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The Impact of a Four-Day School Week on Teacher Recruitment:

A Case Study of a Large Urban School District

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Currently, over a third of public school districts in Missouri utilize a four-day school week (4DSW). The overwhelming majority that currently use a shortened school week are small, rural school districts. The primary reason cited by districts for transitioning to the 4DSW is to recruit and retain certified educators in an increasingly competitive workforce marketplace. While, up to this point, the four-day school week has been a rural school district phenomenon, this is beginning to change as larger districts also struggle to find and retain staff. This study examined the 4DSW influence on job applications to the Independent School District (ISD), which adopted a four-day school week for the 2023-2024 school year. With over 14,000 students and over 1,200 certified staff, ISD is by far the largest 4DSW district in Missouri. As policymakers analyze the 4DSW, it is important to investigate how the size and diversity of a school impact a school district's ability to attract and retain teachers.

Key Points

- Sixty-three percent of the applicants rated the 4DSW schedule as one of their top three priorities for applying for a job at ISD.
- Twenty-seven percent of the applicants ranked the 4DSW schedule as their number one priority.
- According to applicants, if given two similar job offers from districts with different schedules, 61% said a 4DSW schedule would make them much more willing to accept a job offer.
- The vast majority of applicants are from Independence and the surrounding Kansas City metropolitan area.

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Introduction

Current estimates are that over 1,600 schools in the United States have adopted a four-day school week (4DSW)[1]. This model has gained traction primarily due to the growing difficulties school districts face in attracting qualified candidates for employment vacancies. As Missouri schools continue to hire more teachers, fewer candidates are completing teacher preparation programs, and Missouri's average teacher pay remains much lower than national or regional averages[2]. From 2015 to 2021, only forty-six percent (46%) of Missouri beginning teachers remained in the teaching field after five years[3]. The teacher shortage is a crisis in Missouri. A report from the Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development[4] shows that during the 2022-2023 school year, thirty-five percent (35%) of Missouri first-year teachers were working with no teacher certification or were teaching only on a substitute teacher's certificate.

Research indicates that the 4DSW is well-received by educators, improving morale and enhancing their perception of instructional quality[5]. A survey completed by the national education publication Education Week[6] found the four-day school week attractive to all educators, especially teachers. This positive reception makes the 4DSW a potential recruitment tool, particularly for smaller, rural school districts that often struggle to attract and retain staff and have limited alternative incentives at their disposal. The adoption of the 4DSW often creates a ripple effect, with neighboring districts following suit in what Anglum and Park[7] describe as a "keeping up with the Joneses" trend.

The prevalence of the 4DSW is particularly notable in the central and western United States, with every state west of the Mississippi River now offering this option. During the 2023–2024 school year, over 30% of Missouri public school districts had adopted the shortened school week[8], however, the implementation of the 4DSW has been mainly limited to small, rural communities.

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[1] Thompson et al. (2021)
[2] Donaldson-Burle et al. (2023)
[3] Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2023)
[4] Dickey et al. (2024)
[5] Turner, Finch, & Uribe-Zarain (2018)
[6] Peetz (2023)
[7] Anglum and Park (2021)
[8] Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2024)

A significant departure from the norm occurred in the Fall of 2023 when the Independence School District (ISD), a large suburban district near Kansas City, Missouri, with over 14,000 students, transitioned to a 4DSW. As Anglum and colleagues[9] note, this adoption represents a clear exception to the "small-rural" paradigm typically associated with the 4DSW. During the 2023–2024 school year, only three of Missouri's 165 4DSW districts served over 3,000 students. The unique nature of Independence's implementation offers a valuable opportunity to examine how the effects of the 4DSW may differ in a large suburban context compared to the more common small-rural settings.

An analysis conducted by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education did not find a statistically significant effect of a four-day school week on Missouri student achievement[10] which has likely caused more school districts to consider the unique school calendar. The lack of negative impact on student academic outcomes, however, has not curbed scrutiny from Missouri policymakers. A new law was passed in 2024 that will require all large Missouri districts that would like to transition to a 4DSW to have it first approved by voters. Large existing 4DSW districts, like Independence, with over 30,000 citizens, will also be required to have a community vote once every ten years to remain on the 4DSW starting in the 2025–2026 school year. This has caused at least one large school district in the St. Louis region to delay a decision to adopt the 4DSW. Fox School District Superintendent Paul Fregeau says, "it'll be interesting to see the communities that have been in it for a while, what their votes are, that'll send a strong message one way or another."[11]

According to ISD Superintendent Dale Herl, the decision to adopt the 4DSW in Independence was primarily motivated by the need to enhance teacher recruitment and retention. Initial reports suggest a substantial impact, with Herl citing a 360% increase in job applications and full staffing across all classrooms[12]. These preliminary outcomes underscore the potential significance of the 4DSW as a recruitment strategy in diverse educational contexts. It is important to better understand how the 4DSW could impact the lack of applicants for educator vacancies in larger, non-rural school districts.

Given the exceptional nature of the ISD's adoption of the 4DSW and its broader implications for education policy in Missouri, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the 4DSW implementation's impact on faculty recruitment in Independence. Drawing on data collected from the pool of applicants for the 2023–2024 school year, this research seeks to describe the factors contributing to the reported 360%

[9] Anglum et al. (2023)
[10] Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2023)
[11] Lieberman (2024)
[12] Forino (2024)

increase in applications. Specifically, we will examine the demographic characteristics of the applicants and explore their motivations for seeking employment in the ISD under the new 4DSW model.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on alternative school scheduling and its effects on teacher recruitment while also offering valuable insights for policymakers and administrators considering similar strategies in diverse educational settings, including large suburban schools.

This brief uses the data from the applications ISD received during the year the school district adopted a 4DSW schedule to answer the following core questions:

1. What role does the 4DSW schedule play in the decision-making process of applicants when choosing between job offers from districts with different schedules?

2. To what extent does the appeal of a 4DSW schedule vary among different demographic groups of applicants?

Data and Sample

We surveyed certified applicants who applied for positions at ISD between October 2022, when the district adopted the 4DSW schedule, and July 2023, when the hiring process for the first year on the 4DSW was largely completed. The survey was distributed via email through Qualtrics to all 440 applicants. The researchers had no knowledge of the final employment outcome of the applicants; all applicants were invited to participate and some, no doubt, were not ultimately hired by ISD. Of these, 10 emails were returned as undeliverable, resulting in a final sample of 430 potential participants.

The survey instrument consisted of 12 questions, 9 of which were closed-ended and 3 of which were open-ended. The questions were designed to assess applicants' perceptions of the 4DSW and its influence on their decision to apply to ISD.

