

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF FOUR-DAY SCHOOL WEEKS: LEADERSHIP AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN K–12 EDUCATION

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Abstract

As school districts increasingly consider four-day school weeks to address staffing shortages and educator burnout, educational leaders must weigh potential benefits against instructional, equity, and community implications. This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to explore the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and school board members regarding a four-day school week, drawing from diverse school districts throughout the United States. Quantitative survey data were analyzed to identify differences across stakeholder groups, while qualitative data from surveys, focus groups, and interviews were thematically analyzed to provide contextualized explanations. Findings indicate administrators and school board members more strongly perceived benefits related to recruitment and retention, whereas teachers emphasized improvements in work–life balance and sustainability. Teachers also expressed greater concern regarding instructional quality, student fatigue, childcare access, and equity for families with limited resources. Integrated findings suggest stakeholder support for a four-day schedule is conditional and shaped by role, proximity to practice, and perceived mitigation strategies. Implications for school leadership highlight the importance of inclusive decision-making, equity-centered planning, and ongoing evaluation when considering alternative scheduling models.

Keywords: four-day school week, teacher recruitment and retention, teacher burnout, educational leadership, school scheduling policy, educational equity, mixed methods research

School calendar reform has emerged as one of the most visible leadership strategies for addressing structural pressures in K–12 education. Over the past decade, more than 1,600 school districts across the United States have adopted a four-day school week (4DSW), most often in rural and economically constrained communities (Morton et al., 2024). Although initially justified as a cost-saving measure, the four-day school week has increasingly been positioned as a response to teacher shortages, educator burnout, and persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff (Morton & DeWitt, 2024). Districts frequently cite savings in transportation and operations, as well as improved staff morale, as central motivations for the shift (Anderson & Walker, 2015).

Despite its rapid expansion, the four-day school week remains a contested reform. Quantitative studies have examined its effects on student achievement, attendance, and staffing, often reporting modest or mixed outcomes (Anderson & Walker, 2015; Morton, 2022; Morton et al.,

2024; Thompson, 2019). These findings have fueled debate about whether reducing instructional days compromises academic quality. However, far less is known about how those responsible for implementing and governing the four-day week experience this reform in practice. This gap is especially consequential for educational leadership because calendar reform reshapes instructional rhythms, labor expectations, and family–school relationships in ways that extend beyond test scores.

From a leadership perspective, the four-day school week represents far more than a scheduling adjustment. It requires administrators, teachers, school boards, and community partners to renegotiate responsibilities for learning, supervision, meals, transportation, and student support. These shifts raise serious equity concerns, particularly for families who rely on schools for childcare, nutrition, and structured daily supervision (Day et al., 2025). For these families, the non-instructional day may represent not only flexibility but also increased financial, logistical, and safety risks. Consequently, the four-day school week offers a powerful case for examining how leadership, policy implementation, and equity intersect in real-world school reform. The purpose of this study is to examine how key professional stakeholders perceive the four-day school week and how those perceptions shape leadership and implementation dynamics.

Specifically, this study addresses three research questions:

1. How do teachers, administrators, and school board members differ in their perceptions of the benefits of a four-day school week?
2. What themes emerge from stakeholder narratives regarding equity, well-being, and community impact?
3. How do these perceptions inform leadership and implementation strategies for calendar reform?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The four-day school week (4DSW) has transitioned from a marginal innovation to a widely adopted calendar reform across the United States. More than 1,600 districts, serving hundreds of thousands of students, have implemented four-day schedules, with the highest concentration in rural and economically constrained regions (Morton et al., 2024). Early adopters frequently cited transportation, energy, and food-service savings as primary motivations (Anderson & Walker, 2015). However, in recent years the rationale for adoption has shifted toward addressing chronic workforce instability, teacher shortages, and educator burnout (Morton & DeWitt, 2024).

The post-pandemic educational landscape has intensified these pressures. Districts now face historically high teacher attrition, difficulties filling specialized positions, and increasing demands for mental health and social-emotional supports. Within this context, the 4DSW has emerged as a labor policy as much as an instructional one, offering districts a non-monetary incentive to attract and retain staff (Camp et al., 2025). While the fiscal savings associated with four-day schedules are often modest, their symbolic and practical value as a quality-of-life improvement for educators has driven renewed interest (Morton & DeWitt, 2024).

Yet the growth of the four-day school week has not been uniform. Morton et al. (2024) found adoption patterns vary by state policy environments, labor market conditions, and community

demographics. Rural districts with limited tax bases and fewer employment alternatives have been particularly likely to adopt compressed schedules. These patterns suggest calendar reform is shaped by structural inequality and resource constraints, raising important leadership and equity questions that extend beyond efficiency.

Four-Day School Weeks and Student Outcomes

A substantial body of research has examined the academic consequences of four-day school weeks, often with mixed or modest findings. Anderson and Walker (2015) discovered small negative effects on student achievement in some contexts, particularly in mathematics, while Thompson (2019) reported little systematic difference in test scores between four-day and five-day schedules in Oregon. More recent multi-state analyses similarly suggest achievement effects are heterogeneous and dependent on local implementation conditions (Morton et al., 2024).

