

Perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week in Saskatchewan

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Ethics Statement

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- b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

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Abstract

The four-day school week (4DSW) is an emerging concept in public education in North America. In Canada, there are only a few districts or divisions that have made the switch from a traditional five-day school week to a four-day school week. However, in recent years' interest in moving to a 4DSW has grown. This case study was undertaken to explore the perspectives of teachers working in the 4DSW in a Canadian province and to build upon the lack of current literature from a Canadian perspective. Semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted with teachers to gain an understanding of the four-day school week specifically on student well-being, academic achievement, teacher perceptions, and teacher retention. Two teachers from the Prairie South School Division in Saskatchewan were interviewed for this study. Qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews identified strong support for the four-day school week, citing its positive impact on students and staff. The teachers reported that students' well-being and school culture improved, student academic achievement was not negatively impacted, teachers have strong positive perceptions of the four-day school week and teachers reported a strong desire to remain within the four-day school week and not return or move to a school that operates on the five-day school system. The findings of the research are positive and beneficial to school district leaders considering a move to a four-day school week. However, it is noted that there is a lack of research regarding four-day school weeks within the Canadian context and further research is needed.

Keywords: Four-day school week; Student well-being; Student academic achievement; Teacher perception; Teacher retention

Dedication

I would like to acknowledge all of the people in my life that have been very supportive through this whole program. My fellow cohort members, all the professors that I have had along the way, my co-workers that have provided encouragement and gave up their time to proof read my work and finally, my family for being patient with me through this, at times, stressful process. With the love and support from the community I have built around me, I dedicate this final project to you.

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Introduction

Rather than the traditional five-day school week, some school districts are adopting four-day school weeks. There are many variations of the schedule- primarily driven by days/weeks/hours of instructions as required provincially. The concept of a four-day school week (4DSW) in public education in Canada is not as common as it is in the United States, where it occurs in just under half of the states in over 500 districts (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). With a greater number of school districts adopting a four-day school week, more research has been emerging in recent years. Within Canada, the number of districts and divisions that operate on a four-day school week are few. However, recently the conversation to move from a traditional five-day school week to a four-day school week has increased with several school districts and divisions in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba considering the change (Froese, 2020; Livingston Range School Division, 2021; McGuire, 2016).

Research problem, purpose and questions

With schools operating on a 4DSW calendar and more schools considering the shift, a research problem in academic literature within Canada is that there is little research found to indicate whether moving to a four-day school week is beneficial to the student, school, district, and teachers. The rationale of this study is to start filling in the gaps in existing Canadian literature surrounding the four-day school week. The research question being asked is What are the perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week who have previous experience in a five-day a week school, in regards to student academic achievement, student well-being, teachers' perceptions and teacher retention? The results of this study will add to the existing Canadian literature and aid school districts that are contemplating shifting from the traditional five-day school week to a four-day school week by providing additional information.

Literature Review

The four-day school week is an emerging concept in public education in which a traditional five day a week school is moved to a four-day a week school. Most schools choose to operate a Monday to Thursday school with fewer choosing Tuesday to Friday (Dam, 2006). On the fifth day, there are no instructional classes. Teachers use the time to collaborate, lesson plan, take professional development courses and to do corrections on student work (Dam, 2006; Hill & Hayward, 2012). In order to meet the required instructional minutes, students spend longer days in school and the length of days varies from district and division. Having more instructional time per day has shown marginal gains in academic success (Cattaneo, 2017).

Within Canada there are only a limited number of districts/divisions that operate on four-day school week but with many more contemplating the idea (Froese, 2020; Livingston Range School Division, 2021; McGuire, 2016). With such a few districts/divisions to choose from, there is a lack of research conducted in Canada and much of the main literature from a Canadian context has been from anecdotal writings or conducted by independent researchers (Blakesley, 2013; McGuire, 2016; Plourde, 2007; Sanderson, 2015).

In the United States, the four-day school week has been adopted in 25 states and 560 districts (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). There have been some studies of this concept but overall there is a lack of peer-reviewed and academic research on the topic (Donis-Keller & Silvernail, 2009; Thompson, 2020). Analyzing the current anecdotal and academic research related to teachers and students, the following themes or characteristics of a four-day school week emerge and are discussed within this paper: Student academic achievement, Well-being of students, Teacher perceptions and Teacher retention.

