecurity, special education, and English-language services might all be harmed even if some districts could make the schedule work.

The District's Apparent Verdict

Insufficient justification to proceed.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Divided, with no public mandate for change.

The Reader's Question

Should a district require majority support before adopting a schedule that reorganizes every family's week?

Cartwright School District, Arizona: An Implemented Program Reversed

Cartwright School District adopted a four-day schedule in 2023. In January 2026, its governing board voted to return to a traditional five-day week beginning with the 2026-2027 school year.

The district's announcement said the return would prioritize "academic growth and well-being" and provide greater consistency for families. It also noted that five-day operation would expand access to school meals. ([Cartwright School District](#))

The board's decision was controversial and closely divided. The reversal itself is significant evidence. Whatever benefits the district experienced, a majority of the governing board concluded that the five-day schedule would better serve students and families.

The District's Apparent Verdict

The district no longer considered the four-day schedule the preferred arrangement.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Divided. The public controversy indicates that some families valued the four-day schedule while others wanted restoration of five-day instruction and services.

The Reader's Question

Does returning to five days prove failure, or does it show that a policy can serve a temporary purpose and later become less appropriate?

Jasper Independent School District, Texas: Two Years and a Reversal

Jasper Independent School District adopted a four-day week for 2022-2023 and later voted to return to a traditional five-day schedule for 2024-2025. ([Local report](#))

The accessible public record confirms the reversal but does not provide enough verified detail to state definitively why the district abandoned the calendar. That absence is itself important. A school district evaluating Jasper should obtain the board materials, surveys, academic comparisons, attendance data, staffing records, and family feedback rather than inventing a lesson unsupported by the record.

The District's Apparent Verdict

The board concluded that five days were preferable after the four-day trial.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

Not established by the accessible evidence reviewed here.

The Reader's Question

What evidence caused the reversal, and why is that evidence not readily available to other districts considering the same experiment?

Turner, Montana: A Schedule Fitted to a Very Small Rural Community

Turner School District serves slightly more than 50 students in a remote community. Long-distance athletic travel can remove many students from class, and the four-day schedule allows families additional time for farm work. ([Associated Press](#))

This is the kind of district in which national averages may be least useful. A calendar that fits a 50-student agricultural community may not translate to a suburban district serving 15,000 students.

The District's Apparent Verdict

The schedule fits the community's geography, travel, employment, and agricultural life.

The Families' Apparent Verdict

The available account indicates that the schedule aligns with local family needs.

The Reader's Question

Should a policy designed for an isolated rural community be cited as evidence for using the same schedule in a large town or metropolitan district?

What the Four-Day Cases Establish

The national and local evidence supports several conclusions without deciding the policy for every district.

First, four-day weeks are popular. Any honest review must acknowledge that many students, parents, and teachers prefer them.

Second, popularity is not proof of improved learning. The strongest recent research finds small but meaningful academic risks, especially where weekly instructional time falls and in non-rural districts. ([Economics of Education Review](#))

Third, district savings are generally real but modest. A district claiming that the schedule will solve a major budget problem should show the actual dollars, the percentage of the total budget, and every service eliminated or shifted to families. ([National Conference of State Legislatures](#))

Fourth, the recruitment advantage may be strongest when one district adopts the schedule before its neighbors. When many nearby districts follow, the competitive advantage declines.

Fifth, family impact is radically unequal. A family with flexible employment, older children, nearby grandparents, farm responsibilities, or Friday medical appointments may gain. A single parent working five weekdays may receive an uncompensated childcare obligation.

Sixth, the fifth day must be evaluated as part of the program. A district cannot call the calendar successful while excluding the cost of meals, childcare, intervention, transportation, special education, and supervision necessary to make the off day safe and workable.

Seventh, the schedule should be treated as a reversible policy, not an institutional identity. Cartwright and Jasper returned to five days. Clearwater and Washington rejected adoption. Independence voters approved continuation. Those communities reached different conclusions because their conditions and priorities differed.

The Family Test

The family test asks what the district's efficiency looks like inside an ordinary home.

For staggered busing, it asks:

- What time must the first child wake?
- What time does the last child return?
- Can parents still reach work?
- Who supervises a young child after an early dismissal?
- Can siblings watch one another as they did before?
- Are children standing in darkness?
- Does the schedule reduce or increase the time parents spend driving?
- Are sports, jobs, music, therapy, church, and family meals still practical?
- How much additional money must a household spend because the district saved money?