One explanation for these mixed results lies in how instructional time is reallocated. Most four-day schedules lengthen the remaining school days, attempting to preserve total weekly instructional minutes. However, Day et al. (2025) noted extended days may disproportionately tax younger students' attention and stamina, potentially undermining instructional quality even when time requirements are technically met. Moreover, longer days can complicate participation in extracurricular activities and special education services.

Equity concerns also emerge in this literature. Morton et al. (2024) ascertained achievement effects varied across student subgroups, with economically disadvantaged students sometimes experiencing larger declines. These patterns suggest calendar reform may interact with family resources and community capacity in ways that widen existing gaps. Despite these risks, achievement-focused studies rarely incorporate leadership or implementation variables, leaving unanswered questions about how local governance and stakeholder engagement shape academic outcomes.

Teacher Labor, Burnout, and Retention

One of the most consistent findings in the 4DSW literature is its relationship to teacher labor conditions. Camp et al. (2025) found districts adopting four-day schedules experienced improved recruitment and retention, particularly in hard-to-staff rural areas. Similarly, Morton and DeWitt (2024) reported Colorado districts using four-day schedules saw reductions in teacher turnover and increases in applicant pools.

These patterns align with broader research on teacher burnout and working conditions. Johnson et al. (2012) demonstrated that workload, time pressure, and emotional exhaustion are key drivers of attrition, particularly in high-need schools. By offering an additional non-instructional day, four-day schedules may alleviate some of these pressures by creating space for planning, recovery, and family responsibilities.

From a leadership perspective, these findings position calendar reform as a workforce policy. Ingersoll and Collins (2017) argued organizational conditions, not individual deficits, are the primary drivers of teacher turnover. Leaders who adopt four-day schedules may therefore be attempting to restructure the organization in ways that make teaching more sustainable.

However, focusing primarily on teacher labor risks obscuring the broader system impacts of calendar change, particularly for students and families.

Equity, Childcare, and Family Capacity

Schools function not only as instructional institutions but also as pillars of the social safety net. They provide meals, supervision, transportation, and stability for millions of children, particularly those from low-income families (Rothstein, 2014). The four-day school week disrupts this infrastructure by shifting responsibility for care and supervision onto families and communities.

Day et al. (2025) identified childcare access as one of the most significant challenges associated with four-day schedules. Families with flexible work arrangements or financial resources may view the non-instructional day as an opportunity for enrichment or rest. In contrast, families working hourly or multiple jobs often struggle to secure affordable childcare, leaving students unsupervised or in unstable arrangements.

Food insecurity is another critical concern. Many students rely on school meals for daily nutrition, and a non-instructional day can exacerbate hunger and stress for vulnerable families. Cooper et al. (2021) emphasized the role of schools in supporting student mental health, noting instability in routines and basic needs undermines emotional well-being and learning. Steinberg and Lacoë (2018) further demonstrated access to childcare is linked to academic outcomes, suggesting calendar reforms that reduce school-provided supervision may have indirect effects on achievement. These findings underscore the four-day school week is an equity-sensitive policy whose consequences depend heavily on family and community capacity.

Community Impacts and Cross-Sector Burden

Calendar reform also redistributes responsibility beyond families to community organizations, including nonprofits, faith-based groups, and youth-serving agencies. Stone et al. (2001) argued successful education reform requires civic capacity, the ability of institutions across sectors to coordinate and share responsibility for children's well-being. Four-day schedules test this capacity by increasing demand for community-based supervision, meals, and enrichment. Day et al. (2025) found in many districts, local organizations became de facto providers of fifth-day programming, often without stable funding or coordination. Honig (2006) warned such policy drift occurs when reforms shift burdens onto actors who lack the resources or authority to meet new expectations. From a leadership standpoint, failing to engage community partners in calendar reform risks overloading already strained systems.

Policy Implementation in Education Reform

The four-day school week exemplifies the complexity of policy implementation in education. Honig (2006) argued reforms succeed or fail based on how they are interpreted and enacted by local actors. Calendar change requires adjustments to transportation, instruction, food service, special education, and family communication, making it a deeply embedded organizational reform.

Coburn (2001) demonstrated educators engage in collective sensemaking when interpreting new policies, negotiating meaning through professional interaction. Similarly, Lipsky's (1980)

concept of street-level bureaucracy highlights how frontline workers adapt policy to fit daily realities. In the context of four-day schedules, teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria staff, and administrators must reconcile policy intent with practical constraints. These frameworks suggest leadership must attend not only to formal policy adoption but also to how reforms are experienced and enacted across the system. Without this attention, well-intentioned calendar changes can produce unintended consequences.

Distributed Leadership and Large-Scale Change

Distributed leadership theory provides a useful lens for understanding how calendar reform unfolds. Spillane (2006) conceptualized leadership as a practice distributed across people and situations, rather than confined to formal roles. Harris (2008) found distributed leadership is particularly important in periods of organizational change, when expertise and influence must be mobilized across the system.

