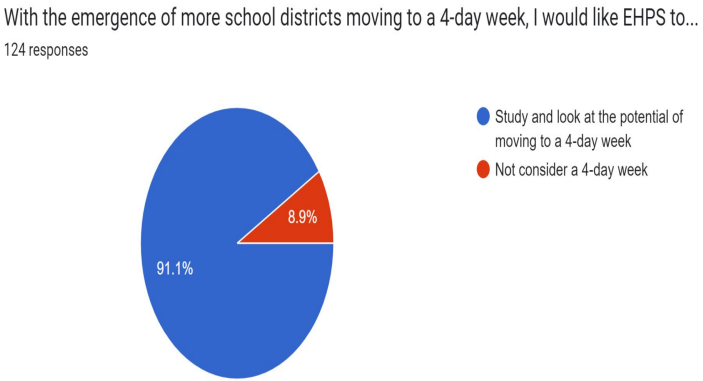
4-Day School Week Proposal

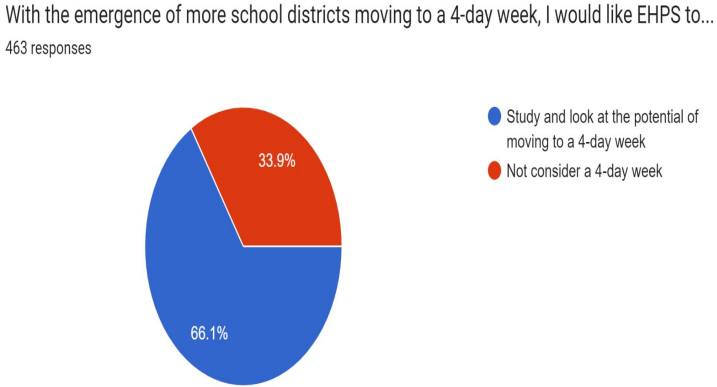
Pros, Cons, Solutions

Overview of the past 3 years - Process / Planning

Began research in 2022/2023

In studies conducted with EHPS Staff and East Helena Community, the response was overwhelmingly positive towards considering a 4-day school week. In the studies below, 124 staff members in the district responded and 463 community members responded..





Overview of the past 3 years - Process / Planning

- With board approval, the Calendar Committee commenced the study - Parent Rep from the PTO, Booster Club parent rep, and School Board rep. were added to the committee.
- February-March 2024 - Initial meeting was held where we defined roles and subgroups and established the goals of the study
- April-June 2024 - Initial research was conducted in 5 different areas: Staff Considerations, School Considerations, Other Districts - Local and Regional, Family and Community Considerations, and General Considerations.
- September-October 2024 - Formalized 4-day proposal for Board consideration.
- Presented and tabled pending further discussion, research and findings.

Where are we now?

- 2026/27 School year - we want to propose a 4-day school week for our K-12 students. This will also include a change to a 7 period day for those in 6-12.

- Calendar committee has spent this school year revisiting and reviewing research findings combined with current school needs and feel it is worth exploring this as a viable option. Full school calendar options have been explored, CBA language has been looked at and staff, student and community needs have been taken into consideration.

- Initial work this year includes potential pros and cons of this proposal, solutions and next steps to make this fully implementable next school year.

Student Pro's

1. Improved Attendance - Many districts report higher student attendance because appointments, family travel, and extracurricular obligations can be scheduled on the free weekday.

2. More Rest & Recovery - A three-day weekend can reduce burnout, especially for teens. Students may come to school more refreshed, improving engagement and focus.

3. Increased Extracurricular Flexibility - Sports, clubs, work, and responsibilities like livestock care, family supports can be done on the day off without missing class.

4. Potential for Academic Gains - Some studies show equal or even improved achievement, especially when the instructional day is well-designed and the extra day is used for targeted support (catch-up programs, tutoring, enrichment).

5. Reduced Discipline Issues - Districts that switch often report fewer discipline referrals, possibly due to reduced fatigue and improved morale.

6. Consistent Schedule - 4-day school weeks with 7 period days give students the consistency needed when scheduling obligations such as work and completing Dual Enrollment courses.

7. Friday Opportunities - School tutoring, college planning and visits, credit recovery and enrichment programs can take place on Fridays allowing students to both stay on track academically, plan for their future, and participate in community activities with their peers.

Family Pro’s

1. Easier Scheduling - Families can use the free weekday for Medical/dental appointments, Errands, Vacations or family travel, Parenting plans in split households

2. More Family Time - A consistent weekday off provides opportunities for Shared activities, Cultural or community events, Religious or family traditions

3. Lower Transportation Costs - Fewer school days means reduced driving, especially helpful in rural districts with long bus routes. Families who drive students save on fuel, car wear, and commute time.

