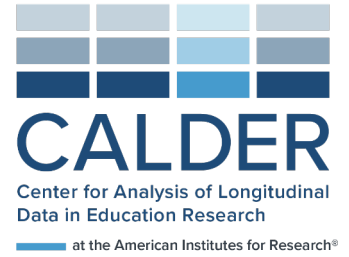


Is the Four-Day School Week in Colorado Delivering on Teacher Retention, Recruitment, and Student Attendance?

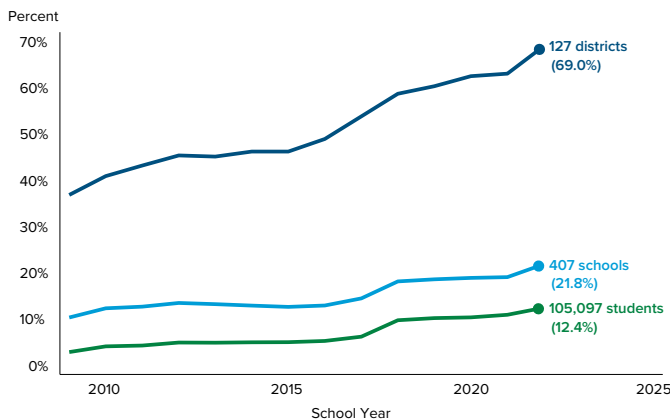
Research One-Pager
August 2024



A growing number of Colorado school districts have adopted four-day school weeks (4DSW) to cut costs, increase teacher recruitment and retention, and improve student attendance.

Over 70% of Colorado school districts now have at least one school using a four-day schedule, mostly in small, rural areas. Together, schools with a 4DSW serve about 12% of the state's K-12 students.

FIGURE 1.
The share of districts, schools, and students with a 4DSW in Colorado has grown over time.
Number and share of districts, schools, and students in Colorado using 4DSW, 2009-10 to 2022-23.



Source: Colorado Department of Education (CDE) data

Colorado schools are not alone. Over the past two decades, 4DSWs have been adopted in 2,100 schools across nearly 900 school districts in 26 states (as of SY 2022-23).

Despite its popularity, prior research suggests the 4DSW often falls short of expectations. Research on its impact on teacher retention and attendance is limited and mixed.

Previous studies consistently show that cost savings from the 4DSW are minimal (Morton, 2021; Thompson, 2021). Evidence about the policy's impacts on staffing and student attendance, however, is more mixed (Camp, 2024; Kilburn et al., 2021; Manion & Varkey, 2021; Morton, 2023; Nowak et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2021). For example, qualitative studies suggest teachers appreciate having more flexible work weeks (Kilburn et al., 2021). But quantitative analyses indicate the policy's impact on teacher retention and recruitment varies across contexts (Camp 2024; Manion & Varkey, 2021; Nowak et al., 2023).

Recent evidence suggests that the 4DSW in Colorado is not improving teacher recruitment, retention, or student attendance.

CALDER researchers recently used 14 years (2009-10 to 2022-23) of data from Colorado to investigate whether 4DSWs in the state are improving staffing outcomes or student attendance. The study looked at the effects of the 4DSW using a synthetic control difference-in-differences method, which compares outcomes in schools that adopted the schedule to outcomes in a weighted set of schools that kept a traditional schedule.

The results show that 4DSWs led to small but statistically significant *increases* in the percentage of teachers (FTE) employed with a [shortage credential](#)—a proxy for teacher shortages. Most of this effect is driven by non-rural schools that adopted the 4DSW. In these schools, the shortened schedule led to a 0.25 percentage point *increase* in full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers with shortage credentials. That translates to an additional 6 or 7 full-time teachers with shortage credentials across 97 schools. The results also show no detectable effect on teacher retention. The policy's effects on student attendance were null or negligible.

Bottom line: Despite its popularity, districts using or considering the 4DSW in Colorado or elsewhere should proceed with caution.

The results on 4DSW in Colorado suggest it is failing to improve teacher recruitment and retention or to boost student attendance. These results align with previous studies that show the 4DSW is of little benefit for schools and students. Other research suggests the 4DSW may actually cause harm, resulting in small to medium *negative* effects on student test scores (Morton et al., 2024). In short, despite being popular in the communities that use the 4DSW, school districts should proceed with caution and consider other options to achieve their goals.

Go Deeper: <https://caldercenter.org/>

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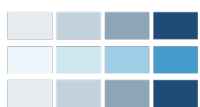
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