Student academic achievement

The research into student academic achievement has shown to be inconclusive. A study in 2016 compared test scores from four-day school and five-day school students in Montana. The test scores looked at criterion reference test results in Mathematics and reading over a five-year period. The results show that five-day schools perform better on the reference tests (Tharp, 2016). In Idaho, an analysis of standardized tests scores

from 2014-2019 of students in a 4DSW compared to students in a five-day school week show “no statistically significant impact on academic performance” (Barzee, 2020, p.64). In Colorado, results of the Colorado Student Assessment Program were analyzed to examine student performance for grades 3 to 10. The analysis showed slight variation in test scores in reading, writing, and mathematics (Hewitt, 2011). Morton (2020) utilized district level data from Oklahoma over a 7-year period and found no differences in student achievement. In another study using data from Colorado, conducted by Anderson and Walker (2015), it was found that grades four and five students performed better in a four-day school week than their counterparts. A 2021 study across 12 states by Thompson (2021) found that no significant academic impacts on Math in students who spend middle to high time in school. Students who spend low time in school, statistically have negative impacts on Math achievement (Thompson, 2021). The literature on the impact of the four-day school week on student academic achievement shows no definitive positive or negative outcome. Most cases show no negative impact.

Well-being of students

There is inconclusive evidence through a lack of research as to how a four-day school week effects a student's well-being. Fischer-Argyle (2018) found that juvenile crime increased 20% in Colorado whereas Geranios (2006) found that there was no increase in crime on days off in Idaho. In a 2020 study on adolescent health behaviours, the results were mixed. A 4DSW was associated with improved student engagement, decreased substance use, decreased non-school screen time and an increase in physical activity. The same study found that a 4DSW had some negative outcomes such as increased bullying, increased sexual activity and a decrease in sleep (Israel, 2020).

Within four-day school weeks, teachers have reported that students' participation has increased, attendance has improved, and student disruptions have decreased (Geranios, 2006; Yarbrough, 2006). In the research in this area, there is not enough data to suggest definitively that students have improved or worsened, and further research is needed on the effects of a 4DSW on the well-being of students.

Teacher perceptions

It is reported that teachers positively support a four-day school week. Some of these reasons for the support are: increased planning and collaboration, positive impact on instruction, increased teacher attendance and increased staff morale (Marion, 2018; NCSL, 2020; Turner, 2017). The non-instructional day allows teachers to run errands, and to spend more time with family (Davy & Hall, 2015; Plucker et al., 2012). Thompson et al. (2020) noted that the fifth day is used by a third of the districts analyzed to offer remedial education, professional development and other opportunities for students and staff. Some districts suggest teachers to use the fifth day for medical and dental appointments to reduce teacher absenteeism (Morones, 2013). However, Marion (2018) and Turner (2017) state that not a lot of research has been done on the impacts on teachers in the literature.

Teacher retention

In a paper by Thompson et al. (2020), one third of the districts who have moved to a 4DSW state the primary motivation was to increase teacher retention in rural school and in doing so, the districts would save money on recruitment and hiring. In a paper by Turner (2017) which studied staff perspectives in the four-day school week, it was reported that 91% of school staff preferred to work in a four-day a week school. Working in a four-day school is highly favored by teachers (Davy & Hall, 2015). A dissertation written by Marion (2018) concluded that moving to a four-day school week helped in the retention of teachers, but it wasn't the lone deciding factor for them staying in the profession. These coincidences with the anecdotal evidence from Rouse (2006) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (2020). However, in a study by Maiden (2020), it was concluded that there is no empirical evidence that shows that four-day school week improves teacher retention. It is of note mentioning that in the paper by Maiden, it states that a larger study needs to be conducted to back up the initial data.

Canadian context

In Canada, there is a lack of peer-reviewed research on four-day school weeks. Much of the information comes from anecdotal reports (McGuire, 2016; Plourde, 2007; Sanderson, 2015) and from independent research (Blakesley, 2013). From these anecdotal reports, the main reason for moving to a four-day school week is financial-

(McGuire, 2016; Plourde, 2007; Sanderson, 2015), which in turn will help keep schools open (McGuire, 2016; Sanderson, 2015).

In terms of student academic achievement, schools are reporting no positive or negative effects (McGuire, 2016; Sanderson, 2015). Sanderson (2015) when reporting on Boundary School District 51 in British Columbia, reported that the school board conducted a review five years after the implementation of the four-day school week and found “virtually no change in [student] academic performance.” This is on par with the reporting from academic literature from the U.S.

Prairie South School Division made the change to a four-day school week, not for financial reasons, but for quality of life reasons (Sanderson, 2015). Sanderson (2015) reported students were riding the bus an extra two hours a day. Since the switch, students and parents are pleased with the shortened school week.