For a four-day week, it asks:

- Who supervises the child on the fifth day?
- Who provides breakfast and lunch?
- Can special-education services be delivered consistently?
- Can a working parent preserve employment?
- Is the fifth-day program free, available, and transported?
- Does the longer school day exhaust younger children?
- Are students receiving the same effective learning time, not merely the same scheduled minutes?
- Are vulnerable children losing regular contact with mandated reporters and trusted adults?
- Are the district's savings larger than the private costs imposed on families?

A policy has not been fully evaluated until those questions are answered.

Extensive Interrogatory for a School District

A. Purpose and Baseline

1. What exact problem is the proposed schedule intended to solve?
2. When was that problem first identified?
3. What quantitative evidence demonstrates that the problem exists?
4. Is the problem primarily financial, operational, academic, demographic, or related to staffing?
5. What year is being used as the baseline?
6. Why was that year selected?
7. Were any unusual conditions present during the baseline year?
8. What other remedies were considered?
9. What remedies were rejected?
10. Who recommended the proposed schedule?
11. Did any consultant, contractor, vendor, state agency, or employee have a financial or institutional interest in adoption?
12. What assumptions does the proposal depend upon?
13. Which assumptions have been independently validated?
14. What outcome would cause the district to admit that the proposal failed?
15. Is the policy a pilot, a temporary measure, or an indefinite change?
16. What is the formal review date?
17. What authority can reverse the policy?
18. Will reversal require another full public process?

B. Transportation System and Staggered Busing

19. How many buses currently operate each morning and afternoon?
20. How many will operate under the proposed tiers?
21. How many drivers are currently employed?
22. How many positions are vacant?
23. How many substitute drivers are available on an ordinary day?
24. How many routes will each driver complete?
25. How much recovery time exists between tiers?
26. What happens when the first route is ten minutes late?
27. How does that delay propagate through later tiers?
28. What is the longest scheduled student ride?
29. What was the longest actual ride during the previous year?
30. What maximum ride-time standard has the board adopted?

31. How many students will exceed 30, 45, 60, 75, or 90 minutes each way?
32. What is the earliest scheduled pickup?
33. How many students will board before 6:00, 6:15, 6:30, and 6:45 a.m.?
34. What is the latest scheduled drop-off?
35. How many students will arrive home after 5:00, 6:00, or 7:00 p.m.?
36. How many transfer points are included?
37. How long may a student wait at a transfer point?
38. Who supervises transfer points?
39. Are elementary and secondary students transported together?
40. What safeguards apply to mixed-age loading?
41. How were routes physically test-driven?
42. Were they tested at the actual time of day?
43. Were railroad crossings, seasonal roads, construction, traffic, and weather included?
44. Did drivers participate in route design?
45. How many hours of route practice will each driver receive?
46. What backup exists when a driver is absent?
47. What backup exists when a bus fails?
48. How many spare buses are available?
49. What GPS and parent-notification systems will be used?
50. How quickly will the district know that a student boarded the wrong bus?
51. How quickly will a parent be notified?
52. How will the district handle students without phones or reliable internet?
53. What call-center capacity exists during the first weeks?
54. Who has authority to suspend a failed route?
55. What emergency threshold will trigger a delayed opening or cancellation?
56. Will the district publish actual on-time performance by route?

C. Bell Times, Sleep, and Instruction

57. What are the current and proposed start and end times for every school?
58. How many schools move by more than 15, 30, 45, or 60 minutes?
59. What sleep research was considered?
60. Are middle and high schools beginning before 8:30 a.m.?
61. How many elementary students will wait for buses in darkness?
62. What lighting, sidewalks, reflectors, crossing assistance, or supervision will be provided?
63. How will the new schedule affect morning intervention programs?
64. How will it affect after-school tutoring?
65. How will it affect athletics?
66. How will it affect music, clubs, jobs, church activities, and family meals?
67. How much instructional time will be lost to late bus arrivals?
68. How will the district record that lost time?
69. Will teachers be required to delay instruction for late-arriving students?
70. How will the schedule affect students attending career-technical programs, dual-credit courses, or other campuses?