4. Reduced Student Stress = Better Home Environment - Students with less academic fatigue tend to be; More cooperative at home, Less overwhelmed, More available to help siblings or participate in family responsibilities.

5. Potential Childcare Savings (in some models) - If the district provides optional Friday programs, STEM/arts camps, Homework help or tutoring …families may pay less compared to full-day childcare.

6. Absence reduction on Fridays - Younger siblings who travel with families to older siblings sports/activities have more instructional time and less absences overall.

Teacher Pro's

Fewer Staff Absences - Teachers also use the free weekday for Appointments, Professional tasks, Family obligations. This reduces the likelihood of teachers needing to take personal or sick leave.

Improved work–life balance - This leads to healthier staff and fewer burnout-related absences. Helps our coaching staff who are also teachers. Allow them to have a full 2-day weekend and not working at home to catch up on both Saturday and Sunday.

Improved Substitute Coverage - Because there are fewer teacher absences overall, substitute demand drops. Districts studied often note; Higher fill rates, Higher-quality substitute placements, Less scrambling to cover unfilled classrooms, Substitutes are easier to retain when they consistently work four longer days instead of five shorter ones.

Stronger Staff Recruitment & Retention - This connects closely to a more competitive for attracting applicants. Many districts report it becomes their **#1 recruitment tool**, especially in rural regions. We will soon be competing with the Helena School District and their brand new buildings.

Athletics / Clubs / Activities Pro's

Athletics & Activities Benefit Significantly - There is less missed instruction because competitions and travel events can occur on the extra day off (commonly Friday), meaning; Fewer early dismissals, Fewer missed classes, Less need for makeup work.

Reduced Student Fatigue - Student-athletes get more recovery time after late games, Better balance between academics, extracurriculars and personal life.

Stronger Team/Club/Activity Logistics - Travel-heavy districts gain; Safer daylight travel, Lower stress on coaches and volunteers, Easier scheduling for tournaments and away games

Student Engagement - Ability for our students across the district to travel and support their teammates and siblings without missing class time.

Transportation Pro's / Efficiencies

- Lowered Fuel costs, Less Wear and tear on buses
- Improving recruitment and retention. More flexibility in scheduling
- Bus drivers can still have the opportunity to drive on Friday's for athletic/activity/club travel or potential routes for students participating in the scheduled Friday programs that will be offered.

Professional Development / Events Pro's

Simplified Scheduling - The free weekday can be used for; In-service trainings, Professional development, Staff collaboration, Student supports, tutoring, and credit recovery. This avoids pulling staff out of classrooms or interrupting learning. No Early Out days would be required for PD. The example calendar drafts for our district include teachers coming in the first Friday of each month to complete PD / Staff meetings / and other required trainings/meetings/tasks.

Building Rentals- This can provide potential revenue with the option to utilize buildings for community events.

District Sporting Events - This would allow the option to host future District sporting events allotting for more room/parking, staff to help if needed, students and community can attend.

Historical data on substitute teachers used on Fridays

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Gsfsk88fQc1kTkKD5SmvIA90P-53D8LDPojrptmUCQI/edit?usp=sharing

Next academic year - Every Friday will be closed for personal leave at the high school from Aug-February due to absences. This leaves staff members who have their own children who are student athletes not being able to attend all/any of their games.

Student Con's & Solutions

Possible Con's

1. Longer School Days
2. Can be difficult for some to focus with an extended day
3. Potential risk of learning gaps
4. Social isolation on Fridays

Solutions

1. Build in short movement breaks, mindfulness moments, or transition time. The7 period day for 6-12 allows for shorter class periods overall.
2. Use shorter learning segments inside longer blocks. Provide quiet break spaces or sensory supports for students with attention needs.
3. Provide online learning opportunities for students who miss full days (already do this on Google). Provide academic support on Fridays.
4. Offer opportunities for older students to work the Friday childcare program, partner with community groups for teen hangout spaces, open gyms, and rec. Activities. Provide virtual check-ins for students who need emergency connection.