Leithwood et al. (2020) identified shared vision, relational trust, and collaborative problem-solving as core elements of successful leadership. Sun and Leithwood (2015) further emphasized the role of direction-setting and stakeholder engagement in sustaining reform. These insights suggest four-day school weeks require leaders to engage teachers, school boards, and communities in ongoing sensemaking and adaptation.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite a growing body of research on four-day school weeks, significant gaps remain. Most studies focus narrowly on achievement or staffing, with limited attention to leadership, equity, or governance (Anderson & Walker, 2015; Thompson, 2019; Morton & DeWitt, 2024). School board perspectives are rarely included, and few studies use mixed-methods designs to integrate quantitative patterns with stakeholder experiences. Moreover, community impacts and implementation processes remain under-theorized.

By examining stakeholder perceptions through the lenses of distributed leadership and policy implementation, this study addresses these gaps and contributes a more holistic understanding of calendar reform.

Scientific and Scholarly Significance

This study addresses critical gaps in the literature on school calendar reform by centering leadership, equity, and policy implementation. While the four-day school week has become a prominent feature of the contemporary educational landscape, relatively little research has examined how distributed leadership and stakeholder sensemaking shape its adoption and effects.

By combining robust theoretical frameworks with a rigorous mixed-methods design, this study contributes to scholarship on educational leadership, organizational change, and policy implementation. It advances understanding of how leaders and stakeholders negotiate reforms redistribute time, labor, and responsibility in ways that can either mitigate or exacerbate inequality.

Practically, the findings offer district leaders and school boards evidence-based guidance for navigating calendar reform while balancing competing demands for efficiency, equity, and instructional quality. The study also informs leadership preparation programs by illustrating how complex policy changes unfold in real organizational and community contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006) and policy implementation theory (Honig, 2006). Together, these perspectives provide a lens for understanding how the four-day school week is interpreted, enacted, and sustained within school systems.

Distributed leadership theory conceptualizes leadership as an organizational practice rather than a function of formal authority (Spillane, 2006). Leadership emerges through interactions among administrators, teachers, school boards, and community members as they collectively make sense of problems and coordinate action. In the context of a four-day school week, leadership involves negotiating competing priorities such as workforce sustainability, instructional quality, family needs, and fiscal responsibility. Rather than viewing calendar reform as a top-down administrative decision, distributed leadership highlights how multiple actors shape how the policy is understood and operationalized.

Policy implementation theory emphasizes educational reforms do not move from policy to practice in linear or predictable ways. Instead, reforms are filtered through local contexts, organizational routines, and stakeholder beliefs (Honig, 2006). Calendar reforms must be translated into daily practices governing transportation, instructional pacing, meal provision, childcare, and supervision. These processes involve both formal rules and informal negotiations. Whether a four-day school week succeeds or fails depends largely on how well leaders align the policy with community capacity, professional norms, and student needs.

By integrating these frameworks, this study positions stakeholder perceptions as central to understanding how the four-day school week functions in practice. Leadership effectiveness depends on how well district and school leaders align policy goals with the lived realities of educators, families, and communities.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and integrated during analysis. This approach allowed statistical patterns in stakeholder perceptions to be interpreted through the lived experiences and contextual insights of participants.

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study comprised 120 individuals, including teachers, school administrators, and school board members. These individuals were drawn from various types of K-12 districts throughout the United States, all of which were either currently implementing or

contemplating the adoption of a four-day school week. A combination of purposive and stratified sampling was used to ensure representation across professional roles (teacher, administrator, board member) and school levels (elementary, middle, and high school).

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

Survey instruments measured stakeholder perceptions across three domains:

- (a) staff recruitment and retention,
- (b) staff work–life balance, and
- (c) family flexibility.

Likert-scale items were adapted from prior studies of stakeholder perceptions of calendar change (Patterson et al., 2020). One-way ANOVA was used to test for statistically significant differences among teachers, administrators, and school board members. See Appendix A for the full survey instrument.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

Focus groups were conducted with teachers to explore how the four-day week affected instruction, workload, and relationships with students and families. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators and school board members to examine leadership perspectives on policy development, communication strategies, and implementation challenges. All sessions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview protocol is included in Appendix B.

Transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic approach. Coding focused on perceived benefits, equity concerns, community impact, and implementation conditions.

Integration

Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to identify convergence, divergence, and complementarity across data sources, providing a multidimensional understanding of how stakeholders experience calendar reform.

FINDINGS

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to examine stakeholder perceptions of a four-day school week among teachers, administrators, and school board members. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of perceived benefits, challenges, and factors influencing support or resistance. In accordance with established mixed-methods reporting conventions, the results are presented by research question and reflect explicit integration of quantitative and qualitative survey findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Four-Day School Weeks

Quantitative analyses revealed significant differences among stakeholder groups regarding the perceived advantages and disadvantages of four-day school weeks. Administrators were more likely to view the model favorably because of its potential to improve recruitment and retention,

while teachers placed greater emphasis on work–life balance and reduced burnout. School board members tended to focus on family flexibility and district competitiveness.