D. Family and Childcare Impact

71. How many families were surveyed?
72. What percentage of all district households responded?
73. Were responses separated by school, grade, income, disability status, language, transportation use, and employment schedule?
74. How many families will require new before-school care?
75. How many will require new after-school care?

76. How many existing childcare slots are available?
77. What is their cost?
78. Who pays that cost?
79. Will childcare be available at every affected school?
80. Will transportation be provided to childcare?
81. What happens when childcare programs reach capacity?
82. How will the schedule affect single-parent households?
83. How will it affect families in which all adults begin work before school?
84. How will it affect families in which siblings currently supervise younger children?
85. How will it affect hourly workers who cannot change shifts?
86. Did the district estimate aggregate household costs?
87. Were lost wages included?
88. Were additional transportation costs included?
89. Were private childcare costs included?
90. Were employer consequences included?
91. Were family surveys conducted before or after the district selected its preferred plan?
92. Were respondents shown actual school-specific times before answering?
93. Will the district publish all survey questions and results?
94. Will minority objections be reported rather than buried inside a districtwide average?

E. Four-Day Week Instruction

95. How many instructional days will be eliminated?
96. How many minutes will be added to each remaining day?
97. How many weekly instructional hours will students actually receive?
98. How does that compare with the current schedule?
99. How much time is formal instruction rather than lunch, passing periods, recess, advisory, assemblies, or dismissal?
100. Will elementary students remain attentive during the longer day?
101. What curriculum changes are required?
102. How will teachers adjust pacing?
103. What subjects or electives will lose time?
104. How will intervention and remediation be scheduled?
105. How will the district prevent compressed instruction from becoming rushed instruction?
106. What assessment will measure fall-to-spring growth?
107. What comparable five-day districts will be used as controls?
108. Will the district publish grade-level and subgroup results?
109. What academic decline will trigger reconsideration?
110. How many years will the district wait before acting on a decline?
111. Will the district distinguish rising scores from scores rising more slowly than comparable districts?

F. Fifth-Day Services

112. Will school buildings be open on the fifth day?
113. Which students may attend?
114. Is attendance optional or assigned?
115. Is the program free?
116. Is transportation provided?
117. Are breakfast and lunch provided?
118. Are special-education services provided?
119. Are nurses, counselors, social workers, and security personnel present?
120. What is the staff-to-student ratio?
121. How many spaces exist?

122. What happens when demand exceeds capacity?
123. Will participation be available to students whose parents lack transportation?
124. Will fifth-day attendance carry stigma as a remedial program?
125. How will homeless students be served?
126. How will food-insecure students be served?
127. How will students in unsafe homes be served?
128. How will English learners receive support?
129. How will students requiring regular therapy receive services?
130. What will the fifth-day program cost?
131. Is that cost deducted from claimed savings?

G. Teacher Recruitment and Retention

132. How many vacancies existed before adoption?
133. How long did each vacancy remain open?
134. How many applicants were received per position?
135. What was the annual turnover rate?
136. What percentage of departures were retirements, transfers, dismissals, or exits from teaching?
137. How will the district determine whether the calendar caused any improvement?
138. What neighboring districts are competing for the same teachers?
139. How many already use four-day schedules?
140. How much lower are district salaries than competing districts?
141. Was a salary increase considered?
142. What would an equivalent salary investment cost?
143. What evidence shows that teachers prefer a four-day schedule over improved pay, workload, leadership, or planning time?
144. Are teachers actually off on the fifth day?
145. If teachers must work, how is the schedule a recruitment benefit?
146. Will longer days increase fatigue or absenteeism?
147. How will retention be measured over three, five, and ten years?
148. What happens when neighboring districts adopt the same schedule?

H. Financial Claims

149. What is the current transportation budget?
150. What is the projected transportation budget?
151. What is the current total district budget?
152. What percentage of the total budget will actually be saved?
153. Are savings gross or net?
154. Do projected savings include consultant fees?
155. Do they include software?
156. Do they include additional childcare or fifth-day programming?
157. Do they include driver overtime?
158. Do they include additional utility use during longer days?
159. Do they include increased athletics or activity transportation?
160. Do they include meal replacement programs?
161. Do they include additional parent transportation?
162. Which costs are being eliminated?
163. Which costs are merely being transferred?
164. What happens if fuel, wages, enrollment, or ridership changes?
165. Has an independent party reviewed the financial model?
166. Will actual savings be published after each year?

