

the community

104TH YEAR 6TH WEEK

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What will the Teton School District look like in 2014?

Four-day week, more cuts eyed; levy vote March 12

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This is part 1 in a 4-part series that takes a look at school funding.

Although the Teton School District is still taking baby steps in its research, the concept of switching from a five to a four-day school week is one of many possibilities it's considering to balance next year's budget.

Regardless of whether voters March 12 renew an enlarged supplemental levy — \$3.1 million, up from \$2.6 when it was renewed in 2011 — the district is looking at many alternatives to save money wherever it can.

TSD Superintendent Monte Woolstenhulme is speaking to other districts that have made the switch to four days, to see what the financial savings potential might be, as well as instructional and calendar issues. He'll share details with the district board at its Feb. 11 meeting.

The idea has been floating around for several years in Teton County,



Woolstenhulme



Foote

and some districts, such as Salmon, have adopted the plan.

The Salmon School District has been on a four-day school week for about seven years, said Joey Foote, SSD superintendent. Student academic achievement has been as good or better as with a five-day week, he said, with the district meeting state Adequate Yearly Progress goals measured in 2011 and all requirements for high-school accreditation.

"We would have a mutiny" if the district chose to return to five-day weeks, said Foote, who has been with the district about three years.

The four-day schedule is particularly effective for the ranching community, which puts kids home for the extra day a week, he said.

School days run 8:05 a.m.-4:15 p.m. High school runs seven periods, and Foote said there apparently are few issues with younger students on the long schedule. First graders, transition-



ing from half-day kindergarten, start the day with breakfast at school.

Districts throughout the state have differing schedules to meet the needs of their students in their community, but there's no research that favors any particular schedule for student learning.

"The schedule isn't the main factor," Woolstenhulme said. "It's the quality of the teacher in the classroom, and how engaged and supported the student is in that learning process."

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Monte Woolstenhulme, TSD Superintendent

Better or worse?

Statewide research to date is inconclusive regarding whether a four-day school week is better or worse for students, or whether there really is no difference.

In its study on the effectiveness of the concept, the Rural Education Task Force of the Idaho State Department of Education said there is little research available on the practice of a four-day school week and its effects on student achievement.

"There is a lack of evidence that the four-day school week helps or hurts student achievement," said the report, which surveyed Idaho districts subscribed to the four-day program.

While many districts report an increase in actual instructional time due to less interference from athletics, doctor and dentist appointments, "concerns have been expressed by some that certain students in need of more frequent reinforcement have trouble with continuity of learning with the three-day weekend," the RETF said.

The switch from five to four days is an economic strategy used by small, rural school districts as an alternative to cutting programs. But the report said additional advantages come from that switch, including:

- Student dropout rates decline.
- Student disciplinary referrals decrease.
- Student achievement is generally not affected either positively or negatively.
- Student and teacher attendance improves.
- Students and teachers benefit from less interrupted class time as a result of lon-

ger class periods and fewer transitions at all grade levels. This increases the efficiency of instruction.

- Students and teachers share more positive attitudes about school. Consequently, there is a marked improvement in school morale.

The switch doesn't affect the number of instructional hours — 990 — required during a school year. Instead, it makes each school day longer, reducing the total days in school to roughly 150.

Teacher and administrator salaries remain the same since they are set as an annual salary rate. Salary savings

are realized by the cuts to hourly worker hours. Fewer substitutes are needed due to better attendance, according to the report.

"Districts typically report a cost savings after transferring to a four-day school week but also report that the savings are not substantial," the report said. "Most cost savings come as a result of decreased work schedules for classified staff who work on an hourly basis."

Foote said financial savings are relatively small in the SSD, with the biggest savings, at about 15-20 percent, coming from bus route transportation over the widespread district. Classified salary savings run only about 5-10 percent, since some are working longer days rather than taking an entire full day off.

The report found similar results, with transportation costs potentially reduced by about 20 percent, although districts have to severely curtail busing students on non-school days. Fixed costs, such as insurance, remain constant. Those costs are not a net savings, however, since the state reimburses districts only up to 85 percent of their transportation costs.

Food service programs can also be cut by 20 percent, but that also does not include fixed costs.

"A full 20 percent reduction in these areas for many districts that have made the transition results in roughly a 2 percent savings in the districts' overall budget," said the report.

"The savings come to the entire system, including the state," Foote said.

The Salmon district, which serves 810 students, has a budget of \$5.7 million.

SSD gets local budget support through a \$350,000 supplemental levy. Now in the first year of its third voter-approved renewal, the funds go toward athletics, music and arts and technology.

Other concerns

The RETF said childcare is an issue, with some parents saying they find it easier to find a babysitter for one day, rather than a few hours for five days.

"Others dislike it for the same reason and prefer to arrange for child care in smaller increments of time," the report said. "Some schools have alleviated this concern by using high school students as baby-sitters for those in need."

The report found other concerns regarding the transition, including:

- How young students will respond to longer school days. Many schools structure the day so the afternoon is composed of less academic work than the morning, thus allowing students to have some "down time," according to the report
- Some educators are concerned that the four-day school week may appear to be inconsistent with the new emphasis for more time in school.
- The four-day school week will take more of the local community commitment than other schedule options as it can affect daily community routines.
- While a four-day school week may appear to be effective in one district, it does not guarantee that it will be effective in all.

The report strongly recommends districts considering the change get extensive community feedback.

TVN en Español

Para ajustar su presupuesto, el distrito escolar de Teton está presuponando todas las posibilidades. Una semana escolar de cuatro días es una opción para reducir los gastos del distrito. En Salmon, Id, las escuelas funcionan con solo cuatro días de escuela. Cada día es más largo para cumplir las horas escolares requisitas por el estado. Según Joey Foote, el superintendente del distrito escolar de Salmon, el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes ha sido tan buena o mejor como con una semana de cinco días. Pero, según una investigación del Rural Education Task Force, el horario de cuatro días reduce el presupuesto escolar por solamente 2 por ciento. El distrito escolar de Teton todavía no ha decidido en como reducir su gastos. También pedirá a los votantes el día 12 de Marzo una exacción especial de \$3.1 millón.