When it came to teacher’s perceptions on the four-day school week, teachers were in favour (Plourde, 2007) and report positive experiences (McGuire, 2016). Plourde, Sanderson and McGuire all report that moving to a four-day school week resulted in a reduction in staff absenteeism. Blakesley (2013) reported 74% of those surveyed announced that there is a greater balance between work and personal lives.

In 2013, eight years after of moving to a 4DSW, Gulf Islands School District 64 commissioned an independent research study with the main question being “To what degree does the organization of time in School District 64 affect educational outcomes?” From that research study it was concluded that there was no definitive answer as to its effect on student achievement. The paper did indicate that if an effect on student achievement was shown it wouldn’t be due to moving to a four-day school week alone but other factors such as size effects, government policy changes, and changes in format and delivery of standardized instruments would influence the achievement scores (Blakesley, 2013). In Blakesley’s analysis of the surveys collected, employees state that teaching and learning are not compromised by having a shorter school week.

Context of Study

Prairie South School Division is located in southern Saskatchewan and encompasses 32,747 square kilometres. The division consists of 39 rural and urban schools, with roughly 7100 plus students enrolled, and 1400 plus staff.

In 2002-2003, Prairie South School Division decided to move to an alternate school calendar also known as a four-day school week and away from the traditional five-day school week. This decision was not based on financial reasons but due to quality-of-life reasons. Prairie South School Division realized that students were spending a considerable amount of time being bused to and from school; some students spent 2 extra hours a day on a bus (Sanderson, 2015). Mr. Tony Baldwin, director of education, said in a CBC news interview, "If you can take 14 days a year for 13 years off of that bus ride, that's an awful lot of that little person's life that comes back to them where they're not rattling around on a bus" (Cowan, 2018, para. 8).

Since its implementation in 2002-2003, all but four of Prairie South's rural schools have moved to an alternate school calendar with the latest being Mossbank, Craik and Chaplin in 2019. The principal of Mossbank school in Prairie South told the CBC that the move wasn't just about length of bus rides, "it was also about having extra time off for family time, and taking the pressure off for young children who find the five-day week tiring" (Cowan, 2018, para. 10).

For this paper, the two participants that were interviewed are teachers from a rural school in Prairie South School Division, which follows the alternate school calendar. Both participants have previously worked in a five-day school week and it is this experience that is fundamental to answer the research question, what are the perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week.

Research Process

Methodology and design

The methodology described here is an exploratory qualitative case study that used semi-structured interviews. Seven interview questions were designed to elicit responses from teachers working in a four-day school week specifically in areas of student achievement, student well-being, teacher perception and teacher retention (See Appendix C).

Participants

Participants of this study involved two teachers from Prairie South School Division in Saskatchewan who are currently working in a four-day school week. Participant 1 has been teaching in a four-day school for seven years. She teaches pre-kindergarten and kindergarten French immersion. Participant 2 has worked in a four-day school for eight years. She teaches grades three to twelve science and math.

Instruments

Interview questions were designed to capture the responses of participants regarding their experiences in a four-day school week. The seven questions designed aligned to the guiding research question (See Appendix C).

Question one was included as an icebreaker and to collect information as to why the interviewee wanted to participate within this research study. Question two was included to collect data based on the impact, if any, that a four-day school week has on learning, classroom and school culture. Question three was included to ask the respondents if they have observed student academic achievement and student well-being having been affected by a four-day school week. Question four was included to gather information about the participants' experience moving from a traditional five-day school to a four-day school and what helped in that transition. Question five was included to collect data on whether working in a four-day school influenced their decision to stay in the division. Question six was included to collect data on how, if it has, working in a four-day school has affected working relationships with staff. Lastly, question seven

was included to collect information on teacher recommendations for districts/divisions that are considering moving to a four-day school week.

Data collection

After approval from the Ethics Review Board at Simon Fraser University, a letter of invitation (Appendix A) to participate in this study was sent out to the superintendent of the Prairie South School division via email. The superintendent, after approval, disseminated the letter of invitation to the schools within the division that operate on a four-day school week. Interested participants that met the criteria within the letter of invitation were sent a letter of consent (Appendix B) and the interview guide. Each participant was given the opportunity to preview the questions prior to the interview.

Interviews took place in the winter of 2022 via Microsoft 365 teams and both interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. Interviews took between 15 and 22 minutes. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and all potentially identifying information was removed or changed. Each participant was given the opportunity to review and approve their interview transcript.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study and the small participant group, this study is not generalizable, but it will contribute to the growing body of literature on 4DSW in Canada.