- 167. Where will the savings be spent?
- 168. Did the board formally restrict the savings to that purpose?

I. Safety, Equity, and Vulnerable Students

- 169. How will early darkness affect student safety?
- 170. How will late dismissal affect student safety?
- 171. How will the plan affect students with disabilities?
- 172. How will it affect students requiring door-to-door transportation?
- 173. How will it affect homeless students?
- 174. How will it affect foster children?
- 175. How will it affect students living in poverty?
- 176. How will it affect students whose parents lack vehicles?
- 177. How will it affect rural students with long rides?
- 178. How will it affect students working after school?
- 179. How will it affect students responsible for sibling care?
- 180. How will it affect children in unsafe or abusive households?
- 181. How will missed meals be replaced?
- 182. How will reduced contact with teachers and mandated reporters be addressed?
- 183. Has the district evaluated juvenile safety or delinquency on the off day?
- 184. Will outcome data be separated by income, race, disability, language, grade, and geography?
- 185. Can families request an alternative school or schedule?
- 186. What happens when a family cannot comply with the new arrangement?

J. Transparency and Accountability

- 187. When was the public first informed?
- 188. When did administrators begin planning?
- 189. What documents existed before public notice?
- 190. Were all consultant reports published?
- 191. Were routing assumptions published?
- 192. Were financial spreadsheets published?
- 193. Were raw survey results published?
- 194. Were dissenting staff analyses preserved?
- 195. Did the board receive information unavailable to the public?
- 196. How much time was allowed between publication and decision?
- 197. Did the board vote on separate components or one bundled package?
- 198. Can staggered busing be evaluated separately from a four-day week?
- 199. Can bell-time changes be evaluated separately from route changes?
- 200. What public hearings were held?
- 201. Were meetings scheduled when working parents could attend?
- 202. Was childcare provided during public meetings?
- 203. Were translated materials available?
- 204. Were families presented with alternatives?
- 205. Did the district tell families what the proposal would cost them?
- 206. Will the board receive quarterly public reports?
- 207. Who is accountable if projections prove false?
- 208. What automatic sunset or reconsideration provision applies?
- 209. What evidence would cause each board member to vote for reversal?
- 210. Will the district commit to asking families after implementation whether they still consider the policy successful?

Sample Staggered-Busing Scorecard

Category	Weight	Score of 5	Score of 0
Student safety and accountability	20	Every student continuously accounted for; no serious incidents	Missing, misrouted, or unsupervised students
Reliability and on-time performance	15	At least 98 percent on time after stabilization	Persistent delays or unpredictable service
Ride time	10	Nearly all rides under 45 minutes; none over 60	Routine rides over 75 to 90 minutes
Sleep and age-appropriate times	10	Secondary starts align with sleep research; no extreme elementary pickups	Predawn pickups or biologically harmful secondary starts
Family employment and childcare	15	Minimal additional cost; sufficient care is available	Major added costs, lost work, or unavailable care
Operational efficiency	10	Documented reduction in buses, routes, mileage, or overtime	No improvement or increased operational burden
Net financial result	10	Independently verified net savings	Savings disappear after full costs are counted
Equity and special populations	5	Burdens do not concentrate on vulnerable families	Disproportionate burden on low-income or disabled students
Transparency and responsiveness	5	Data published; concerns produce timely corrections	Decisions concealed, bundled, or defended despite contrary evidence

Interpretation

- 90 to 100: Strong evidence of success.
- 80 to 89: Successful with limited correctable weaknesses.
- 70 to 79: Mixed result requiring formal remediation.
- 60 to 69: Weak result; continued operation requires substantial justification.
- Below 60: Failure or an unjustified transfer of costs and risks.
- Automatic failure review: Any child left unaccounted for, routine rides exceeding 90 minutes, repeated drop-offs after 7:00 p.m., or material safety data concealed from the board or public.