While the quantitative findings identified statistically significant differences among stakeholder groups, the qualitative data provided important context for understanding the reasons behind these differences. Participants' narratives illustrated how professional roles and daily responsibilities shaped perceptions of the four-day school week. Teachers frequently described the value of an additional day for rest, planning, and personal responsibilities. One teacher explained, *“Having that extra day would help teachers recharge and be more effective during the week.”* Administrators similarly viewed the schedule as a strategy for attracting and retaining educators, noting *“We have to stay competitive if we want to attract teachers.”*

Together, these findings suggest perceived benefits and drawbacks are closely tied to stakeholders' professional responsibilities and lived experiences. (See Appendix C, Table C1)

Differences Across Stakeholder Groups

The quantitative results indicated statistically significant differences across stakeholder groups on all measured items. Stakeholders varied considerably in how they viewed staffing benefits, family flexibility, and potential challenges associated with implementation.

To better understand the patterns observed in the survey data, qualitative responses were examined to explore the experiences and perspectives that influenced stakeholder perceptions. The qualitative findings revealed stakeholders approached the issue through different lenses shaped by their roles within the educational system. Teachers emphasized workload and burnout reduction, administrators focused on recruitment and organizational sustainability, and school board members highlighted accountability to the broader community. These narratives explain why stakeholder groups differed significantly in their quantitative ratings and reinforce the importance of considering multiple perspectives when evaluating calendar reform. (See Appendix C, Table C2)

Concerns and Challenges Associated with Four-Day School Weeks

Survey results demonstrated concerns about implementation remained prevalent across stakeholder groups, particularly regarding instructional quality, student outcomes, and equity implications. Teachers were less convinced than other groups that the four-day schedule would provide meaningful benefits for families.

Although the quantitative analyses identified significant differences across stakeholder groups, the qualitative findings explain how these concerns emerged through participants' experiences with student learning, family responsibilities, and community needs. Teachers frequently expressed concerns about student fatigue during longer instructional days, while administrators worried about potential learning loss and widening achievement gaps. Participants also raised concerns regarding extracurricular scheduling, transportation, and student supervision. One administrator noted, *“We can't afford to lose learning time with our students,”* while a community member observed students may have *“nowhere to go”* on the additional non-instructional day.

These qualitative insights demonstrate stakeholder concerns extend beyond operational logistics and reflect broader questions about educational equity and student well-being. (See Appendix C, Table C3)

Factors Influencing Support or Resistance

Quantitative findings suggested support for four-day school weeks was generally stronger among individuals who perceived direct benefits from implementation, particularly those closest to instructional and staffing challenges.

The qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative results by demonstrating stakeholder support is influenced by personal experiences, organizational context, and perceptions of equity.

Participants who had previous exposure to four-day schedules often expressed greater confidence in the model's effectiveness. Others viewed the schedule as a means of addressing teacher burnout and improving workplace satisfaction. However, resistance frequently emerged when stakeholders considered the potential impact on vulnerable student populations and working families. As one board member stated, *"If we can't support families, we shouldn't do this."*

These findings indicate support for four-day school weeks is not solely determined by perceived benefits but is also shaped by stakeholders' beliefs about fairness, access, and community readiness. (See Appendix C, Table C4)

Integrated Interpretation of Findings

When considered together, the quantitative and qualitative findings present a nuanced understanding of stakeholder perceptions. While the survey results identified statistically significant differences among stakeholder groups, participant narratives revealed these differences were influenced by contextual factors such as educator well-being, family needs, community capacity, and equity considerations. The convergence of findings across both data strands strengthens the overall interpretation that stakeholder support for four-day school weeks is highly contextual and dependent upon local implementation conditions. Consequently, educational leaders considering calendar reform should engage stakeholders throughout the decision-making process to ensure both operational benefits and potential unintended consequences are carefully considered. (See Appendix C, Table C5)

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine stakeholder perceptions of a four-day school week and to understand how perceived advantages, challenges, and levels of support vary across teachers, administrators, and school board members. Guided by a convergent mixed-methods design, the discussion integrates quantitative and qualitative results to interpret patterns, explain divergences, and situate findings within the broader literature on alternative school scheduling, educational leadership, and policy implementation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Interpreting Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages

Findings from this study indicate stakeholders simultaneously recognize meaningful advantages and express substantial reservations regarding a four-day school week. Quantitative results demonstrated administrators perceived staffing and retention benefits more strongly than teachers, while teachers emphasized improvements in work-life balance. Qualitative findings

further clarified these distinctions, revealing educators' support is grounded in lived experiences of burnout, workload intensity, and limited planning time.

These findings align with existing research suggesting four-day schedules are often viewed favorably by educators due to perceived reductions in stress and improvements in professional sustainability (Morton & DeWitt, 2024; Thompson & Morton, 2021). At the same time, both quantitative and qualitative data indicate perceived disadvantages particularly those related to childcare access, student supervision, and equity temper enthusiasm for the model. This duality suggests the four-day school week functions as both a potential lever for workforce stability and a source of risk for families and students, depending on contextual conditions.