The survey was administered electronically through Qualtrics. To incentivize participation, respondents were offered a $10 gift card upon completion. Of the 430 potential participants, 155 (36.0%) initiated the survey, and 139 (32.3%) completed it, yielding a completion rate of 89.7% among those who started the survey. However, not all respondents answered all questions; the total sample size by question might vary.

The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Missouri State University prior to data collection. Participants were told about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses. Participants provided informed consent before completing the survey.

Survey Results

Reasons for Applying for a Job at ISD

To avoid prompting a biased response, we asked the applicants an open-ended question about why they applied to ISD without any mention of the four-day school week (4DSW). We categorized their responses based on…. Table 1 summarizes the categorized responses from 138 applicants.

TABLE 1

Main Reasons for Applying for a Job at the School District

Brief description of why you decided to apply for a job in the Independence School District

Reasons	Count	%
Four-day school week	37	27
Location/community factors	18	13
Seeking a new job/opportunity	17	13
Salary/benefits	11	8
Career advancement/change	9	7
Positive reputation of the district	7	5
Recent graduation/first teaching job	6	4
Specific position available	5	4
Previous connection to the district	5	4
Work-life balance (aside from 4DSW)	4	3
Dissatisfaction with current position/district	4	3
Relocation to the area	4	3
Commute/proximity to home	3	2
District improvements/initiatives	3	2
Diversity/community demographics	2	1
Total	135	100

The most frequently cited reason for applying to the district was the 4DSW, which many respondents highlighted as a primary motivation or a significant factor in their decision. Geographic considerations were also important for several applicants, with some mentioning that they lived in or near Independence, wanted to work in their local community, or were relocating to the Kansas City area. The commonly described reason was improved pay and benefits, which were notable attractions for multiple respondents.

Additionally, many applicants were seeking new opportunities, including recent graduates aiming for their first teaching position, experienced teachers desiring a change, and some individuals pursuing administrative or leadership roles.

Other less frequent considerations were mentioned. The district's reputation played a role in attracting applicants, with some mentioning positive feedback from colleagues or friends and being impressed by the district's leadership and initiatives. The desire for better work-life balance, especially among those with families, was commonly linked to the four-day school week. Also mentioned were the openings in specific fields of expertise or desired roles, such as instructional coaches or librarians, which attracted some applicants. A few respondents were alumni of the district or had previously worked there. Lastly, some applicants noted they had heard about positive changes or improvements within the district and expressed a desire to leave their current district or position.

Employment Status of Applicants

At the time of their application, the employment status of the applicants varied:

- 54% were employed as educators by another Missouri public school district.
- 11% were employed as educators by a public school district in another state.
- 4% were employed as educators by private or parochial schools.
- 31% were not employed as educators.

Among the 31% of respondents who were not employed as educators at the time of their application, a diverse range of occupations and activities were reported. Many were in education-related roles or transitions (for example, student teachers, substitute teachers, recent graduates, adjunct faculty, and academic advisors, etc.). Some came from non-education occupations (for example, healthcare, speech-language pathologists, self-employed, etc.). Several cited other types of life circumstances (for example, stay-at-home-parents, caregivers, volunteers, retired individuals, etc.).

It is important to note that 15 applicants (11%) were either retired educators or former educators who were not employed as educators at the time of the application.

Sought Educator Positions

In terms of the school level, many respondents (23%, 26 applicants) applied for teaching positions working with elementary students. A significant portion of respondents (15%, 17 applicants) were interested in

teaching positions related to special education. At the middle school or junior high level, teaching positions in ELA, social studies, math, and science, attracted 23% of respondents (23 applicants).

TABLE 2

Type of Position for which Respondents Applied

In general terms, what type of educator position were you applying for in the Independence School District?

Position Type	Count	%
Early Elementary or Elementary Teacher	26	23
Special Education Teacher (any grade level)	17	15
English/Language Arts Teacher (any grade level)	9	8
Certified Counselor, Social Worker, or Therapist	7	6
Social Studies Teacher	7	6
Certified School Administrator	6	5
Mathematics Teacher (any grade level)	5	4
Physical Education Teacher (any grade level)	3	3
Science Teacher (any grade level)	2	2
Other Area Teacher (any grade level in an area not listed above)	31	27
Total	113	100

Previous Experience as Educator

A significant portion of applicants (40%, 55 respondents) had between 0 to 5 years of experience, as shown in Table 3. This group includes both new and relatively new educators, indicating strong interest from early-career professionals in joining the district. Thirty-five percent of applicants (48 respondents) reported having 6 to 15 years of experience. This suggests that many mid-career educators are also interested in positions within the district. In addition, 15% of applicants (21 respondents) had 16 to 25 years of experience, reflecting interest from more seasoned educators who bring significant experience to their roles. Finally, 10% of applicants (14 respondents) had over 26 years of experience, indicating that veteran educators with extensive backgrounds in teaching and education are also seeking opportunities within ISD.

TABLE 3

Applicants' Years of Experience in Education

At the time you applied for a position in the Independence School District, how many years of experience did you have working as an educator in a school setting?

Years of Experience	Count	%
0–5	55	40
6–15	48	35
16–25	21	15
26 or more	14	10
Total	138	100

Priorities Ranked

We asked participants to rank their priorities when deciding to apply for a job at ISD, specifically to determine how important the 4DSW schedule was in their decision-making process. Table 4 reports the frequency of responses associated with the 4DSW schedule. Out of 136 responses, 37 (27%) ranked it as number one priority, 26 (19%) ranked it as number two, and 23 (17%) ranked it as number three. Sixty-three percent of the applicants rated the 4DSW as one of their top three priorities.

TABLE 4

Applicants' Ranks of the 4DSW as a Priority for Applying for a Job at ISD

When you applied for a job in the Independence School District, rate the importance of your priorities when deciding to apply (rank 1 as most important priority—rank 8 as least important priority) - School Calendar Structure (4-day school week calendar)

Rank	Count	%
1	37	27
2	26	19
3	23	17
4	10	7
5	8	6
6	6	4
7	10	7
8	16	12
Total	136	100

Each priority is summarized below with a focus on their relative importance based on the rankings provided by the applicants. Priorities are presented in order from most important to least important based on the frequency of high rankings.