Data storage

The data was collected via audio recorded interview and the subsequent recording has been transcribed. The transcribed audio recordings will be stored on my password-protected computer. All audio files and transcripts will be stored for seven years.

Data analysis

Coding is a heuristic – an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow (Saldana, 2008, p.8). Coding methods were utilized to find patterns in the data. This was done by reading through the data multiple times while applying a word or short phrase each time to summarize and represent the transcript passages.

Once the data was summarized, similarly coded data were placed categories (Saldana, 2008). Through analyzing these categories, the interviewer developed a list of themes or trends that aided in the understanding of the data. Analysis of the data by the interviewer was completed in the spring and summer of 2022.

Findings

This exploratory qualitative study was conducted to record the perspectives of teachers currently working in a four-day school week who have experienced working in a five-day school week. Through the data analysis, the following themes emerged that help provide some insight into the overall research question:

What are the perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week who have experience working in a five-day school week, in regards to student academic achievement, student well-being, teacher perception and teacher retention?

No change to positive academic achievement

With respect to student academic achievement, the participants have differing views. Participant 1 when reflecting on their experience working in a five-day school week two years previously and considering now, stated that they haven't noticed any differences in academic achievement. They shared

Two years before here I taught in a five-day school, and there's not a difference, like it's not because its four days that the kids are struggling more....it hasn't impacted that achievement. No, not at all. (Participant 1)

Participant 2 believes that students do better in this system because of longer class time and opportunity for students to complete work in class rather than for homework. "I honestly think students do better because we get longer class time.....I teach math so it gives them more practice time." This participant also states some students would normally be missing that Friday instructional time because of other obligations such as work and for other students having that extra day allows students to catch up on assignments and projects.

I honestly think they do better because they know that they have an extra day to do an assessment because sometimes, if it's due on Thursday, 'hey can I hand it to you Friday because I'm gonna work on it. (Participant 2)

Both participants' views on academic achievement are different. It is worth noting that neither participant believes that a shorter school week effects students' academic outcomes negatively.

Students well-being & positive school culture

Both participants expressed that students prefer the four-day a week school over a five-day a week school. Both teachers believe the students' well-being has improved in the four-day school week system. Participant 1 noted that student attendance has improved and students miss less time because of the available Friday. Some students participate in sports through the school and participant 1 believes this contributes to improved well-being.

.... their well-being is better because they have more time to engage in extracurricular because on Fridays when its off, they have tournaments.....so they don't miss school. (Participant 1)

Students who do not participate in school organized sports, are engaged in activities outside of school on Friday that improves their well-being and students have expressed this to one of the participants in the following way:

My students have definitely told me that they really like the four-day weeks because they get to go hang out with their friends or they get to go have a job or they get to make money, help on the farm, whatever it is they want to do because a two-day weekend is not that long.....They tell me all the time just how much better the four-day weeks are. (Participant 2)

Participant 2 commented that students are happier with the extra day off and don't notice the extra time in class added to the end of Monday through Thursday classes to make up for Friday's lost instructional time.

Nobody notices an extra 24 minutes a day, because we do 24 extra minutes a day to account for those Fridays off. Nobody notices 24 minutes.... I know that my students like it. (Participant 2)

Regarding school culture, participant 1 expressed that there is a positive feeling throughout the school, more than the traditional five-day a week school. Both staff and students prefer this school schedule, and it is reflected in the atmosphere of the school. According to the participant "I would say its better. I'm so happy to have four days. You can feel it." When there is school on a Friday, it changes the feeling of the school and the students represent this.

We do have school on some Fridays so let's say once a month kindish. And there's a big difference, with the kids. They know when it's a five-day week, its long. The teachers don't like it. The kids don't like it. (Participant 1)

Participant 2 noted that students have time on Fridays to complete jobs or tasks that they must do and would normally miss school for. Students have less resentment toward the school because of this.

The school culture makes students resent being at school less because we have a farming community so students will miss school because of seeding or planting or whatever they have to do. It actually makes them resent being in school less because they're missing less school because they can always have Friday off. (Participant 2)

Both participants believe that a four-day school week has positive effects on both student well-being and school culture.

Teachers perceptions

The four-day school week has positive effects on home life and work life. Both participants report that having four days of instructional time has improved home life by allotting them to spend more time with their husbands/wives and children. Participant 1 is shared

My husband and I leave for three days so we can just drive to Banff for the weekend and then we come back. So it gives us more time and its so precious right now. (Participant 1)

While Participant 2 stated that having that Friday to plan and do corrections, allows them to spend Saturday and Sunday with his/her family and not split between schoolwork and family.