Stakeholder Role and Divergent Perspectives

Differences across stakeholder groups emerged as a defining feature of the findings. Administrators and school board members tended to evaluate the four-day schedule through system-level lenses, emphasizing recruitment, retention, and organizational adaptability. Teachers, by contrast, assessed the model through classroom-level realities, including student fatigue, instructional continuity, and family needs.

This role-based divergence is consistent with scholarship on policy implementation, which emphasizes proximity to practice shapes how reforms are interpreted and enacted (Honig, 2006). Rather than indicating disagreement about goals, these findings suggest stakeholders operate from distinct accountability frameworks. Teachers are primarily accountable for student learning and daily classroom management, whereas administrators and board members balance workforce sustainability, fiscal responsibility, and community expectations. Recognizing these differing vantage points is essential for leaders seeking coherent and inclusive policy adoption.

Concerns Related to Equity and Unintended Consequences

One of the most salient contributions of this study is the identification of equity-related concerns associated with four-day school weeks. Teachers' lower ratings of family flexibility benefits, compared to school board members, were explained qualitatively through concerns about childcare availability, food insecurity, and student safety. These findings echo prior research cautioning that the effects of four-day schedules are highly context-dependent and may disproportionately affect economically disadvantaged families and younger students (Anderson & Walker, 2015; Morton et al., 2024).

Importantly, these concerns do not necessarily reflect opposition to alternative scheduling but rather apprehension about inadequate support structures. Stakeholders consistently emphasized without intentional mitigation strategies, four-day schedules risk shifting responsibility for supervision and enrichment from schools to families and communities that may lack capacity. This finding reinforces the need for equity-centered analyses when evaluating policy innovations in education.

Factors Shaping Support and Resistance

Support for the four-day school week was determined to be conditional rather than absolute. Administrators' stronger support reflected alignment with staffing and operational goals, while teachers' support was closely tied to perceived improvements in well-being. Qualitative findings

revealed prior exposure to four-day schedules and awareness of educator burnout increased openness to the model, whereas uncertainty regarding student outcomes and community readiness contributed to resistance.

These patterns align with implementation research suggesting stakeholder support increases when reforms are perceived as responsive to local needs and when risks are transparently acknowledged (Desravines et al., 2015). Resistance, in this context, appears pragmatic rather than ideological, underscoring the importance of trust-building, pilot initiatives, and continuous evaluation.

Implications for Educational Leadership and Policy

The integrated findings suggest adopting a four-day school week is a complex adaptive challenge rather than a technical scheduling change. Effective leadership requires navigating competing priorities, aligning system-level objectives with classroom realities, and addressing equity implications proactively. Leaders who approach alternative scheduling as a one-size-fits-all solution may overlook critical contextual factors that shape outcomes.

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the importance of inclusive decision-making processes that elevate multiple stakeholder voices. Policies that mandate needs assessments, require monitoring of academic and equity outcomes, and allow for iterative adjustment may better support sustainable implementation. Moreover, the findings suggest flexibility within policy frameworks rather than rigid mandates may enable districts to respond effectively to local conditions.

Contribution to Literature

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on four-day school weeks by providing an integrated, stakeholder-informed analysis that combines quantitative differentiation with qualitative explanation. By demonstrating how perceptions vary systematically by role and context, the study extends prior research that has primarily focused on student achievement or teacher labor markets. The mixed-methods approach offers a more nuanced understanding of how leadership, equity, and community capacity intersect in alternative scheduling decisions.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this mixed methods study suggest the four-day school week (4DSW) holds promise as a strategy for addressing educator wellbeing and staffing challenges; however, it simultaneously raises significant concerns related to equity, student support, and community capacity. Importantly, the success of alternative scheduling models appears to depend less on the schedule itself and more on the quality of leadership, inclusiveness of decision-making processes, governance structures, and the availability of mitigation supports reduce unintended consequences. As districts continue to explore innovative calendar reforms, future research must adopt evidence informed and equity centered approaches that account for the complex and context dependent nature of structural change.

First, future research should expand stakeholder representation. While this study incorporated perspectives from teachers, administrators, and school board members, subsequent research should intentionally include students and parents or caregivers. Their lived experiences offer essential insight into how the noninstructional day influences learning, wellbeing, childcare

arrangements, food access, and family routines. Incorporating these perspectives would deepen understanding of equity related impacts and complement the professional stakeholder voices represented here. Mixed method and longitudinal designs integrating student achievement data with qualitative accounts of family and community experiences would provide a more holistic portrait of reform consequences (Anderson & Walker, 2015; Morton, 2022; Thompson, 2019). Second, future studies should investigate the longitudinal effects of the 4DSW across diverse contexts and time horizons. Multiyear research designs tracking academic performance, attendance, wellbeing indicators, and workforce patterns would clarify when and for whom the model is beneficial. Longitudinal analyses are especially critical for identifying differential impacts across grade levels, disability status, multilingual learners, and economically disadvantaged students. Although prior quantitative studies have assessed aggregate academic outcomes (Anderson & Walker, 2015; Morton, 2022), less is known about sustained organizational and community level effects over time.