1. Salary:
    - Ranked 1 or 2 by 87 respondents (63.5%)
    - Most frequently ranked as the top priority
    - Very few low-rankings
2. School Calendar Structure (4DSW):
    - Ranked 1 or 2 by 63 respondents (46%)
    - Second most frequent top-ranking
    - Bimodal distribution with some ranking it low
3. Geographic Location:
    - Ranked 1 or 2 by 43 respondents (31.4%)
    - Third most frequent top-ranking
    - Fairly even distribution across rankings

4. Health, Retirement, and Insurance Benefits:
    - Ranked 3 or 4 by 59 respondents (43%)
    - Rarely ranked as the top priority
    - Clustered in the middle rankings
5. School Leadership Quality:
    - Most commonly ranked 4, 5, or 6
    - Relatively even distribution across rankings
    - Not often a top priority but rarely the lowest
6. Instructional Opportunities and Resources:
    - Most commonly ranked in the middle (4, 5, 6)
    - Relatively even distribution
    - Not often a top or bottom priority
7. Student/Community Characteristics:
    - Most commonly ranked 5, 6, or 7
    - Rarely a top priority
    - Skewed toward lower importance
8. Reputation of the School District:
    - Most frequently ranked as the least important factor (8)
    - Rarely ranked as a top priority
    - Strongly skewed towards lower importance

From the ranking of respondents, salary and the 4DSW were clearly the most important factors for most applicants. Geographic location is also a significant factor for many, followed by benefits, school leadership, instructional opportunities, and community characteristics are middle-tier priorities. The district's reputation appears to be the least important factor for most applicants.

Applicants' Consideration of a 4DSW Schedule

Applicants were asked how a 4DSW schedule would influence their consideration of a job offer. A significant majority (61%, 83 respondents) indicated that a 4-day school week schedule would make them much more willing to accept a job offer. An additional 23% (31 respondents) stated that it would make them slightly more willing to accept the offer. Some respondents had a more neutral approach, 12% of respondents (16) mentioned that the 4-day school week schedule would play no role in their decision-making process. Finally, a very small percentage of applicants viewed the 4-day school week

negatively, with only 2% (3 respondents) stating it would make them much less willing to accept the job offer and 1% (2 respondents) saying it would make them slightly less willing.

TABLE 5

Applicants' Consideration of a 4DSW Schedule

If you received a job offer from a district with a 4-day school week, how would the 4-day school week schedule influence your consideration of the job offer?

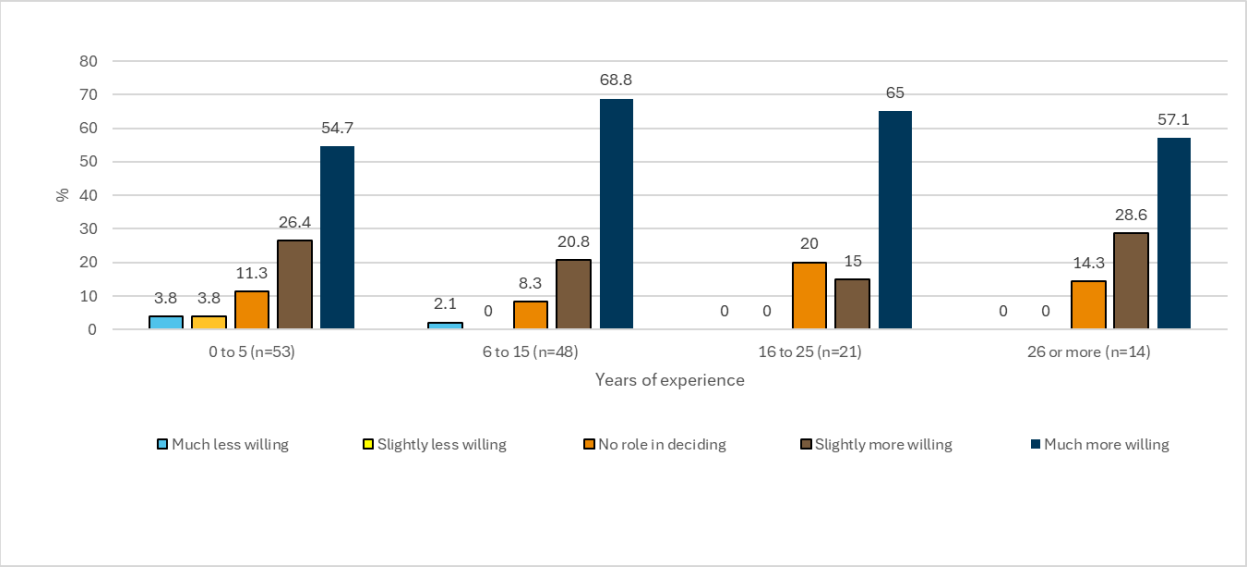
Influence of 4DSW Schedule	Count	%
Much more willing to accept the job offer	83	61
Slightly more willing to accept the job offer	31	23
No role in deciding whether to accept the offer	16	12
Slightly less willing to accept the job offer	2	1
Much less willing to accept the job offer	3	2
Total	135	100

We examined the extent to which applicants' years of experience related to their willingness to accept a job offer with a 4DSW (see Figure 1). For applicants with 0 to 5 years of experience, the majority (54.7%) indicated that a 4DSW would make them much more willing to accept a job offer, with a smaller proportion (3.8%) feeling it would make them much less willing. Similarly, those with 6 to 15 years of experience showed a high level of interest, with 68.8% stating it would make them much more willing to accept the offer, 20.8% saying it would make them slightly more willing, and none feeling it would make them less willing. For those with 16 to 25 years of experience, 65% indicated a strong positive influence, with no respondents stating it would make them less willing. Finally, applicants with 26 or more years of experience also responded positively, with 57.1% feeling much more willing to accept the job offer and none indicating a negative impact. Across all experience levels, a 4DSW schedule is generally seen as an attractive feature, particularly among those with 6 to 15 and more than 26 years of experience.

FIGURE 1

Influence of a 4DSW schedule on the decision of accepting a job offer by years of experience.

If you received a job offer from a district with a 4-day school week, how would the 4-day school week schedule influence your consideration of the job offer?



Prioritizing 4DSW

We asked respondents to rate their agreement with two statements regarding the 4DSW. The responses are categorized into levels of agreement, neutrality, and disagreement (n=135).

