Our Voice

Our Voice: Four-day school weeks interesting conversation to have

Sep 28, 2019

Most South Dakota students go to school five days a week.

But more and more are going four days a week. A South Dakota News Watch study earlier this year showed 34 South Dakota school districts are maintaining a four-day school week.

That is nearly 23 percent of the 149 public districts statewide, according to the report. Custer was the first district in South Dakota to transition to a four-day week in 1995.

The trend is growing nationwide as well. And growing fast.

Nationwide, the number of school districts moving to a four-day week has grown dramatically in the last three years. It went from approximately 120 districts in 21 states in 2016 to 560 in 25 states now.

More than half of these 560 districts are located in four states: Colorado, Montana, Oklahoma and Oregon.

Only a handful of districts in our neighboring North Dakota are on a four-day schedule.

Most districts on a four-day week are small and rural. But that is changing as well.

Almost 100 districts in Colorado have transitioned to either Monday–Thursday or Tuesday–Friday school weeks.
Included in that Colorado group is a suburban district northeast of Denver. Headquartered in Brighton, School District 27J serves 19,000 students in 26 schools. Brighton is the largest district in the U.S. on a four-day week.

And another densely populated, urban district in Colorado, Pueblo City Schools, also has adopted a four-day week.

On average, South Dakota schools practicing the four-day week have classes 45 to 60 minutes longer each day than schools in the state on the traditional five-day schedule.

Saving money, especially early on, was a motivating factor in going from five days to four. However, those savings have seemed to be minimal at best, according to many schools that have made the switch.

There have been other benefits, however.

Some district administrators say they have seen increased time for students to work with teachers, time for teacher training and preparation and other benefits from the calendar change.

Districts also have used Fridays for remedial days, allowing students with needs to catch up. The flexibility of the shortened week also has allowed parents to schedule things like doctor’s appointments on Fridays without having to excuse their children from class.

There are negatives as well. The longer days can be hard for younger students whose attention spans might be shorter. Also, a three-day weekend makes it harder for some students to retain the information they are studying.

And for low-income families, finding quality Friday or Monday day care and providing sufficient meals on the days the students aren’t in school also can be challenging.

The research on the four-day school week is limited and, in many cases, inconclusive. Many parents, students and teachers seem to love it and the flexibility that comes with a shortened week of formal classes.

Since it is a rather new educational phenomena, no one seems to really know its effect on children and learning just yet.
That will be interesting to learn and might lead to some intriguing choices — districts returning to five-day weeks or more implementing the four-day system. But here’s what should never change. The decision needs to be a local one, left in the hands of school board members guided by feedback from the district and its residents.

However, it is an option available for each community to explore. And it’s a creative way to examine schools and their educational missions.

And having more options and trying new ways to educate our youth usually turn out to be good things. And we like it when the debate about the quality of education dominates community coffee shop conversations rather than how the local football team did on Friday night.

— American News Editorial Board
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AP Top 25 Poll

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### AP PRO 32 Poll

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**Poll Released: Sep 24**