Third, implementation design and noninstructional day utilization warrant closer examination. Focus group participants highlighted operational complexities involving athletics, transportation, career and technical education, and special education services. Future research should explore how districts structure professional learning, tutoring, enrichment programming, and community partnerships on the noninstructional day, and how these practices influence instructional coherence and policy durability. Because total instructional time appears to moderate academic outcomes (Anderson & Walker, 2015; Morton, 2022), greater clarity regarding how time is reallocated is essential for understanding variation in results across districts.

Fourth, governance processes and leadership framing merit sustained inquiry. Participants described polarized reactions shaped largely by how the 4DSW was framed, whether as a cost saving measure, a workforce strategy, or an instructional redesign. Distributed leadership theory suggests reform legitimacy is constructed through shared interpretation rather than formal authority alone (Spillane, 2006). Comparative case studies could examine how superintendents and school boards engage in collective sense making, how narratives are strategically constructed, and how these processes shape stakeholder acceptance and policy sustainability. In addition, qualitative analyses of board deliberations, stakeholder engagement strategies, and decision-making dynamics would illuminate how competing values such as efficiency, equity, instructional quality, and community wellbeing are negotiated within local governance structures (Honig, 2006).

Fifth, future research should assess equity supports and community capacity. Participants raised concerns regarding childcare access, food insecurity, youth supervision, and supervision for vulnerable students. Studies should measure whether mitigation strategies such as childcare partnerships, meal distribution, transportation adjustments, and community-based supervision reduce burdens for families and promote equitable access to resources. Comparative case studies across districts with varying levels of community infrastructure could clarify how responsibilities shift among schools, families, and local organizations, and what resource investments are necessary to sustain equitable implementation.

Finally, there is a need for research that bridges organizational theory and empirical policy analysis. Adoption of the 4DSW represents not merely a technical scheduling adjustment but a

leadership mediated structural reform embedded within governance systems and community ecosystems. Integrating distributed leadership perspectives (Spillane, 2006) with policy implementation frameworks (Honig, 2006) may provide more nuanced explanations for why similar reforms yield divergent outcomes across districts. Building accessible datasets that link student outcomes, family indicators, workforce data, and implementation logs would further strengthen the field's capacity to conduct cross context comparisons and support evidence informed policy development.

Taken together, these recommendations underscore structural school reform must be examined as a leadership driven, governance mediated, and contextually contingent process. Advancing research on the four-day school week and comparable calendar reforms requires methodological rigor, expanded stakeholder inclusion, longitudinal analysis, and sustained attention to equity centered leadership and community capacity.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this mixed-methods study yield important implications for K–12 educational leaders and policymakers considering the adoption of a four-day school week. Rather than functioning as a universally beneficial reform, alternative scheduling emerges as a context-dependent strategy that requires deliberate planning, stakeholder engagement, and equity-focused safeguards.

Implications for Educational Practice

For district and campus leaders, the findings underscore the importance of aligning system-level goals with classroom-level realities. Teachers' strong emphasis on work–life balance and instructional sustainability suggests leadership decisions related to scheduling should explicitly address workload expectations, protected planning time, and educator well-being. When teacher experiences are foregrounded, alternative schedules are more likely to be perceived as supportive rather than imposed.

Leaders should also anticipate and proactively address implementation challenges identified by stakeholders. Childcare access, food security, student supervision, and extracurricular scheduling require coordinated responses that extend beyond the school day. Partnerships with community organizations, faith-based institutions, and local agencies may help mitigate unintended burdens on families, particularly in rural or high-poverty contexts.

Pilot programs and phased implementation models represent promising strategies for practice. Allowing districts to test four-day schedules on a limited basis provides opportunities to gather local data, assess instructional and equity impacts, and make adjustments before districtwide adoption. Ongoing monitoring of academic outcomes, attendance, behavior, and staff retention should be embedded into implementation plans to ensure responsiveness to emerging needs. In addition, the findings point to the value of strengthening leaders' capacity for collaborative sensemaking and shared problem-solving as they navigate calendar reform. Because perceptions of the four-day school week vary across roles, leaders may benefit from establishing ongoing structures, such as cross-role planning teams or routine stakeholder check-ins, that foster transparency and mutual understanding. These structures can help leaders surface unintended consequences early and adapt implementation strategies in real time. Moreover, prioritizing

relational trust and open communication may increase stakeholder confidence and reduce uncertainty during periods of significant schedule change, reinforcing the distributed leadership practices highlighted in prior research.

Implications for Policy

At the policy level, the findings highlight the need for frameworks that balance local flexibility with accountability and equity protections. State and district policies governing alternative schedules should require comprehensive needs assessments prior to adoption, including analyses of childcare availability, transportation, instructional minutes, special education services, and extracurricular access. Such requirements can help ensure scheduling decisions are informed by local capacity rather than solely by anticipated benefits.