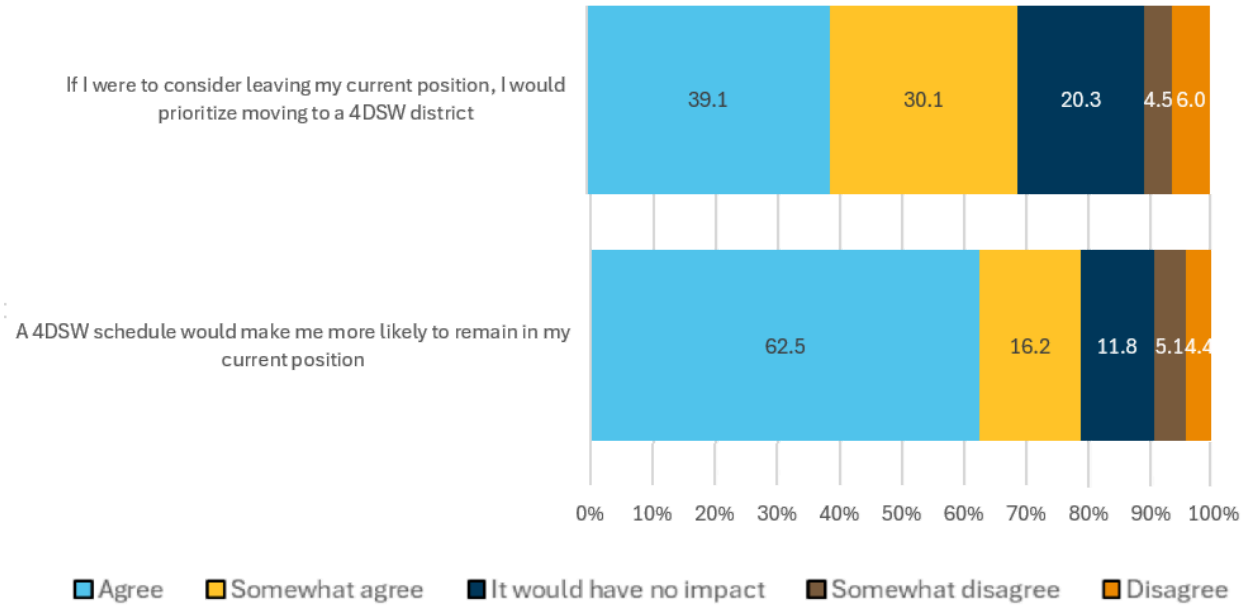
When asked, “If I were to consider leaving my current position, I would prioritize moving to a 4DSW district," the majority of respondents (92, 69%) showed a positive inclination towards prioritizing a move to a district with a 4-day school week, with 52 agreeing and 40 somewhat agreeing. Only a small portion disagreed or somewhat disagreed, indicating a strong preference for the 4-day school week among most respondents (see Figure 1).

When asked, “No matter where you are currently employed, a 4DSW would make me more likely to remain in my current position," an even larger majority (107, 79%) agreed or somewhat agreed that a 4DSW would increase their likelihood of remaining in their current position, with 85 respondents agreeing and 22 somewhat agreeing. The responses indicate that a 4-day school week is a significant factor in retaining educators, as only a small number indicated it would have no impact, somewhat disagree or disagree (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

4DSW as a Priority.

1. *If I were to consider leaving my current position, I would prioritize moving to a 4-day school week district.*
2. *No matter where you are currently employed, a 4-day school week would make me more likely to remain in my current position.*

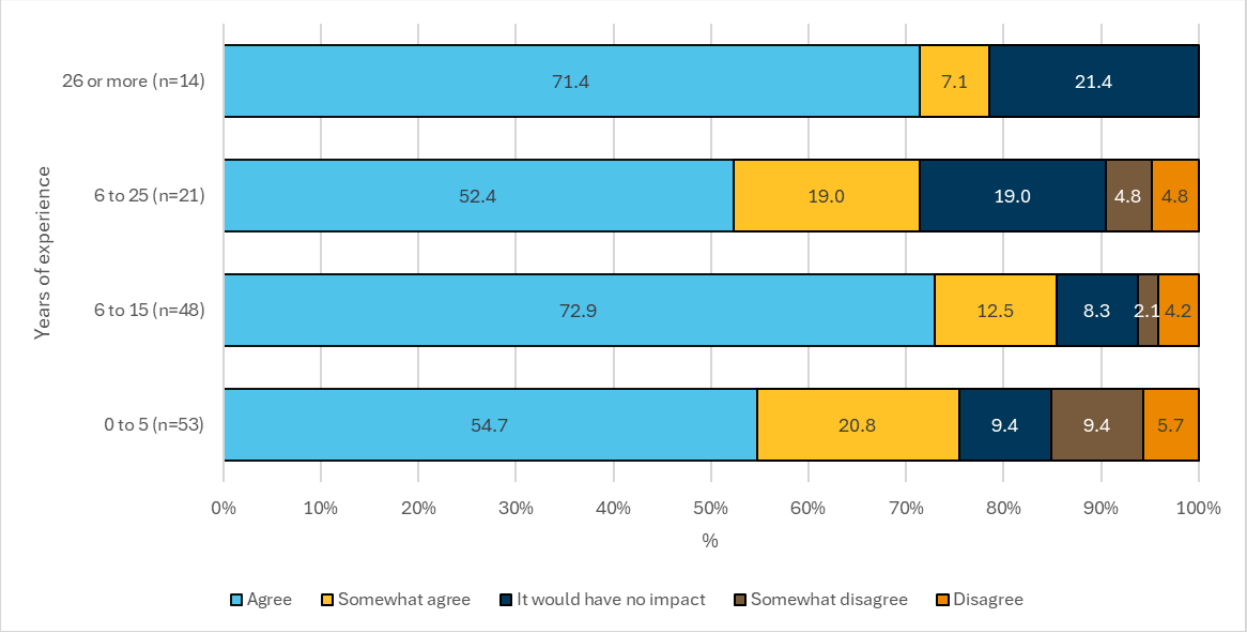


For those with 0 to 5 years of experience, a majority (54.7%) agreed that a 4DSW would make them more likely to stay (See Figure 3), with an additional 20.8% somewhat agreeing. Only a small portion (9.4%) felt it would have no impact or would somewhat disagree, and 5.7% disagreed outright. In the 6 to 15 years of experience group, an even higher percentage (72.9%) agreed, with 12.5% somewhat agreeing. The number of respondents who felt it would have no impact, somewhat disagreed, or disagreed was relatively low at 8.3%, 2.1%, and 4.2%, respectively. Among those with 16 to 25 years of experience, 52.4% agreed and 19.0% somewhat agreed, though 19.0% felt it would have no impact, and smaller portions (4.8%) somewhat disagreed or disagreed. Lastly, for educators with 26 or more years of experience, 71.4% agreed that a 4DSW would make them more likely to remain in their position, with 7.1% somewhat agreeing and 21.4% feeling it would have no impact. Overall, the trend suggests that a 4DSW is viewed favorably across all experience levels, particularly among those with 6 to 15 years and 26 or more years of experience, as a factor that would increase their likelihood of staying in their current position.

FIGURE 3

Influence of a 4DSW impact on remaining in their current position by years of experience.

No matter where you are currently employed, a 4-day school week would make me more likely to remain in my current position.

