



The Impact of Four-Day School Weeks on Teacher Recruitment in Missouri

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In 2009, Missouri enacted legislation allowing public school districts to implement a four-day school week (sometimes abbreviated as “4DSW” by education professionals) with the approval of their local school board. By the 2020-21 academic year, data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education showed that approximately 20% of school districts in the state had adopted the four-day model. Four-day adopters—overwhelmingly rural districts—justified the shift in a two-part rationale: a shortened school week lowered costs and enhanced teacher recruitment and retention. But what does the evidence say?

As more districts consider a four-day week, it is critical that policymakers and stakeholders understand the impact of this change. While administrators anecdotally report that they are more successful in hiring and retaining qualified teachers with a four-day week, there is a lack of research analyzing the impact of this policy on teacher recruitment—that is, the ability of a district to attract high quality, properly credentialed candidates to fill open teaching positions. Using data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for the 2008-09 through 2019-20 school years along with reporting from local media outlets, we evaluated the observable impact of a four-day school week on teacher recruitment in Missouri school districts.

Rise in Four-Day School Weeks

In Missouri, 95% of four-day districts are rural, and the strongest predictor of whether a school adopts a four-day schedule is the presence of a nearby district that already has. Thus, so far, four-day districts are largely clustered in set geographic areas. Few Missouri school districts switched to a four-day week in the first few years following the policy’s implementation, but recent years have seen a snowball effect: By the 2018-19 year, nearly a decade after the legislation’s passage, only 33 districts had four-day weeks; this number nearly doubled to 60 districts in the next year, and most recently another surge brought the total to 102 districts for the 2020-21 school year. Without clear data about whether the shortened week actually drives better teacher recruitment, patterns like these suggest that districts may feel pressured to adopt this model simply because their neighbors have.

Teacher Shortages and Rural Disparities

While the adoption of a four-day school week steadily increased, teacher shortages continue to be a concern, both in Missouri and nationally. There was a 5% shortage in qualified full-time equivalent instructors in Missouri for the 2019-20 academic year, and teacher retention was 64% after three years (that is, after three years on the job, just 64% of teachers continued in the profession) and 48% after five years. There are indicators that more teachers will leave the profession in coming years, making recruiting and hiring qualified

teachers even more important and more difficult.

Missouri educational administrators identified pay as the biggest challenge to recruitment—and overall, rural school districts have the lowest average salary in the state. This factor plus their geographic isolation means that rural school districts face a real recruitment and retention disadvantage. Adopting the shortened teaching week is one competitive move districts have made to appeal to qualified teachers despite lower salaries.

Recruitment Effects of Four-Day School Weeks

Missouri school districts—and rural districts in particular—are all looking to appeal to good quality teachers to fill open positions. Does adopting a four-day school week achieve this goal? Our study attempted to measure the four-day week's effect on teacher recruitment, which we broke down into three scenarios:

- Successful recruitment: Open positions were filled by qualified applicants.
- Unsuccessful recruitment (altered courses): An originally scheduled course was changed because of the inability to hire a qualified candidate. For example, a school may have wanted to offer French, but could not hire a French teacher; they offered German instead.
- Unsuccessful recruitment (less than qualified candidates): An open position was filled with a candidate that was not fully qualified.

In our analysis for the 2019-2020 school year, approximately 14% of districts used a four-day schedule. Our statewide results show that adopting the shortened week does not have a significant effect on successful or unsuccessful teacher recruitment. In both four- and five-day week districts statewide, the number of altered courses decreases as teacher salary increases, indicating that increased salary decreases instances of unsuccessful recruitment.

That same 2019-2020 school year saw 19% of rural districts adopting the four-day school week. Our analysis shows that the shortened week does not have a significant effect on teacher recruitment. However, results show that salary does matter, as higher salaries reduce instances of unsuccessful recruitment where a less than qualified candidate was accepted for an open position. In rural four- and five-day school week districts alike, with each additional \$1,000 in teacher's salary there is a 1.2% decrease in recruitment of an unqualified candidate.

These findings do not speak to other potential benefits of adopting a four-day school week; we only find that the shortened week has no effect on teacher recruitment, whereas increased salaries can result in the decrease of the hiring of less-than-qualified candidates. The attraction of the four-day school week for teachers does not appear as pronounced as originally claimed; furthermore, whatever attraction there was may be decreased simply because as more and more neighboring districts adopt the shortened week, it no longer functions as a competitive advantage. Instead of expecting four-day school week adoption to act as the magic bullet that attracts qualified teachers and reduces unsuccessful recruitment, we recommend that school districts adopt a holistic approach to teacher recruitment in which the four-day school week could be implemented along with other measures such as salary increases, cultivation of supportive principals who can nurture talented teachers at all stages of their careers, and programs that contribute to elevating the image and status of the teaching profession.

Read more in Anita Manion and Sapna Varkey, **"The Impact of Four-Day School Weeks on Teacher Recruitment in Missouri."**