It's great, it's fantastic. I have more time for my family. I have more time for things I want to do. (and). if I spend all Friday correcting or doing whatever, that gives me Saturday, Sunday to actually do family things. So it's great! (Participant 2)

At work, having no instructional classes on Friday relieves teachers of stress and allows them to focus more on their job in the way of correcting and planning. As both participants spoke about the stress in important ways in terms of work-life balance and being able to leave work at work and focus more on both aspects of their lives.

I take the 5th day as a prep day which means I can just spend all day at school to get work done and that means I'm here less after school hours than I should be normally. (Participant 2)

...I use my Fridays off to come to school to do prep, so its stress free.... it's much better for teachers and it's much better for kids. (Participant 1)

In an email sent to the researcher after the initial interview, Participant 1 shared another benefit of the 4DSW was that teacher absenteeism has decreased, and student attendance has improved. The four-day school week allows staff and students to make dental and medical appointments on the weekday without having to take time off school.

.... we have better attendance from students and teachers, because we try to book our appointments on those Fridays off. Even our medial clinic and the dental clinic has a copy of our calendar and they try to accommodate us. It

means less cost for the school division as they don't have to pay for a sub[stitute]. (Participant 1)

The result of having Friday as a non-instructional day not only means that staff and students miss less school but it results in the school district/division saving money.

Another positive perception has been improved staff morale. Participant 1 makes the connection that since staff are less stressed and are happier it is easier to maintain those good work relationships. Participant 2 noted that staff are less resentful of school and administration.

...it's just that we're all so much happier, that you don't feel the stress of those long weeks, when we do have a Friday, we all go to the bar altogether, even our principal comes.... we all go together so I think it brings us closer. (Participant 2)

If we have to have a meeting after school, we're less resentful about it because I find with a five-day week, you have to be at school for 5 days and then still staying after school for hours on end. (Participant 2)

Overall, staff are much happier with a non-instructional Friday than a five-day work week. A quote from participant 1 reflects teachers' perceptions, "So those four-days, it's nice because we're happy. The staff's happy so you feel much better."

Teacher retention

Both interviewees stated that the four-day school week factors into their decisions to remain at their school or within a division that operates a four-day school week. When asked about their experience moving from a five-day school week to a four-day school week, participant 1 was very adamant by saying, "I wouldn't go back. I will never move to five days even if they give me a million dollars to move. I would not move back". Later in the interview, when the same participant was asked about how has working in a four-day school influenced their decision to remain at the district/division, they reiterated, "...like I said, I will never go back to five days. Never. I will not move school divisions. Not if it's for five days. No way." Participant 1 mentions that a

contributing factor for remaining in a four-day school week is that it allows more time for family.

...where I am in my life right now, my youngest, she's 16.... I don't know if you can understand it, it's so weird because it goes very fast. Everything is so fast, but then you have more time to enjoy life....and yeah, I will not move school divisions. (Participant 1)

Participant 2 also expressed their desire to remain in the four-day school system, but were leaving the district to pursue their doctoral education. Their lament of leaving is evident in their sharing

I'm leaving to go do my PhD, which is happy but it's the saddest thing in my life to be leaving because I would stay here forever. I don't want to imagine going back to working a five-day week ever again. (Participant 2)

Participant 2 goes on to explain that their mental health is an important reason why they wish to remain in the four-day school system. "I would always choose a four-day a week school over a five-day week school. It's just so much better. My mental health loves it."

Suggestions or recommendations for districts considering a 4DSW transition.

Both of the participants work for the same school division and through their experiences working in a four-day school, they both offered suggestions to other districts/divisions who are considering a move to a four-day a week system. Participant 1 makes the suggestion that the district/division has to educate the parents on the benefits of the four-day school week and present it to them as a better option in order for the parents to be onboard with the four-day school instead of the traditional five-day school.

You have to present it like it will be better for their kids, their mental health and (kids) will have more time to be kids, then they can play more, they can go outside more. It's really for the kids well-being.... they (the division) have to build

this relationship with the parents first and show them all the benefits of it. (Participant 1)

Participant 2 noted that because of a lack of daycare and costs, many parents would be hesitant about moving to a four-day school week. Their recommendation is to use the Friday's to offer babysitting courses, CPR and other accreditations in order to alleviate some of the parental childcare concerns and to further educate middle and high school students. A benefit of this is some of those middle school and high school students will be earning an income. Participant 2 also provided a unique way in which the school can showcase this, "high school students don't know elementary [students] and vice versa so maybe having a career fair of 'choose me as your babysitter on your days off'."