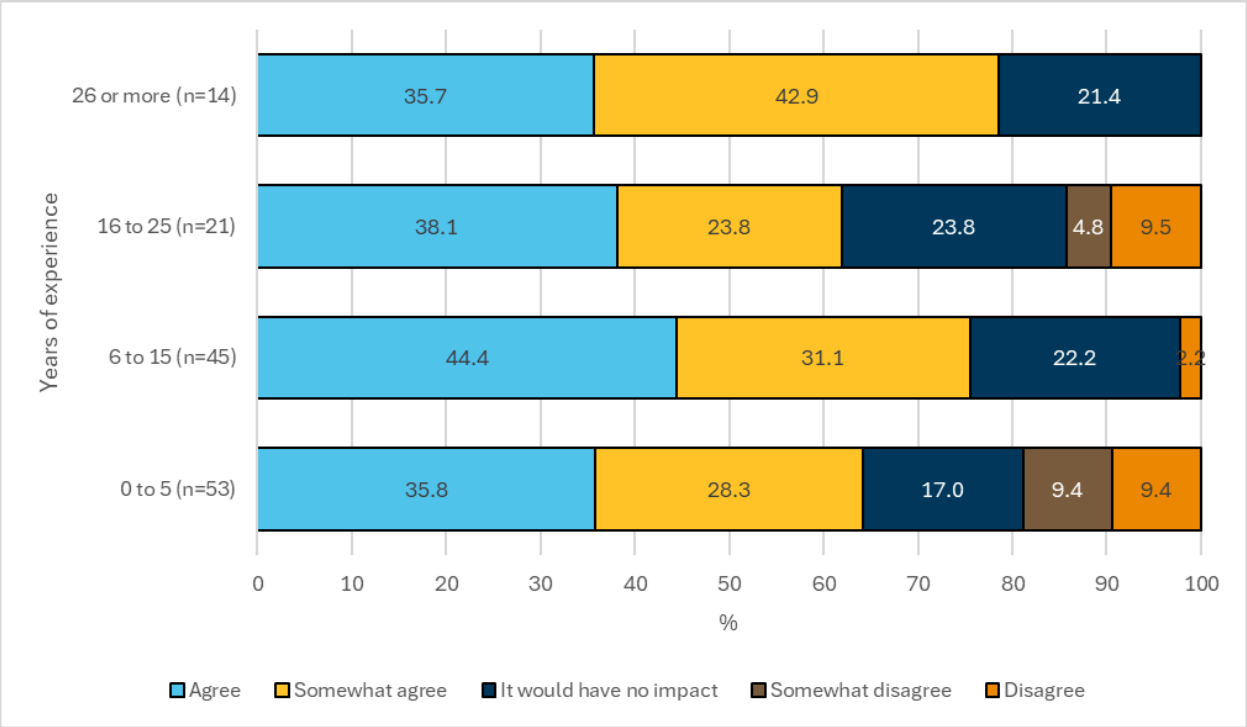


In terms of leaving their current position for one in a 4DSW (see Figure 4), for those with 0 to 5 years of experience, 35.8% agreed that they would prioritize moving to a 4DSW district, and 28.3% somewhat agreed. However, 17.0% indicated it would have no impact, while 9.4% somewhat disagreed, and another 9.4% disagreed. For educators with 6 to 15 years of experience, a higher percentage (44.4%) agreed, with 31.1% somewhat agreeing. Here, 22.2% felt it would have no impact, and only 2.2% disagreed, with no respondents somewhat disagreeing. In the 16 to 25 years of experience group, 38.1% agreed, and 23.8% somewhat agreed. Equal portions (23.8%) felt it would have no impact, while smaller numbers (4.8% and 9.5%) somewhat disagreed or disagreed. Finally, among those with 26 or more years of experience, 35.7% agreed, and a significant 42.9% somewhat agreed. Another 21.4% felt it would have no impact, with no respondents somewhat disagreeing or disagreeing outright. Overall, the trend suggests that a 4DSW is a positive factor that could influence educators' decisions to move districts, particularly among those with 6 to 15 years of experience, where agreement levels are notably higher.

FIGURE 4

Influence of a 4DSW impact on moving to another position by years of experience.

If I were to consider leaving my current position, I would prioritize moving to a 4-day school week district.



The Role of the 4DSW Schedule

Towards the end of the survey, we asked participants if the ISD's adoption of the 4DSW had influenced their decision to apply for a position. Overall, while the 4-day week was clearly a significant draw for many applicants, responses were diverse, with various factors influencing people's decisions to apply to the district. Out of the 108 responses, approximately half indicated that 4DSW had an influence.

We categorized the responses according to how the respondents saw the role of the 4DSW in their decision. It is important to note that some responses were ambiguous or contained mixed sentiments, which makes precise categorization challenging. Additionally, some neutral responses might lean slightly positive or negative without explicitly stating so. The breakdown was as follows:

- Positive: Approximately 48 (44%). These respondents viewed the 4DSW positively and said it influenced their decision to apply. One participant said, "ABSOLUTELY! The 4-day work week was the sole reason I applied. I enjoyed my previous district and position. However, my family will

always come first. If I can still do my job and have an extra day at home with my babies, it's a no brainer then."

- Negative: Approximately 6 (5.5%). These respondents expressed concerns about the 4DSW or said it was not beneficial. For example, one individual said, "Absolutely not, as an educator, this is not what is best for children."
- Neutral: Approximately 54 (50%). These respondents either said the 4DSW did not influence their decision, they were not aware of it when applying, or they had a neutral stance on its impact. An applicant wrote, “No, I applied for and was hired by the district before the 4-day school week was voted on and approved”

There was a fairly even split between those who said yes, it was a factor, and those who said no, it did not influence their decision. From their comments, the 4DSW schedule was the primary motivator for some. However, for others, it was an added benefit —some viewed it as a nice bonus but not the primary reason for applying. Many cited other primary reasons for applying, such as job availability, salary, benefits, or location.

Many who were influenced by it cited improved work-life balance, more time with family, and reduced burnout as benefits. A few mentioned that fewer commute days were appealing. Some saw the extra day as an opportunity for planning, grading, or professional development. In fact, a few mentioned that while it did not influence their initial application, it has been a reason they've stayed with the district.

A small number expressed concerns about the impact on student learning or felt the implementation was not as beneficial as advertised. For example, one person said, “It was a nice idea, but in hindsight hearing that the teachers didn't actually have but 2 Mondays off per month made me thankful I chose another 4 day school district." This comment suggests that the reality of the 4DSW implementation did not match the respondent's expectations. It indicates that teachers only had two Mondays off per month, which was less than they anticipated. The respondent implies that other 4DSW school districts might offer more consistent days off, making them grateful they chose a different district in the end.