Policies should also emphasize continuous evaluation rather than one-time approval. Clear criteria for monitoring student outcomes, equity indicators, and community impact can support evidence-informed decision-making and provide mechanisms for revision or discontinuation if negative effects emerge. Funding flexibility at the state and federal levels may further support districts in developing mitigation strategies, such as expanded meal programs or supervised enrichment opportunities on non-instructional days.

Importantly, policymakers should recognize four-day school weeks are not inherently appropriate for all districts. Contextual factors, including rurality, labor markets, community resources, and family needs must guide decision-making. Policies that allow districts to opt in based on demonstrated readiness may better support sustainable and equitable implementation. Furthermore, the findings suggest policymakers should consider adopting guidance that encourages districts to integrate community capacity assessments and family impact analyses into the early stages of decision-making. Given the equity concerns raised by stakeholders, policies that support partnerships with childcare providers, youth-serving organizations, and local agencies may help ensure the noninstructional day does not exacerbate existing resource disparities. Policymakers might also explore targeted funding streams or technical assistance models that help districts develop evidence-informed mitigation plans. Such supports would allow local leaders to tailor implementation to their specific contexts while maintaining a focus on equitable access and student well-being, a priority echoed throughout the stakeholder responses in this study.

CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study examined how key professional stakeholders perceive the four-day school week and how those perceptions shape leadership and implementation dynamics. By integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative focus group and interview findings, the study demonstrates calendar reform is not a neutral or purely operational change but a leadership decision that redistributes time, labor, and responsibility across schools, families, and communities. Stakeholder perceptions were nuanced, role-dependent, and deeply shaped by professional responsibilities and contextual realities.

In response to the first research question, clear differences emerged in how teachers, administrators, and school board members evaluated the benefits of a four-day school week.

Administrators primarily viewed the reform as a strategy for recruitment and retention, reflecting their responsibility for workforce stability amid persistent staffing shortages. Teachers emphasized the value of the four-day schedule for improving work-life balance and reducing burnout, highlighting the daily intensity of instructional labor. In contrast, school board members were most likely to frame the four-day week as a means of increasing family flexibility and responding to community preferences. These differences underscore that no single stakeholder group holds a complete perspective on calendar reform and that perceptions are shaped by proximity to daily school operations.

The second research question addressed themes related to equity, well-being, and community impact. Across stakeholder groups, participants acknowledged the four-day school week can enhance educator well-being and, in some cases, improve student focus by providing longer recovery periods. At the same time, substantial concerns emerged regarding childcare access, food insecurity, student supervision, and unequal family capacity. These equity-related risks were especially visible to teachers who work closely with families facing economic hardship. Participants also described increased pressure on community organizations to provide meals, supervision, and enrichment on the non-instructional day. Together, these findings suggest that while the four-day school week may offer meaningful benefits, it can also create or intensify inequities if not accompanied by intentional supports.

The third research question examined how stakeholder perceptions inform leadership and implementation strategies. Findings indicate the success of a four-day school week depends less on the schedule itself and more on how leaders manage the reform process. Stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of transparent communication, early calendar release, pilot programs, and ongoing evaluation. These strategies reflect the need for distributed leadership in which administrators, teachers, school boards, and community partners collaboratively interpret and adapt the reform to local conditions. Support for alternative scheduling increased when stakeholders perceived alignment with community needs and adequate safeguards to address potential risks.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate the four-day school week is a complex policy reform that requires adaptive, equity-centered leadership rather than technical adjustment alone. For district and school leaders, this means that calendar change must be accompanied by robust stakeholder engagement, partnerships that address childcare and nutrition, and continuous monitoring of student and family outcomes. For leadership preparation programs, the four-day school week provides a valuable case for teaching policy implementation, collaborative governance, and equity-oriented decision-making.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates the success of four-day school weeks is determined not simply by the structure of the school calendar, but by the quality of leadership guiding its implementation. Educational leaders must balance workforce sustainability with their responsibility to ensure equitable opportunities for all students and families. Leadership-informed, equity-centered decision-making requires meaningful stakeholder engagement, careful consideration of local context, and continuous evaluation of both intended and unintended outcomes. As school systems continue to pursue innovative approaches to addressing persistent educational challenges, reforms that are grounded in evidence, collaboration, and a commitment

to equity are far more likely to produce sustainable and meaningful improvements for schools and the communities they serve.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Survey: Exploring Stakeholder Perceptions of the Four-Day School Week

Estimated Completion Time: 10–15 minutes

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is valuable in understanding the potential impacts and perceptions of the four-day school week. All responses will remain confidential.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1.1 What is your current role? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Administrator
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Parent/Guardian
- ☐ School Board Member
- ☐ Community Member
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

1.2 What grade level(s) or area are you affiliated with?

- ☐ Elementary (K–5)
- ☐ Middle School (6–8)
- ☐ High School (9–12)
- ☐ District Level (Central Office)
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

1.3 How many years have you been involved with the school district?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1–5 years
- ☐ 6–10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

1.4 What is the type of your school district?

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Rural

1.5 In what state is your school district located?

Section 2: Perceived Benefits

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

The four-day school week improves student attendance.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