Sample Four-Day School Week Scorecard

Category	Weight	Score of 5	Score of 0
Comparative academic growth	20	Growth equals or exceeds comparable five-day districts	Persistent comparative decline
Effective instructional time	10	At least 32 high-quality instructional hours weekly	Substantial reduction or ineffective compressed time
Family support	10	Broad, sustained support across household types	Opposition or support concentrated among favored groups
Childcare and family employment	10	Free, sufficient, accessible care with transportation	Families bear unaffordable or unavailable care
Meals and vulnerable-student support	10	Meals and services continue without access barriers	Students lose meals, therapy, intervention, or supervision
Teacher recruitment and retention	10	Verified improvement attributable to the calendar	No improvement or advantage disappears
Attendance and engagement	5	Sustained comparative improvement	No improvement or worsening absence
Behavior, safety, and student well-being	10	Better behavior and well-being without off-day harms	Increased delinquency, isolation, exhaustion, or risk

Category	Weight	Score of 5	Score of 0
Net financial savings	10	Verified savings after fifth-day costs	Negligible or illusory savings
Transparency and reversibility	5	Published data, annual review, and clear reversal standard	Policy retained without meaningful evaluation

Interpretation

- 90 to 100: Strong evidence that the calendar fits the community.
- 80 to 89: Generally successful but requires continued monitoring.
- 70 to 79: Mixed, with material tradeoffs requiring correction.
- 60 to 69: Weak justification for continued use.
- Below 60: Failure, or a policy sustained primarily by preference rather than results.
- Automatic reconsideration: Two consecutive years of materially slower academic growth, inability to provide fifth-day meals or care, severe service inequities, or demonstrated net savings below 1 percent without other measurable benefits.

Glossary

Bell-time cascade: A sequence in which a delay on the first bus route causes delays on every later route assigned to the same bus or driver.

Baseline: The documented conditions existing before a policy change, used to determine whether performance improved or declined.

Causal effect: A result that can reasonably be attributed to the policy rather than to unrelated changes occurring at the same time.

Childcare displacement: The transfer of student-supervision responsibility from a school district to families, private providers, relatives, or community organizations.

Comparative growth: Student improvement measured against a credible group of similar students or districts, rather than merely comparing this year's raw score with last year's.

Confounding variable: A factor other than the schedule that may influence the measured result, such as curriculum changes, enrollment shifts, staffing changes, or new interventions.

Deadhead mileage: Distance traveled by a bus without students, often between the end of one route and the beginning of another.

Difference-in-differences: A research method comparing the change in a participating group with the change in a similar nonparticipating group.

Effective instructional time: Time during which students are meaningfully engaged in instruction, as distinguished from scheduled minutes that include transitions, fatigue, disruptions, or administrative activity.

Family success: A result in which a policy is workable for households without unreasonable added costs, lost employment, unsafe supervision arrangements, or severe disruption.

Fifth-day program: Childcare, tutoring, meals, enrichment, intervention, or other services provided on the weekday when regular four-day schools are closed.

Four-day school week: A calendar concentrating regular instruction into four days, usually by lengthening each remaining school day.

Gross savings: Costs apparently avoided before subtracting new expenses or costs transferred to other parties.

Implementation failure: A breakdown caused by inadequate preparation, testing, staffing, communication, training, or contingency planning, rather than necessarily by the underlying concept.

Instructional-hour requirement: The minimum annual or weekly amount of scheduled instructional time required by state law or regulation.

Lagging indicator: An outcome visible only after substantial time, such as multiyear achievement growth, graduation, teacher retention, or long-term family employment effects.

Leading indicator: An early measure, such as first-month delays, childcare enrollment, complaints, staff applications, or student fatigue.

Mixed-age loading: Transporting elementary and secondary students together on the same bus.

Net savings: Savings remaining after all implementation, staffing, programming, childcare, meal, technology, overtime, and support costs are counted.

Operational success: Improvement in fleet use, staffing, mileage, routes, timing, or cost.

Pilot: A limited, temporary implementation intended to produce evidence before broader or permanent adoption.

Response bias: Distortion created when people answering a survey differ materially from those who do not respond.

Ride-time cap: A formal maximum amount of time a student may remain on a bus during an ordinary route.

Route compression: Reducing the number of routes or buses by combining stops, increasing capacity utilization, or assigning multiple runs to one driver.

Selection bias: Distortion caused when the students, families, teachers, or districts choosing a program differ from those used for comparison.

Standard deviation: A statistical unit used to describe the size of a difference relative to the variation in the measured population.

Staggered busing: A transportation system using different school start and dismissal times so buses and drivers can complete multiple consecutive routes.