Hypothetical Situation

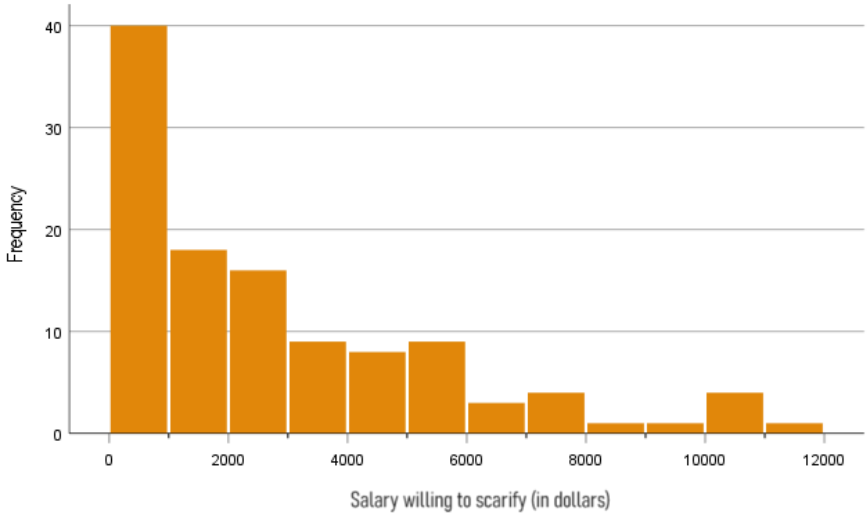
In the survey's final item, respondents were asked to imagine having two similar job offers for teaching positions that differed only in their schedules and salary structures: one from a school district with a 4-day school week and another from a district with a 5-day school week. Given identical factors such as student characteristics, instructional opportunities, resources, and school leadership in both districts, respondents

were asked how much of their annual salary they would be willing to sacrifice to work at the school with the 4-day week instead of the 5-day week. Out of 115 respondents, the responses indicated a significant willingness to sacrifice salary for the 4-day school week (see Figure 5). The amount respondents were willing to forgo ranged widely from a minimum response of $0, suggesting that some respondents placed no additional value on the 4-day school week, while the two highest responses were $23,885 and $ 42,605. We assumed these two highest values were outliers and removed them from the analysis (see Figure 2). The final count (n=113) still shows that some respondents placed extremely high importance on the 4DSW schedule when evaluating the job offers, with an average willingness to sacrifice $2,569.04 annually. The data underscores a preference among respondents for a 4-day school week, highlighting its perceived value despite potential financial sacrifices.

FIGURE 5

Histogram of the amount of salary willing to sacrifice for a 4DSW schedule.

Imagine you have two similar job offers for teaching positions, but they differ in their schedules and salary structures. One offer is from a school district with a 4-day school week, while the other is from a district with a 5-day school week. Other aspects such as student characteristics, instructional opportunities, resources, and school leadership are the same in both districts. - How much of your annual salary would you sacrifice to work at the school with the 4-day week instead of the 5-day week, if any?



Finally, we broke down the hypothetical amount of salary participants said they were willing to sacrifice for a job at a 4DSW district (see Table 6). For those with 0 to 5 years of experience (n=44), the mean amount they would sacrifice is $2,336, educators with 6 to 15 years of experience (n=42) would sacrifice a mean amount of $2,526, those with 16 to 25 years of experience (n=16) indicated a higher mean sacrifice of

$3,164, and respondents with 26 or more years of experience (n=11) would sacrifice a mean amount of $2,001.

Overall, the total mean amount of salary willing to be sacrificed across all respondents (n=114) is $2,267, with a standard deviation of $2,824, and values ranging from $0 to $11,149 (median is $1,877.00). The data suggests that while there is some variability, educators across all experience levels are willing to sacrifice a portion of their annual salary to work in a district with a 4-day school week, with those in the 16 to 25 years of experience range indicating a slightly higher willingness to make a larger sacrifice.

TABLE 6

Amount of salary willing to sacrifice for a 4DSW by years of experience

Imagine you have two similar job offers for teaching positions, but they differ in their schedules and salary structures. One offer is from a school district with a 4-day school week, while the other is from a district with a 5-day school week. Other aspects such as student characteristics, instructional opportunities, resources, and school leadership are the same in both districts. - How much of your annual salary would you be willing to sacrifice to work at the school with the 4-day week instead of the 5-day week, if any?

Years of Experience	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
0–5	44	0	$11,149	$2,336	$2,773
6–15	42	0	$10,187	$2,526	$2,526
16–25	16	0	$10,450	$3,164	$3,825
26 or more	11	0	$9,259	$2,001	$2,826
Total	114	0	$11,149	$2,267	$2,824

Geographical information

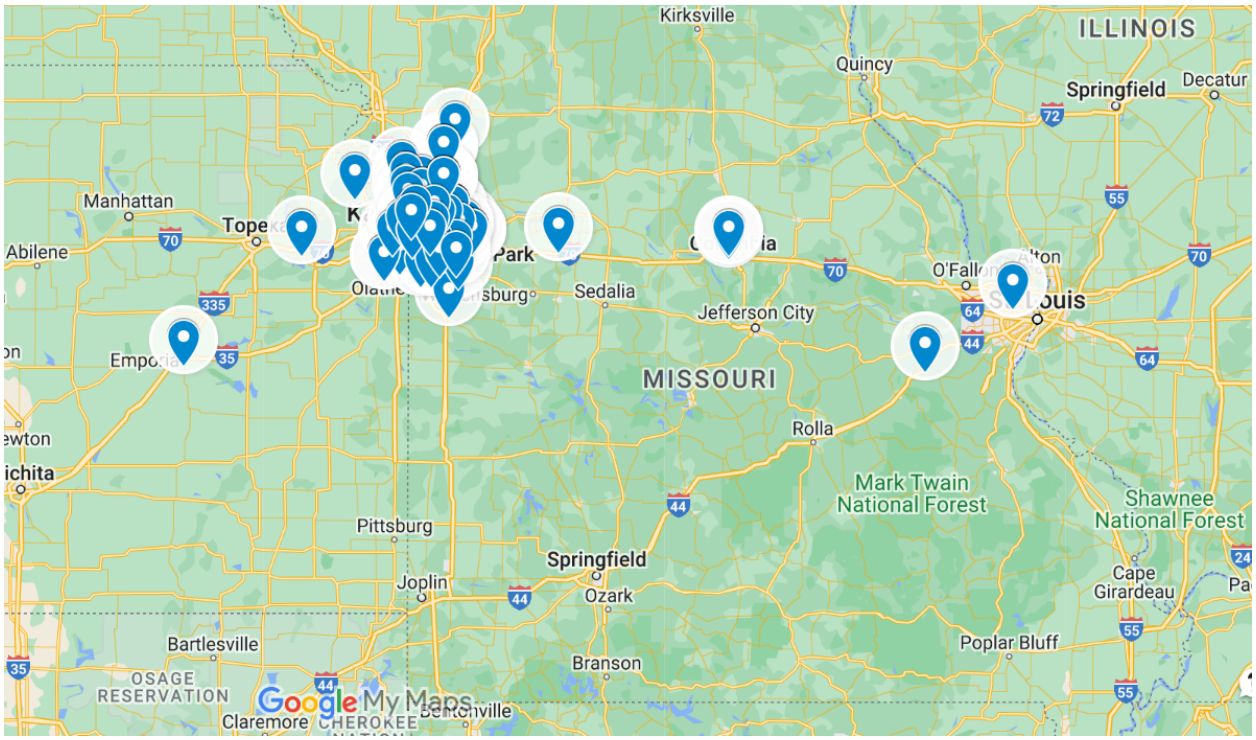
An online map[13] (linked here) shows the location of the applicants who provided their zipcodes (n=129). A still shot of the map is displayed below.

