

For several years, there has been an increasing awareness of replacing the traditional 5-day school week with a shortened 4-day week. In such a plan, students will receive an extra day off from school, either on a Friday or Monday, in exchange for a longer period of time in the classroom, typically 15-20 minutes per class period. This plan has been implemented in Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon, Wyoming, South Dakota and in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Numerous states and their legislatures, facing massive budgetary shortfalls, have sought to make an informed decision.

In considering all the facts surrounding the situation, I have come to the conclusion that there should be no change to the current situation as it exists in transitioning to a 4-day school week. My reasons for opposition are numerous.

There are concerns regarding alternative care for children and youth; what can the parents be expected to pay for day care? If there is not supervised care provided, then what will be expected of proper supervision, especially of our younger children? It is entirely possible that there may be a resurgence in juvenile delinquency, and expecting the police to be our ex facto day care providers. If our youth are in school being educated, then there is no need for additional funds to be expended on day care providers.

We must also evaluate the educational results over the last 25-30 years. Based upon what I have read, there seems to be conflicting data on student testing results. Joseph T. Newlin, the director of the office of rural education at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, said that his university's studies in the 1980s of student achievement were inconclusive. In 1990, a superintendent in Texico, New Mexico examined testing data from the first ten New Mexico districts to go on a four-day week. He compared eight years of test scores from four-day and five-day districts and found the mean score among four-day schools was higher but not high enough to be considered "statistically significant."

Student demands of long days and late evenings create fatigued students who cannot function at their best in class the next day. Health concerns can create absentee students; then once in the class, how must a teacher work with students who have been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD and seeking to keep them focused? What about students' tutoring? Hours of homework may need to be completed before bed. A four-day school week has not adequately addressed this issue.

Regarding teacher demands, more is expected in a day's work to be sure that the curriculum is covered by the year's end. According to teachers in the Boundary, British Columbia school district, teachers had great difficulty completing the curriculum. The question was asked, "What impact will this have on Boundary's educational outcomes and future test scores?" Teachers are expected to be more flexible in scheduling, more focused on student attention and that their pupils are learning what is needed. There many actually be questions posed for the teachers as to why they aren't doing their job because they have longer classroom times!

What are perceptions that can be raised? Some may wonder that if this plan has been around for so many years, where are the results that it is truly working and that there are more schools who want to take a serious look? The School District of Greenville County, South Carolina concluded, "It is not surprising that little evidence - except that provided by testimonials and informal studies long after the fact - can be found about its positive or negative effects on student achievement or any other aspect of the school program. What little evidence of potential benefit that does exist should not be used as a basis for moving a 60,000-student district toward that option." Political concerns share the perspective that there should be more time in school, not less, and that this shift to "fewer days, less education" seems to fulfill their beliefs.

In general, it appears that savings have been modest, and generally less than expected. If schools have sought to do this for economic purposes, teachers and staff may wonder what impact this will have on their salaries, benefits, pensions. Questions may be raised in the use of the cost savings, if they are not being used for education.

In my opinion, there are too many unanswered questions to compel schools to go to a 4-day week. There must be more evaluation done to ensure that the long-term academic achievement of our children will not be threatened for the sake of saving educational dollars.