Both participants are fully aware that the four-day school is not what parents are used to and may be very hesitant but both believe that the benefits of a four-day school outweigh the five-day school. As participant 2 says,

I understand the fear that some people have from going to this because it is not the norm right now but there are so many advantages, that I think if implemented correctly, like giving babysitting courses and just slowly integrating this idea, that would really help. (Participant 2)

Discussion

An exploratory qualitative study was utilized to explore the perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week who have had experience working in a five-day school week. The researcher was primarily interested in the impact the four-day school week had on student academic achievement, student well-being, teacher perception and teacher retention. The researcher conducted interviews with two teachers from the Prairie South School division in Saskatchewan, Canada who currently work in a four-day a week school but who have experience in a five-day a week school.

In terms of student academic achievement, the results of the research are inconclusive as to whether there is no impact on academic achievement or a positive impact. These findings match the inconclusive results found in the literature. Data analysis showed that there were no observed negative academic impact by participants which aligns with findings of the research conducted by Barzee (2020), Hewitt (2011), Morton (2020) and Thompson (2021). In fact, the analysis showed that there was a sense of positive academic impact on student achievement which is a similar finding to the study of school-level data from Colorado done by Anderson and Walker (2015). It is important to note that very few cases in the literature discuss a negative impact on student academic achievement which resonates with the findings in this research project.

Another theme was the positive effects of the 4DSW on student well being and school culture. The results of the research shows that the four day school week positively effects the student's well-being. Students are happier, there is a positive feeling in the school, and having that Friday off, students are less resentful toward the school. Student's well-being appears to have improved because students are able to participate in school extracurricular activities on Fridays or engage in activities outside of school. The positive impact on students' well-being is similar to the research results found by Geranios (2006), and Yarbrough (2006).

The results of teacher perceptions from this research matches with the research in the literature. Marion (2018), National Conference of State Legislatures (2020), and Turner (2017) reported the reasons teachers' support a four-day school week is because of increased planning, increased teacher attendance and increased staff morale. This research supports those findings. This research also supports the findings reported by Davy and Hall (2015) and Plucker et al., (2012) that the extra day off allows for my family

time. Morones (2013) suggested that teachers use the fifth day for medical and dental appointments and the findings in this study supports that.

When it came to teacher retention, the four-day school week was favoured positively. This matches the reports from Davy and Hall (2015) and Turner (2017). Marion (2018) concluded that moving to a four-day school week helped in the retention of teachers but it wasn't the deciding factor. The results of this research paper supports Marion's conclusions. The findings indicate that better mental health, and more family time are factors that are important in their job and these are determining factors as to whether or not to remain at a four-day a week school.

A significant finding of this research that will interest school district leaders who are contemplating a move to a four-day school week, are the recommended suggestions from the participants of this study. The participants recommend to involve the parents in the decision making and to establish courses or programs on the non-instructional Friday for students to achieve accreditations such as in babysitting, and CPR. The participants suggest that having students' complete accreditation programs may alleviate some of the worry of child-care from the parents.

Significance of study

This qualitative study is significant as it is a case study incorporating the results from two teachers working directly in a four-day a week school who have previous experience in a five-day a week school system. This study is to fill the gap found in the existing Canadian literature on the perspectives of teachers in a four-day school week with a focus on the areas of student academics, student well-being, teacher perception and teacher retention. The data from this research paper may also aid school districts that are contemplating shifting from the traditional five-day school week to a four-day school week by providing additional information.

Limitations

This research project was limited to interviews received from two participants working for the same school division, Prairie South school division, in Saskatchewan, Canada. The results may not be generalizable to other districts/divisions.

Future Research

There is a lack of research on the topic of four-day school week in Canada and although this paper adds to the literature, much more research needs to be conducted. For future research a larger sample size is needed for generalizability of the data and to give a more complete understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the four-day school week.

Also, this research paper focused on one specific group within the four-day school week. A more in-depth study which includes students, educational staff, administrators for the school, administrators for the district/division, parents and community members needs to be conducted to fully understand the impacts of a four-day school week in rural school districts.

The research reported that there was an increase in staff and student attendance and it would be important to know the percentage of improvement. Future research needs to be conducted to include data of teacher attendance in a four-day school week in comparison with a five-day school week.