Stakeholder satisfaction: The reported approval of students, families, employees, or community members. It measures preference, not necessarily academic or financial performance.

Sunset provision: A requirement that a policy automatically expire unless the board affirmatively renews it after reviewing evidence.

Tier: One group of schools sharing approximately the same start and dismissal time within a staggered transportation system.

Transfer point: A location where students move from one bus or route to another.

Conclusion

The evidence does not support the claim that staggered busing succeeds or fails everywhere. It can produce substantial savings and still be rejected because the bell times impose unacceptable costs on families. It can also be the only practical method of operating during a driver shortage.

The evidence does not support the claim that four-day school weeks are either a miracle or an obvious disaster. They are popular. They can improve morale, flexibility, and local recruitment. They usually save less money than advocates

imply. They can slow academic growth, especially when instructional time is reduced. Their effects on families depend heavily on employment, income, transportation, age, geography, childcare, and the needs of individual children.

The most revealing question is not whether administrators can identify a benefit. Nearly every policy produces some benefit for someone.

The proper question is whether the district counted every cost, identified who bears it, disclosed every tradeoff, and established objective conditions under which it would admit the policy did not work.

A bus schedule is not successful merely because the bus was reused.

A school calendar is not successful merely because it is popular.

And a district has not saved money when it has merely handed the bill to families.

Footnotes and Source Notes

1. NWEA reported that more than 2,100 public schools in 26 states operated a four-day schedule during 2024-2025. [NWEA](#)
2. The U.S. Department of Transportation's evaluation of Boston's routing system reported 50 eliminated buses, one million fewer annual miles, and approximately \$5 million in savings. [U.S. DOT ITS](#)
3. Northwestern University's Kellogg School described the difference between Boston's successful route optimization and its rejected bell-time redesign. [Kellogg Insight](#)
4. Boston reversed the bell-time changes after parents raised employment, childcare, sleep, and family-schedule concerns. [Boston Magazine](#)
5. Bismarck's district comparison reported fewer routes, more transported students, lower projected costs, and more students boarding before 6:30 a.m. [Bismarck Public Schools](#)
6. Seattle estimated that limited bell-time and transportation changes would save more than \$6 million. [Seattle Public Schools](#)
7. Tacoma estimated approximately \$1 million in annual transportation savings and documented mixed parent reactions. [The News Tribune](#)
8. Jefferson County's 2023 transportation redesign produced severe opening-day delays and a temporary school closure. [Associated Press](#)
9. Saratoga Springs withdrew its staggered-time proposal following family and childcare objections. [Times Union](#)
10. Education Next reviewed staggered start-time experiences in Seattle, Boston, Kanawha County, Fort Wayne, and Saint Paul. [Education Next](#)
11. NCSL reported average four-day-week savings of approximately 0.4 to 2.5 percent and a maximum potential estimate of 5.43 percent. [National Conference of State Legislatures](#)
12. RAND documented strong student and parent satisfaction but limited evidence for many commonly claimed quantitative benefits. [RAND](#)
13. NWEA's 2026 review summarized research on achievement, instructional time, satisfaction, staffing, attendance, cost, behavior, and family effects. [NWEA](#)
14. A 2024 multistate analysis found negative effects on spring reading achievement and fall-to-spring reading and mathematics growth. [Economics of Education Review](#)
15. Research on Colorado found an approximately 20 percent increase in juvenile crime among high-school-aged youth, concentrated in property crime. [Economics of Education Review](#)
16. District 27J's survey found 78 percent overall favorability toward the four-day week and strong reported sleep benefits. [27J Schools](#)

17. Reporting on District 27J and Independence documented strong support, recruitment claims, childcare questions, and academic tradeoffs. [Associated Press](#)
18. The PRiME Center's Independence case study found that the schedule was a leading consideration for many teacher applicants. [PRiME Center](#)
19. Independence and Hallsville voters approved continuation of four-day schedules in November 2025. [Missouri Independent](#)
20. Nebraska Public Media's Midwest review documented local successes, opposition, research concerns, and experiences in several Iowa and Missouri districts. [Nebraska Public Media](#)
21. Cartwright School District announced its return to a five-day week beginning in 2026-2027. [Cartwright School District](#)
22. Jasper Independent School District returned to five-day instruction for 2024-2025 after using a four-day schedule. [Local report](#)