Family Con's

Potential Con's

1. Childcare challenges on Fridays
2. Missing teacher instruction / time on Fridays for students who are struggling.
3. Missing club time / student engagement

Solutions

1. We will offer Tiger Care on Fridays (8-12) at 2 district schools. This will run similar to our current Afterschool program. We can use District Staff and/or Classified Staff and High School students to fill positions. This can likely be funded with the CCLC grant.
2. We will offer tutoring, credit recovery, college prep, and study tables on Fridays at the high school. We can utilize our District Staff and/or Classified Staff and other high school students who offer peer tutoring. Also, AP teachers can offer additional study sessions on Fridays.
3. On Fridays, Staff will have the opportunity to offer enrichment classes including STEM, Arts, Robotics, etc.

Teacher Con's

Con's

1. Longer instructional days
2. Compressed Curriculum
3. Worry of work shifting to the extra day
4. Reduced team collaboration
5. Classified Staff losing hours and benefits.

Solutions

1. We will add protected planning time inside the longer school day …Teachers will stop covering on prep periods. We will also utilize support staff for short student supervision periods to create micro-breaks.
2. We will provide curriculum maps aligned to a 4-day model and offer training on prioritizing essential standards and planning streamlined units.
3. We will define Saturday/Sunday as no-meeting, no-email expectation for staff (unless PD is scheduled). This will set norms encouraging teachers to disconnect
4. We can provide virtual collaboration tools (shared planning docs, virtual PLCs) as well as, embed short collaboration blocks within the standard school week so teams meet regularly.
5. Classified staff will still have the option to work on Fridays by staffing the Tiger program and/or tutoring programs at the school, bus routes and/or school kitchens. Due to longer day, they are not losing many hours. 30 hours a week needed for District Benefits.

Athletics / Clubs / Activities Con's

Con's

1. Longer School Days = Tired Athletes
2. Potential for Later Practices

Solutions

1. We will incorporate movement breaks and hydration to maintain energy throughout the day. With having Friday for travel, students are not getting home at 2am with the expectation of going to school the next morning and attend practice the following afternoon.
2. Students already have practice ranging from 6am - 9pm

Transportation Con's

Con's

1. Bus Driver Fatigue & Retention
2. Impact on Driver Benefits & Overtime

Solutions

1. We can rotate routes to balance workload among drivers. Also, offer stipends or incentives for long routes or weekend/optional routes. We will provide adequate breaks and safety training for driver wellness.
2. We will utilize bus drivers on Fridays for the sports/activities trips that will be scheduled. Also, potential routes can be added for those attending the Friday programming.

Plan to offer meals on Fridays

1. Grab-and-Go Meals - Provide Friday (off-day) meal packs for students to take home, including breakfast and lunch. These can include non-perishable or easy-to-store items to last the weekend. These will be available for pickup regardless of participation in Friday programming.

2. Weekend Backpack Programs - Continue to partner with community organizations to send meals home in backpacks for Friday and weekends.

3. Adjust Cafeteria Schedules - On school days, ensure meals are efficiently served to handle longer days. Offer flexible breakfast times for students who arrive earlier or later due to longer days.

4. Meal Subsidy Communication - Inform families about resources for off-day nutrition, including local food banks or community programs.Ensure eligibility and pickup instructions are clear for free/reduced meals.

5. Partner with Community Providers - Work with YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, or other nonprofits to provide meals on the off-day. Could include snacks or lunch for students attending enrichment programs.

Our response to the study put out by U of M

In terms of Cost, A and AA Schools were removed from the data set as large schools are ‘more efficient to run” Pg.8.

There is no analysis of how much these 4 day schools were paying on average when they were 5 day schools. They may have been increasing at the same rate as all other schools, but started with a higher per student expenditure. For example small Native American Schools, or Title 1 schools.

HS ACT scores are comparable Pg.52.

Attendance is comparable. Pg. 57.

More suspensions in the 5 day. Pg. 59.

Teacher retention/recruitment data, not enough collected. Pg. 60.

The conclusion is not backed up by evidence. It says grades are lower and attendance is lower. Attendance is comparable, ACT scores are comparable, discipline is not mentioned which is better. There is no data of just the 4 day schools when they were 5 day schools, especially when talking about costs.

Next Steps if approved to move forward

1. Send out surveys to our EHPS teachers/staff, students, and community members to gauge interest.
2. Hold 3 Community Q & A nights to help community members and families understand what a 4-day school week would look like in our community. 1 @ Radley, 1@ EVMS and 1 @ EHHS.
3. Hold student forums to field questions and concerns regarding a move to a 4-day school week. This would happen at EVMS and EHHS.
4. Hold a District teacher/staff forum to field questions regarding the move to a 4-day week. Each school will facilitate this with their staff.
5. Create calendars that will go to vote to our staff (Drafts are completed and available)