[13] https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=15uoL86wPYT6BMPC1XOdxrqUHbxJxjBk&usp=sharing

FIGURE 6

Location of Applicants

What is your home postal ZIP code?



Most applicants are from Independence and the surrounding Kansas City metropolitan area, reflecting a strong local interest. However, there was some statewide reach. Few applicants came from various parts of Missouri, indicating the district has some appeal beyond the immediate vicinity. There was even some out-of-state interest, a few applicants from other states, showing that the district may also attract some national attention.

Beyond the locations mapped in Figure 3, there were zip codes from Ohio (44028, 44026, 44134, 44137, 44145), South Carolina (29204), Illinois (62205), and Tennessee (38002).

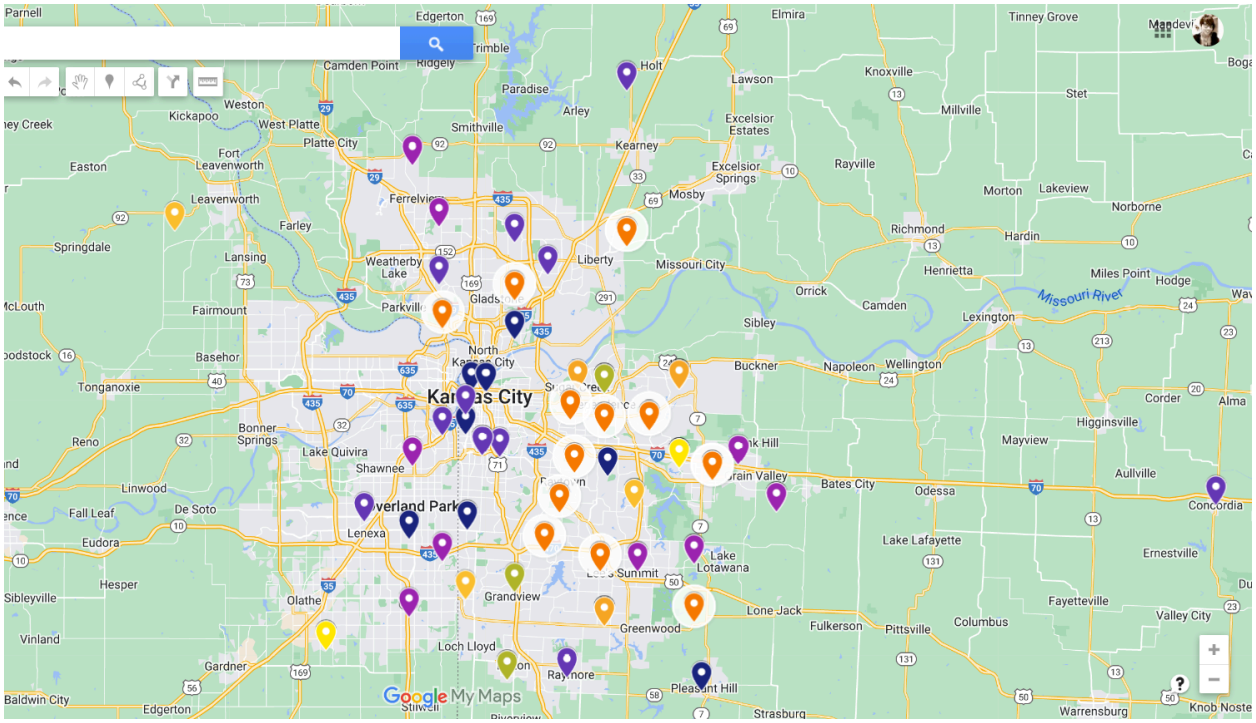
This second online map[14] displays the locations of applicants, using different colored markers to indicate how much of a priority the 4DSW schedule was in their decision to apply for a job at ISD. Figure 4 displays a still shot of the online map.

[14] https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1uGDFLFOnw-BBWZR6oE7YcJLATQBegwc&usp=sharing

FIGURE 4

Location of Applicants by 4DSW Priority Ranking

What is your home postal ZIP code?



Conclusion and Policy Implications

In 2014 Missouri had ten public school districts that implemented the 4DSW; by 2024, the number had exploded to over 165 school districts. The number of Missouri schools using a shortened calendar week now comprises over one-third of the public non-charter school districts within the state. The primary cause driving this rapid growth has been the increased pressure on school districts to recruit and retain high-quality educators. Until recently, these job market pressures have hit small, rural school districts the most; now, nearly all public school districts are facing challenges due to the teacher shortage. As school district leaders develop strategies to respond to this crisis, the implementation of the 4DSW continues to be an option that can be explored. While small, rural school districts have utilized the 4DSW effectively to help attract teachers, it has been unclear if the strategy would also be effective in larger, suburban districts.

This study has investigated the impact of the 4DSW on attracting teacher applicants in a large suburban school district in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The Independence School District, with over 14,000

students, is by far the largest school district in Missouri and one of the largest in the country to implement the 4DSW. In the months leading up to the transition to the shortened school week in Independence, certified teacher applications jumped 360% as compared to the previous school year. This study investigated why these applications jumped and who were the certified educators that greatly increased the applicant pool.

Four key findings have been made as a result of this research.

1. After salary, the 4DSW is the most attractive feature

While salary is the number one priority for teachers applying to ISD, it is clear the 4DSW is a powerful attraction for applicants in the Independence School District. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of respondents reported that the 4DSW was their "top priority" when applying to ISD, with salary the only indicator that was a higher priority.

