

4-Day School Week

What started as way to attract a quality applicant pool to replace retiring teachers has blossomed in to a plan that has the potential to positively affect the educational program at Selkirk by reducing interruptions to the school day and increasing quality instructional time.

Selkirk School District, like many schools around the state, takes pride in offering a quality educational program. Over the past 25 years, the district has moved from one that barely reached the 35th percentile on the ITBS, the standardized test of the early 1990's, to a district that is now ranked among one of the strongest in Washington. Schooldigger.com ranks our high school program as #13 out of 209. In addition to numerous awards, students out-performed many regional schools on the Smarter Balanced Assessment this past spring (*Selkirk Success*, Winter 2017). This transformation is credited to the hard work of teachers, support staff, students, families, and community members.

The secret to Selkirk's success has been the guiding question, "Why not us?" In the mid-90's there were other small, rural districts showing stronger test performance so staff began to reassess programs and instructional strategies. Sure, we might not have the resources available to more affluent districts and our poverty rates were high, but our children, families, and teachers are just as hardworking so could we find a way to help students become more successful on the standard measures used around the state?

25 years later and many, many hours of curriculum development, adjustment, innovation, and focus we have arrived at place where Selkirk students are competitive with those around the state. While our program is not perfect, we are in a continual state of improvement and are moving in a positive direction. Our dilemma is that many of those faces around the staff table for the past 25 years are now retiring, leaving vacancies to fill. Over a five year span, beginning with the 2014-15 school year, 75% of the staff is expected to retire.

This transition coincides at a time when there is a statewide teacher shortage. Students are not entering the education field in large enough numbers to replace the baby boomers retiring. Teacher salaries have not kept pace with other industry wages making it less attractive for students to enroll in four years of college supported by loans in order to make \$35,000 a year. Lack of economical insurance options further degrades that beginning salary. A young married teacher with one baby will likely pay \$500 out of pocket per month for a basic insurance plan reducing that \$35,000 to \$29,000 which would qualify any school-age children in the family for the Free & Reduced Lunch program at school!

Selkirk School District is located in a beautiful, remote location in the northeast corner of the Washington. While we offer a wonderful quality of life, an excellent educational program, and positive work environment, it is difficult to attract quality teachers when there are so many other teaching jobs open across the state, including districts on the west side that offer higher salaries. Even though there is currently a statewide salary for teachers, most I-5 corridor schools offer significant salary enhancements ranging anywhere from \$5,000 to \$30,000, or more, in additional pay. The argument is that cost of living is higher in those regions, but there is also opportunity for spouses to find employment and cost of housing is really only one factor in assessing how expensive it is to live in a community. Rural remoteness also has its costs.

Once teachers actually join our community and school district, they tend to stay. Getting them to consider our district, however, is the challenge. Selkirk School District has four teaching openings for 2017-18. Over the past two years, we have been creative in filling vacancies; finding an alternative pathway to teaching certification for a community member with a bachelor's degree in science and

combining classes until a qualified student teacher could finish her teaching experience. However, with the number of vacancies and at least two more years in this transition period to go, we felt it was time to find a creative solution to our staffing problem.

22 states allow a four-day school week as an option. 30% of Colorado schools operate on a four-day week. 29 of Idaho's 98 school districts implement a reduced four-day week calendar. In Washington, though, the standard is 180 days at roughly 6 hours per day for high school. However, nine years ago, the Washington legislature created a pilot program for a four-day school week option that could be accessed by up to five of the state's 295 school districts.

In looking for a way to make Selkirk unique, something that might attract a workforce or keep teachers who are reaching retirement eligibility a little longer while the state grapples with education funding and the overall teacher shortage, a four-day school week was researched.

There are a number of research studies showing that students in a four-day school week adjust well to a slightly longer day and that academic achievement is not adversely affected. The studies noted other benefits to a four-day school week including the ability to attract a quality workforce, a reduction in student and staff absences, and increased teacher-student contact time (especially in districts who strived to move athletic away games to Fridays and Saturdays). All of those benefits would contribute to an even stronger educational program for our students.

