Divide County School District

Four-Day Student Week Exploration

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Parents & Community Stakeholders

Purpose of this FAQ

Divide County School District is *exploring* the possibility of a four-day student week as part of a careful, research-based process. No decision has been made. This FAQ is designed to share common questions we've received, provide clear and unbiased responses, and outline what information still needs to be gathered before any recommendation is presented to the School Board.

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1) Where are we in the process?

We are in the beginning stages of exploration and data collection. Our goal is to:

- Collect stakeholder feedback (staff, students, families, community)
- Review research and case studies from comparable rural districts
- Study multiple four-day models (including pros/cons)
- Determine if any model could realistically work for Divide County

If the district were to pursue this initiative, it would *not go into effect until the 2027–2028 school year*, allowing ample time for planning, communication, and problem-solving.

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2) Why is the district discussing a four-day week?

This discussion has emerged in many rural districts due to a combination of challenges and opportunities, including:

- Staffing shortages and recruitment/retention pressures
- Transportation realities in rural communities (long routes and limited drivers)
- Protecting instructional time from disruptions (early-outs, meetings, travel)
- Student engagement and wellness considerations
- A desire to explore whether a schedule change could support stronger systems for instruction and student support

This is not about rushing into a change—it is about evaluating whether a different structure could strengthen student outcomes and district sustainability.

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3) Will teacher salaries change? Will teachers be required to work on Fridays?

At this stage, nothing has been finalized, and any changes would require discussion and School Board action.

That said, in many districts that adopt a four-day student week:

- **Teacher salaries do not change.**
- The calendar may shift to fewer student days, but longer instructional days to meet required minutes.
- Fridays vary by district model:
    - Some districts make Friday a non-duty day for staff.
    - Others use Friday for professional development, collaboration, IEP/504 meetings, or targeted student supports.
    - Some districts schedule a limited number of required Fridays (example: one Friday per month).

If Divide County continued exploring this, we would analyze models that best support students and staff, with no assumptions made in advance.

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4) Would a four-day week reduce learning time?

A four-day week does not mean the district can ignore state requirements. Districts must still meet state-required instructional minutes.

In most four-day models:

- The school day becomes longer Monday–Thursday.
- The total annual minutes are designed to remain comparable, although the structure of the week changes.

A key non-negotiable for Divide County would be instructional integrity and curriculum implementation with fidelity. Any schedule model would need to demonstrate how student learning time and outcomes are protected.

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5) How long would the school day be?

A four-day week would likely require:

- **Earlier start times** and/or **later dismissal times** than we currently have.

Exact times cannot be provided yet because we have not selected a model. If this continues, the district would share:

- A sample daily schedule
- Transportation impacts (routes, pick-up/drop-off times)
- Age-level considerations (elementary vs. secondary)

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6) Which day would be the "off" day?

In most four-day districts, Friday is the most common non-instructional day for students.

However, many districts also build in flexibility. For example, if a week already includes a scheduled day off (e.g., MLK Day, Presidents Day, Veterans Day, Easter Monday), that holiday remains the "off" day and Friday becomes a regular school day during that week.

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7) Will the fifth day be filled with meetings?

Not necessarily. This depends on the model.

Some districts:

- Protect the fifth day as a non-duty day (no required meetings)
- Use the day for optional planning or office hours
- Use the day intentionally for:
    - Professional development
    - PLC collaboration and data analysis
    - IEP/504/MTSS meetings
    - Intervention/tutoring opportunities

If Divide County considers a fifth-day structure, expectations would be clearly communicated and designed to support staff—not overwhelm them.

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8) What about students who need extra help—would there be Friday intervention?

Possibly, depending on the model.

Many districts use the fifth day for:

- Targeted intervention and high-dosage tutoring
- Mentoring, enrichment, and missing work support
- Academic recovery time and structured support for struggling students

If the district pursued a "Friday Academy" or required interventions, a formal School Board policy would be needed, and it would be communicated through the student handbook.

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9) What happens to hourly staff paychecks (paras, cooks, custodians, bus drivers)?

This is one of the most important concerns we've heard.

If Divide County were to move to a four-day student week, the intent would **not** be to reduce paychecks. In models used by many districts:

- Classified staff remain **full-time employees**
- Schedules are adjusted to maintain **comparable total hours**
- Benefits eligibility (including health insurance) is protected through full-time thresholds

Before any recommendation could be made, the district would need to complete:

- Financial modeling (weekly and annual hours)
- A staffing plan that protects income and benefits
- Clear communication of what a "work week" would look like

If modeling showed reduced wages or loss of benefits eligibility, that would be a major concern requiring solutions before moving forward.

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10) What about childcare on Fridays?

Childcare is one of the most significant concerns in rural communities, including ours.

If this exploration continues, the district would:

- Invite parent/community input specifically on childcare needs
- Explore options such as partnerships, community programming, and feasible supervision models
- Consider solutions that reflect local realities and workforce shortages

No model would be recommended without addressing the impact on families.

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11) What about meals and student services (nutrition, mental health supports, backpack program)?

We recognize that school is more than academics. For many students, school provides:

- Consistent meals
- Structure and supervision

- Mental health supports and services
- Access to appointments and interventions

If a four-day model were considered, the district would need to examine:

- Nutrition requirements and options for meal access
- Service continuity for high-need students
- How supports would be protected for students who rely on five-day access

These supports would remain central in the decision-making process.

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12) Will this reduce early dismissals for athletics and activities?

A potential benefit cited by many districts is fewer early dismissals, especially if Friday is a non-instructional day for students. However:

- Not all athletic events can be moved to Fridays
- Conference and opponent schedules still matter
- Travel distances remain a factor

We would analyze:

- Game scheduling realities
- Late-night concerns (multiple games)
- Practice time impacts (including morning practice concerns)
- Student stamina and transportation timing

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13) Would we move to a block schedule, or just lengthen periods?

Both are possible, and neither guarantees better learning by itself.

Options typically include:

- Extending the current schedule with slightly longer periods, or
- Moving to a modified block schedule

What matters most is how time is used instructionally, especially to support student engagement and attention span. Any schedule consideration would include planning and training so longer instructional blocks are effective.

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14) What information will be shared before anyone is asked to support or oppose this?

Before any recommendation could be made, stakeholders should expect to review:

- A draft sample calendar
- Proposed start/end times
- A plan for Fridays (student supports, meetings, staff expectations)
- Transportation impact information
- Nutrition and childcare planning considerations
- Staffing and pay/benefits impact modeling
- Academic and intervention plan to protect learning

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15) How can parents and community members provide input?

If the district continues exploring this topic, we will provide clear opportunities for community feedback through:

- Surveys
- Community meetings/listening sessions
- School Board discussions and updates

We want input early, often, and transparently.