The participants in the research report no to positive impact on academic achievement. It is essential to know for sure if the four-day school week effects academic achievement. Future research needs to be conducted which includes student academic achievement data from four-day schools and compare them to five-day schools in the same district/division.

Conclusion

The practice of having school four-days a week is not a common practice in Canada with only a handful of districts/divisions operating this way. The teachers participating in this study are part of the Prairie South School Division that uses the four-day school week calendar in its rural schools. In general, this study has found that teachers strongly support the four-day school week and they believe it has many advantages in comparison to the traditional five-day school week.

This study confirms that teachers believe that the four-day school week benefits student's well-being and school culture. As for academic achievement, the study concludes that there are no negative consequences. Teachers' perceptions of the four-day school are positive, indicating increased staff morale, increased teacher attendance, increased time for correcting and planning and less stress from the job. The results of this study also show that the four-day school week positively effects the ability of a rural school to retain teachers.

School district leaders considering a four-day school week will find the results of this research on the four-day school week and its impact on student achievement, student well-being, teacher perception and teacher retention valuable in their own research and decision- making. The suggested recommendations from the participants in this study to school district/division leaders is also very valuable and school district leaders need to take that into consideration.

Although this report on the four-day school week shows many positives and benefits, it is worth noting that little research from a Canadian perspective has been undertaken and it is imperative that future research, at length, be conducted to get a more complete understanding of the impact a four-day school week has on rural school districts/divisions and communities.

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Appendix A. Letter of Invitation

July 7, 2021

Invitation to Participate in a Research Project:

Perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week

Greetings, you are being invited by Mr. Kyle Tapper, current M. Ed candidate at Simon Fraser University to participate in a research project entitled *Perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week*. This project is being supervised by Dr. Michelle Pidgeon.

Study Background and Procedures

The main goal of the research project is to gather information from teachers and administrators working in a four-day school setting. Notably, I am interested in exploring the perspectives of teachers and administrators who currently work in the four-day school week but have experience working in a five-day school week. This project aims to add to the academic literature currently available about four-day school within Canada.

As part of this project, you are being invited, as an individual (teacher) associated with schools that operate a four-day school week, to participate in an one-on-one interview with Mr. Kyle Tapper that will last approximately 1 hour and will be held via Microsoft 365 – Teams, at a time that is convenient for you during the months of January to April, 2022.

In the interview, you will be asked about your perspectives of the four-day school week specifically questions related to student academic achievement and well-being, teacher retention, self-assessment of job, and work relationships with teachers. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to assist with the data analysis. You will be provided a copy of your interview transcript for your records.

Your identity and confidentiality will be respected in any final reports, presentations, and/or publications emerging from this research project.

The questions you will be asked during your interview will include, and there may be other questions that emerge from the conversation:

1 – Tell me a little bit about yourself and why you choose to participate in this research study.

2 – What kind of impact has a four-day school week had on learning, the classroom and school culture?

3 – What kind of impact has a four-day school week had on student's academic achievement and well-being?

4 – What was the experience like moving from a five-day school week to a four-day school week? What helped in that transition?

5 – How has working in a four-day school influenced your decision to remain at the district? Please explain your answer with as much detail as possible.

6 – How has working in a four-day school effected your working relationship with other teachers and administrators?

7 – What further recommendations or suggestions to other districts, particularly the school leadership team, should be considered when moving to and implementing a four-day school week?

Benefits of Participation

There is a current lack of information on the four-day school week in Canada. Participants will be contributing to the academic literature by providing their perspectives through their experiences. This information, deemed vital by the researcher, will add to the current information available and will help school districts/divisions, who are contemplating a move to a four-day school week, by providing them with more information from school staff currently work in the four-day school week.

As a participant, you will be given a copy of your transcript and you can contact the lead researcher, Mr. Kyle Tapper to receive a copy of the final research report.

Risks to Participants

There are minimal risks to you as a participant in this study.

Remuneration/Compensation

For participating in this study and to show appreciation, you will be given a Starbucks \$10.00 gift card.

Confidentiality

Your identity and all records will be kept confidential. If any direct quotes are selected from your interview for the report (or any subsequent publications/presentations), you will not be identified and no descriptions will be included to ensure your confidentiality is respected.

You may refuse to participate or withdraw participation in this project at any time without consequence and the information that they have provided up to that point will not be used in the study.

