

Lathrop R-II School District
Four Day Information Updated August 2018
By Chris Fine, Superintendent

In January of 2010, when it looked as though we would have some tough economic times ahead, some members of our school board requested that our Superintendent at the time, Dr. Chris Blackburn, look into the four-day school week. We began to research it purely from the money saving aspect. After much passionate discussion from board members and the community, the board voted 4-2 in May of 2010 to begin the four-day schedule for the 2010-2011 school year. I was the middle school principal during the transition. Dr. Blackburn retired in June of 2011. I was lucky enough to become the superintendent and have been in that position since the 2011-2012 school year.

Since that time, we have had great success with the four day school week. We haven't surveyed people about it for many years now, but we've always had 85% of the public and 99% of the teachers that either liked it, or were neutral. I would guess that number to be even higher now. It would be very difficult to go back to a traditional schedule. We started off with 149 full days with no early dismissals but now go 150 days with 2 early outs. We are in school from 8-3:45 which is about 60 minutes longer than we were going on our traditional day. I know several schools that only go about 25 minutes less than that now so length of day should not really be an issue. We have pretty much the same start date (August 16) and end date (May 22) as everyone else. We just don't go on Mondays. If you think about it though, there are a lot of Mondays that most schools are not in session anyway due to federal holidays, 4-day weekends, etc.. We only had 13, full, 5 day weeks of school in our prior calendar due to early outs and holidays.

Best things about our calendar: 1. Increased yearly hours of instruction from 1065 to 1095 without increasing overall teacher time. This is hard for people to understand. We have more hours of educational time, but fewer days. 2. Monthly full day teacher in-services. Four, full, uninterrupted days of school every week which is especially important for elementary kids. 3. Saving about 1.25% overall and 1% in salary which is normally the hardest place to save.

Three concerns: 1. Support Staff took a pay cut, that is the bulk of the savings. 2. Some kids may not get fed as well at home and will be home 15% more days of the year. 3. Parents at least have to find day care on more Mondays and some have to pay for it. Although they did have to find someone for 13 early out Wednesdays before the switch so it may not be much different. I think that a lot of the older people in the community were more concerned about it than the parents and it wasn't as big of an issue as we originally thought it would be. We had churches looking at providing care, and we trained high school kids to be babysitters but in the end, there just wasn't enough interest for either of those programs.

We estimate the yearly savings to be between 1.25% and 1.5% of our budget which works out to about \$125,000 per year. This does not include any possible utility savings. We still use our buildings 5 days per week, so I don't think there really is much savings from utilities anyway.

We don't believe it has affected academic performance either way. Most of our scores have been up and down over the years the same as they were before we switched schedules. The only assessment measure that has been consistent is that our ACT scores increased each of the first 4 years we were on a four day schedule, and 5 out of the last 7, but we also were making a concerted effort to improve those scores. Similarly, our graduation rate is much higher than the four years prior to the switch, but that was another area that we had especially focused on.

The community has been mostly supportive throughout. We implemented and changed to the four day without nearly enough notice and communication with the community and that caused us a little bit of trouble. Really, there were about 15% of the people upset about it, 2 of them ran for and got on the school board. The first 3 years the vote to stay with it was 4-3. Since then it has been 7-0.

Our teaching staff has been 99% on board since inception. The K-1 teachers have always been concerned with the length of the day (7 hrs 50 minutes) but it all seems to have worked out. As I said above, some schools only go 25 minutes less than that on a traditional schedule. We are certain that our four-day work week also helps with teacher recruitment and retention.

Student attendance is up about 1%. Staff was better in the first couple of years, but I feel like it has regressed in the last couple of years. We haven't really tried to measure it since then and we've been sending more people out for Professional Development so it may not be as bad as I think. Also seems like we're having more trouble getting subs lately so that may affect my feeling about staff attendance too.

What happens on Mondays now? We still have games and evening activities like everyone else on Mondays. We originally restricted Monday practices to after 3 pm thinking kids would have to babysit or watch siblings on Monday. After year two's survey, we decided it wasn't an issue so Monday's are pretty much open for practice anytime, which does help alleviate some facility use conflicts. We do try to have each group stay with the same time each Monday so parents will have an easier time scheduling doctor appointments and such. A great number of our teachers tutor students on Mondays providing even more learning time than before. We also take a lot of field trips on Mondays that protect instructional time during the week. We do our Parent-Teacher Conferences on Mondays and last but not least, we have one Monday a month for a full-day teacher inservice. We do send students to the Excelsior Springs Area Career Center on Monday since Excelsior Springs is on a traditional schedule. Even so, enrollment at the Career Center has not been affected.

Here's a link to our website that has some more information on our switch.

<http://www.lathropschools.com/cms/One.aspx?portalId=1121698&pageId=1334793&action=design>

Lathrop R-II is a rural school district 35 miles North of Kansas City just off of I-35 serving the communities of Lathrop and Turney. We have 930 students, 88 certified and 47 non-certified staff members with an annual operating budget of just under 10 million dollars. Lathrop R-II has an administrative/district office building with a couple of classrooms, one elementary school (pk-5) a middle school (6-8) and one high school.

Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Chris Fine
Superintendent
Lathrop R-II School District