Most districts cite economics and savings as a reason for making the change to a reduced calendar, however, that is not Selkirk's motivation. There will be some savings in terms of fuel, utility, or food costs, but the economy and efficiency focus is on students, staff, and families. In a district where 80% of the students participate in extra-curricular activities, we would like to give students and families time in their ever-busy lives to be a family, take care of medical appointments, and meet school expectations. We are also looking to attract a quality pool of teaching applicants to our community. Not everyone with a teaching certificate will be the right fit so increasing the number and quality of applicants insures that we can find the best candidate for our students and program. The district believes the attraction of a four-day school week will increase the number of teachers with the desired skill set. Moving as many athletic away-events to Fridays and Saturdays will also decrease loss of educational time and improving attendance of both teachers and students will increase the quality of our educational program.

The four-day school week calendar provides 18 days of professional development for teachers and 13-18 days for classified staff which is six times as much professional development time than Selkirk teachers currently have. The school day would only be lengthened by 40 minutes with an elementary dismissal time at 3:20 and a high school time of 3:38. While this is longer than our current day, the times are comparable to districts around the region that dismiss after 3:15 on a five-day schedule.

Based on staff and preliminary community support at the meeting on February 22, the district plans to pursue a four-day school week waiver with the State Board of Education. There are still details to work out but staff have already spent time examining different instructional strategies to insure student engagement in a longer day, discussing appropriate homework expectations, and deciding on limiting sports practices to no more than two hours.

If the waiver is approved by the State Board of Education on March 8-9, the district will begin advertising the four-day school week as part of all job announcements shortly thereafter.

The following background is taken from the SBE website and minutes from the January 11-12, 2017 meeting:

Background: Option Two Waivers

In 2009 the Legislature passed SHB 1292, authorizing a basic education waiver from the 180-day requirement for the purposes of economy and efficiency. The act is codified as RCW 28A.305.141. The waivers enable adoption of a flexible school calendar, typically resulting in a four-day school week with longer school days. The statute limits eligibility for the waiver to no more than five districts at any time, two for districts with “student populations” of less than 150, and three for districts with between 150 and 500. Waivers may be granted for up to three years.

The statute sets forth the information that must be provided in an application for an Option Two waiver. It includes, for example:

- A demonstration of how the BEA program requirement for instructional hours will be maintained by the district;
- An explanation of the economies and efficiencies to be gained from compressing the instructional hours into fewer than 180 days;
- An explanation of how monetary savings will be redirected to support student learning.
- Four districts have applied for waivers under this statute: Bickleton, Paterson and Mill A for districts with fewer than 150 students, and Lyle for districts of 150 to 500.
- In November 2009 the Board approved requests from Bickleton for waiver of 30 days for three years, from Paterson for 34 days for three years, and from Lyle for 12 days and 24 days, respectively, for two years. Bickleton and Paterson were granted renewal of their waivers in March 2012. Both continue to operate on calendars of four-day school weeks. Lyle returned to a standard calendar after two years on a four-day week. Mill A was not approved for a waiver as it would have exceeded the cap on waivers for districts with fewer than 150 students.
- The SBE adopted rules for evaluating requests for waivers under this section as WAC 180-18-065 in November 2012. The rules provide that a district requesting a waiver to operate one or more schools on a flexible calendar for purposes of economy and efficiency must meet each of the requirements for the application in RCW 28A.305.141. If more districts apply than can be approved under the statute, priority will be given to those waiver plans that best redirect projected savings to support student learning.
- In establishing the waiver program in 2009, the Legislature placed an ending date of August 31, 2014 on the statute. It required the SBE to submit a report and recommendation to the Legislature by December 2013 on whether it should be continued, modified, or allowed to terminate on that date. The SBE recommendation was to focus on whether the program resulted in improved student learning as demonstrated by empirical evidence. The Board submitted an extensive [report](#), supported by best available data on academic outcomes from the shortened school calendars.
- On November 15, 2013, the Board approved the following recommendation to the Legislature:
- *Recognizing that the data are inconclusive as to the question asked by the Legislature, Did the alternative program lead to measurable growth in student achievement, but that the data does show no measurable decline in student achievement and that other benefits were identified by the waiver district communities, the State Board recommends that Option 2 waivers be allowed to continue for an interim period.*
- In the 2014 Session the Legislature passed and the governor signed legislation continuing the SBE’s authority to grant waivers under RCW 28A.305.141 through August 31, 2017. No changes were made to eligibility for the waiver or other significant provisions. There is no requirement for additional SBE study of the program.