2. 4DSW increases the likelihood of job offer acceptance

The 4DSW not only drives more applications but also greatly increases the likelihood of acceptance of a job offer for all applicants, even among those who didn't necessarily apply because of the shortened school week. Sixty-one percent (61%) of the participants indicated they are much more likely to accept a job offer from a 4DSW district.

3. Teachers will switch school districts for 4DSW

The 4DSW attracted applicants from neighboring school districts where other benefits and salaries were similar to ISD. It is clear teachers are willing to move to a new district to work in a 4DSW district.

4. Teachers are willing to sacrifice some earnings for 4DSW

For many teachers, it's not "all about the money," and most are willing to sacrifice some salary to work in a 4DSW district.

For policymakers, it is clear that the 4DSW can be a powerful tool in attracting more applications for teaching positions in a large, suburban school district like ISD. This finding confirms similar findings made by other researchers in small, rural school districts. Only outranked as a priority by salary, the 4DSW was a powerful attraction for applicants in ISD. Interestingly, the 4DSW is even more of a priority for experienced teachers. In a state where less than half of beginning teachers remain in the classroom for year six, the 4DSW may be a tool to keep mid and late-career teachers in classrooms rather than seeking other

non-education career opportunities. Eleven percent of the applicants in ISD were no longer teaching and were willing to come out of retirement or return to teaching after leaving the classroom.

With a large disparity in teacher pay from district to district in Missouri, teachers in this pool of applicants are willing to take at least a small pay cut to work in a 4DSW district. While we did not evaluate the applicants' salaries at the time of their applications, the respondents reported that they were willing to sacrifice a mean of $2,267 in annual compensation for a 4DSW school year. In Missouri where teacher salaries may differ by tens of thousands of dollars between neighboring rural and suburban school districts, the 4DSW district may not be a large enough attraction to sacrifice a significant amount of salary. It is unclear at this point if the 4DSW in better-paying school districts would draw away teachers from lower-paying 4DSW rural districts. But findings from this study do demonstrate that for many teachers, it's not "all about the money," and school policies, like a 4DSW, may be a recruitment and retention tool for all school districts.

Finally, it is important to note that 11 percent of applicants to ISD included in this study were either retired educators or former educators who were attempting to return to the teaching field. While we do not have data to compare if this number of applicants attempting to return to the teaching field is unusual, it is something that would be interesting for future investigation. If the 4DSW is a significant incentive for those who have left the teaching field to return to the classroom, it might be a recruitment strategy for the large number of teachers who leave the education field prior to a typical retirement age.

It is unclear what the future holds for the 4DSW in Missouri. Missouri's newest Commissioner of Education Karla Eslinger started her tenure leading the public schools in Missouri in July 2024. Commissioner Eslinger appears to taking an open-minded approach to the 4DSW. She has said while she is cautious about going to 4DSW, she will support deferring the decision to local school districts. "So, five days, seven days, whatever it is, that's a local decision, and as long as they are taking care of their children and their performance is up, I don't have a problem," Eslinger said[15]. Recent action by the Missouri legislature requiring larger school districts to receive voter approval prior to going to the 4DSW will complicate expansion. But, with the teacher shortage appearing to have no end in sight, undoubtedly, more Missouri school districts will at least consider the 4DSW, and the findings from this study make it clear that its recruitment potential in larger districts is as powerful as it has been in smaller, rural Missouri schools.

[15] Manley (2024)

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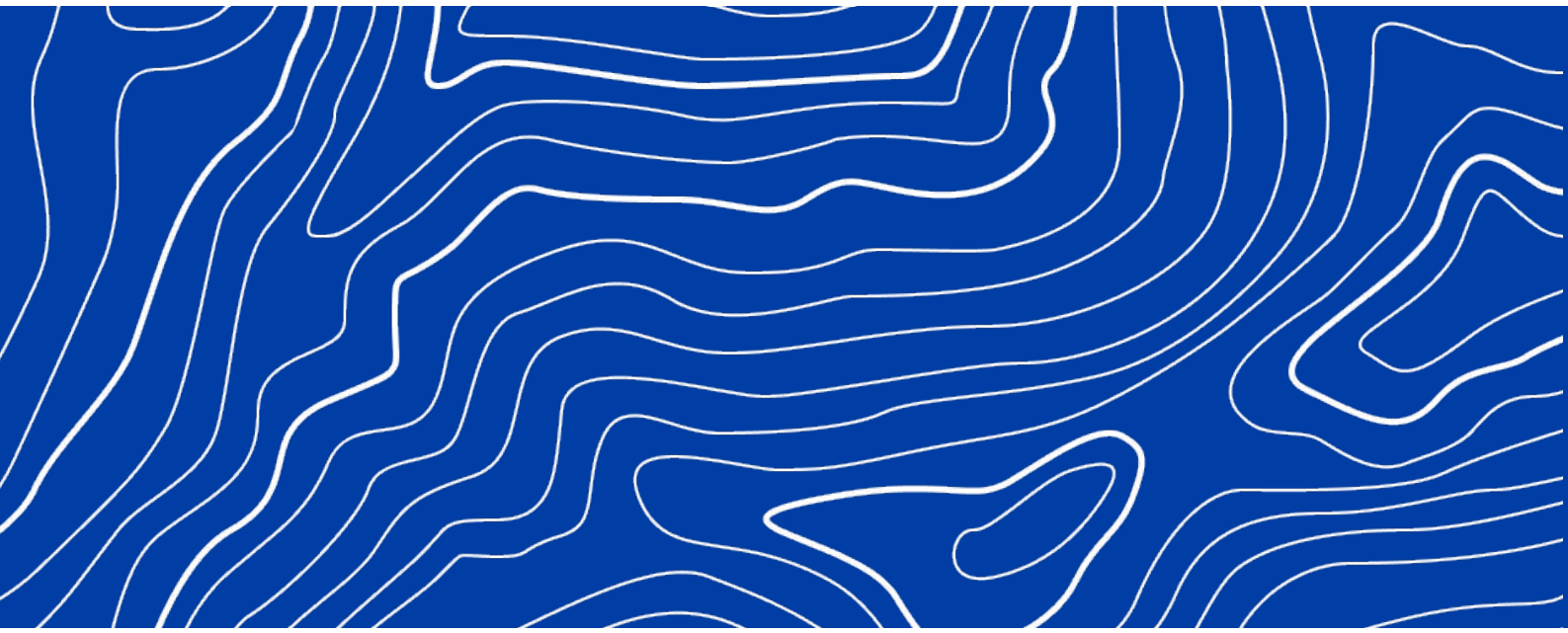

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