The four-day school week reduces overall costs for the district.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

The four-day school week improves work-life balance for staff.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

The four-day school week provides greater flexibility for families.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

The four-day week helps attract and retain staff.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Other benefits you perceive:

Section 3: Perceived Challenges

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

The four-day school week creates childcare difficulties for families.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

The four-day week negatively affects student academic performance.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Students miss access to meals and support services on the fifth day.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

The longer school days are tiring for students and staff.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

It is difficult to align extracurricular or athletic schedules.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Other challenges you perceive:

Section 4: Overall Support

4.1 Overall, how supportive are you of implementing a four-day school week?

- ☐ 1 - Strongly Oppose
- ☐ 2 - Oppose
- ☐ 3 - Neutral
- ☐ 4 - Support
- ☐ 5 - Strongly Support

4.2 Please explain your answer:

Section 5: Additional Comments

Is there anything else you would like decision-makers to know about the four-day school week?

Thank you for your time and thoughtful responses!

Appendix B

Interview or Focus Group Protocol

Interview Protocol: Exploring Stakeholder Perceptions of the Four-Day School Week

Estimated Time: 30–45 minutes

Introduction Script:

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. This interview is part of a study about perceptions of the four-day school week. Your participation is voluntary, and you may skip any questions or stop at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Questions:

1. Can you describe your experiences or thoughts about the four-day school week?
2. What do you see as the main benefits for students, families, or staff?
3. What concerns do you have about this schedule?
4. How do you think this change affects the broader community?
5. What would help make this transition successful?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Closing Script:

Thank you for sharing your perspectives. Your input is very valuable and will help inform our understanding of how this policy affects the school community

Appendix C

Table C1
Themes and Exemplar Quotes

Theme	Description	Exemplar Quote (Participant Identifier)
Improved work–life balance	Reduced burnout and increased time for personal and professional responsibilities	“Having that extra day would help teachers recharge and be more effective during the week.” (Teacher)
Increased planning and instructional focus	Additional time for lesson preparation and collaboration	“With more planning time, instruction would be more intentional instead of rushed.” (Administrator)
Childcare challenges	Limited access to affordable childcare on the non-instructional day	“The biggest issue is what parents are supposed to do with their kids on that extra day.” (Parent)
Equity and access concerns	Disproportionate impact on low-income families	“Families with resources will manage, but others will struggle.” (Support Staff)

Table C2
Stakeholder Differences and Exemplar Quotes

Stakeholder Group	Primary Perspective	Exemplar Quote (Participant Identifier)
Teachers	Work–life balance, burnout reduction	“This would help teachers stay in the profession longer.” (Teacher)
Administrators	Recruitment, retention, district competitiveness	“We have to stay competitive if we want to attract teachers.” (Administrator)
School board members	Community impact and accountability	“We have to consider how this affects the whole community.” (Board Member)
Parents/support staff	Childcare, safety, supervision	“It creates another burden for families who already struggle.” (Parent)

Table C3
Anticipated Challenges and Exemplar Quotes

Area of Concern	Theme	Exemplar Quote (Participant Identifier)
Instructional quality	Student fatigue during longer days	“Little kids are already tired by the end of the day.” (Teacher)
Academic outcomes	Risk of widening achievement gaps	“We can’t afford to lose learning time with our students.” (Administrator)
Extracurricular access	Scheduling conflicts	“Everything would end up happening on Fridays.” (Coach)

Area of Concern	Theme	Exemplar Quote (Participant Identifier)
Community impact	Supervision and safety	“Kids will be out in the community with nowhere to go.” (Community Member)

Table C4
Factors Influencing Support or Resistance and Exemplar Quotes

Factor	Influence	Exemplar Quote (Participant Identifier)
Prior experience	Increased confidence and support	“Once you see it work, it makes more sense.” (Administrator)
Awareness of burnout	Support driven by staff well-being	“Teachers are exhausted, and this could help.” (Teacher)
Equity concerns	Resistance linked to childcare and food access	“If we can’t support families, we shouldn’t do this.” (Board Member)
Contextual fit	Rural capacity and community readiness	“What works in one district won’t work everywhere.” (Administrator)

Table C5
Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings by Survey Section

Survey Section	Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Themes	Integrated Interpretation
SS2: Advantages and disadvantages	Administrators rated staffing benefits higher; teachers rated work–life balance higher; board members rated family flexibility higher	Well-being, recruitment, childcare, equity	Perceived benefits vary by role, while disadvantages center on family and equity impacts
SS2: Group differences	Significant ANOVA differences across all three items ($p < .05$)	Role-based priorities and proximity to daily operations	Stakeholder role strongly shapes perception of benefits and risks
SS3: Concerns and challenges	Teachers less convinced of family flexibility benefits	Childcare, student fatigue, extracurricular conflicts	Classroom-level awareness heightens concern for unintended consequences
SS4: Support or resistance	Greater support among those closest to implementation benefits	Experience, burnout awareness, contextual fit	Support increases with experience and perceived relief; resistance reflects equity and capacity concerns