The data will be kept on a memory key or printed hard copy and all data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the home of Mr. Kyle Tapper and any electronic files will be backed up on a password protected computer hard drive. Only Mr. Kyle Tapper and Dr. Michelle Pidgeon will have access to the data collected. All audio files and transcripts will be stored for 7 years.

Your confidentiality will be respected and honored in any subsequent publications, presentations, or reports regarding the findings of this research.

Contact for more information:

You may ask any questions you might have about the project to Mr. Kyle Tapper. Dr. Michelle Pidgeon is the senior supervisor of this research study and she can be contacted.

Contact for concerns about the study:

You may ask any questions or register any complaint you might have about the project to the Office of Research Ethics, SFU at dore@sfu.ca.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact me.

Many thanks for your assistance.

Warm regards,

Mr. Kyle Tapper

Appendix B. Letter of Informed Consent

Interview Informed Consent

Perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week.

Study Background and Procedures

The main goal of the research project is to gather information from teachers working in a four-day school setting. Notably, I am interested in exploring the perspectives of teachers who currently work in the four-day school week but have experience working in a five-day school week. This project aims to add to the academic literature currently available about four-day school within Canada.

As part of this project, you are being invited, as an individual (teacher) associated with schools that operate a four-day school week, to participate in an one-on-one interview with Mr. Kyle Tapper that will last approximately 1 hour and will be held via Microsoft 365 – Teams, at a time that is convenient for you during the months of January to April, 2022.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to assist with the data analysis. If you participate in an interview you will be provided a copy of your transcript for your records. Your identity and confidentiality will be respected in any final reports, presentations, and/or publications emerging from this research project.

Benefits of Participation

There is a current lack of information on the four-day school week in Canada. Participants will be contributing to the academic literature by providing their perspectives through their experiences. This information, deemed vital by the researcher, will add to the current information available and will help school districts/divisions, who are contemplating a move to a four-day school week, by providing them with more information from school staff currently work in the four-day school week.

As a participant, you will be given a copy of your transcript and you can contact the lead researcher, Mr. Kyle Tapper to receive a copy of the final research report.

Risks to Participants

There are minimal risks to you as a participant in this study.

Remuneration/Compensation

For participating in this study and to show appreciation, you will be given a Starbucks \$10.00 gift card

Confidentiality

Your identity and all records will be kept confidential. If any direct quotes are selected from your interview for the report (or any subsequent publications/presentations), you will not be identified and no descriptions will be included to ensure your confidentiality is respected. You may refuse to participate or withdraw participation in this project at any time without consequence and the information that they have provided up to that point will not be used in the study.

The data will be kept on a memory key or printed hard copy and all data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the home of Mr. Kyle Tapper and any electronic files will be backed up on a password protected computer hard drive. Only Mr. Kyle Tapper and Dr. Michelle Pidgeon will have access to the data collected. All audio files and transcripts will be stored for 7 years.

Your confidentiality will be respected and honored in any subsequent publications, presentations, or reports regarding the findings of this research.

Contact for more information:

You may ask any questions you might have about the project to Mr. Kyle Tapper.

Dr. Michelle Pidgeon is the senior supervisor of this research study and she can be contacted.

Contact for concerns about the study:

You may ask any questions or register any complaint you might have about the project to Dr. Jeffery Toward, The Director of SFU Office of Research Ethics.

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (print name), understand and consent to participate in this study being conducted by Mr. Kyle Tapper in partnership with Simon Fraser University.

I also consent to the interview being recorded for the purposes of transcription and analysis of data for the study.

I acknowledge receipt of the gift certificate for my participation in this project.

I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any point during this study without any negative effect.

By signing below, I fully understand my rights as a participant in the research project outlined in the letter above.

Signature: _____.

Date: _____.

Witnessed by:

Mr. Kyle Tapper _____.

Appendix C. Interview Questions

Perspectives of teachers working in a four-day school week.

The follow seven questions will be asked during the one-on-one interview. When providing answers, participants are expected to provide as specific and as detailed answer as possible.

1 – Tell me a little bit about yourself and why you choose to participate in this research study.

2 – What kind of impact has a four-day school week had on learning, the classroom and school culture?

3 – What kind of impact has a four-day school week had on student’s academic achievement and well-being?

4 – What was the experience like moving from a five-day school week to a four-day school week? What helped in that transition?

5 – How has working in a four-day school influenced your decision to remain at the district? Please explain your answer with as much detail as possible.

6 – How has working in a four-day school effected your working relationship with other teachers and administrators?

7 – What further recommendations or suggestions to other districts, particularly the school leadership team, should be considered when moving to and implementing a four-day school week?