

Four-Day School Week Studied

The Pleasantville Community School is studying the possibility of adopting a 4-day school week for part of the school year in 2010-2011. We are exploring a 4-day week for a 3-month (12-week) period during the winter months. The anticipated time period is January through part of March.

The school has established an “Innovative Calendar Committee” that is working hard to research the initiative, looking at all possible benefits and disadvantages. After looking at findings from schools in other states and learning about possible benefits for our students, the committee’s views are very positive. The committee has also spoken with the school superintendent in Custer, South Dakota, which has had 4-day weeks (for the entire 9-month school year) since 1995-96. Their experience with a 4-day week has produced the following results:

- ***No negative consequences for students
- ***Slight increase in attendance
- ***Some take advantage by scheduling dr. appointments, etc., on off day
- ***Slight increase in ACT scores
- ***Teachers cover more material
- ***Fewer disciplinary incidents; positive effect on attitudes
- ***Strong support from students, staff, parents (86% of parents)
- ***Financial savings, particularly in transportation
- ***Flexibility in offering various programs on “off” day

The Custer, South Dakota, School District has had so many inquiries about their successful 4-day program, that they have included information about it on their school website. Please visit their website at csd.k12.sd.us.

Another school with very positive results is Saratoga, Arkansas. Their findings have been similar to Custer in the areas of student morale, discipline problems, student and staff attendance, flexibility of offering special programs on the off day (such as tutoring), and cost savings. There are many examples of other schools in various states with similar programs. You are encouraged to do your own searches. This concept is relatively new to Iowa. However, due in large part to budget cuts and the **desire to maintain quality programs in trying times**, more and more schools are exploring options such as this. As indicated above, the committee’s studies have found that many benefits beyond those associated with cost savings have been realized.

Pleasantville’s Innovative Calendar Committee has worked on an outline of a possible 4-day week program with the following components/parameters:

1. The 4-day week would be held for a 12-week period, likely beginning in January and continuing into March. Going with a partial year program and adding just 30 minutes to each day during the year will result in students having 18 more hours of instruction than they currently do over the course of the school year. If we were to go with a full nine months of 4-day weeks and still get the same hours of instruction as we currently do, the days would need to be approximately 8.6 hours long. The committee is concerned that this would be too long. There are at least two reasons for looking at the January – March time period. The very positive results other districts have felt in terms of student and staff morale and attitude can have a very meaningful effect on

performance, focus, disciplinary issues, etc. The winter and late winter time of the year is often when the “doldrums” set in, affecting moods and efforts. In the middle/high school during the 2008-09 school year, **109 failing grades were received the second semester compared to 71 the first semester.** It is a long time from winter break to spring break (typically no scheduled days off), which tends to have an effect on morale. A 4-day week could help alleviate those issues. In addition, utility costs tend to be highest during those months. If the use of heat, lighting, water can be reduced even one day a week during that time, any savings will help mitigate budget cuts and can be applied to educational programs. It is realized that this measure alone cannot make up for tremendous budget cuts, but it could be one of many strategies that will need to be implemented. The only options up to this point are making drastic cuts to staff/programs, depleting modest reserves, and/or increasing taxes. The 4-day week could help lessen the extent and harshness of these options.

2. The “off” day in the 4-day weeks would likely be Mondays. Fridays tend to be busy with activities. And studies from 2008-09 and 2009-10 show that **Pleasantville students in the middle/high school miss school on Mondays more than any other day** (an average of more than 23 students per Monday). The committee will continue to look at where in the day to add the 30 minutes.
3. The school will explore possible special programming that could occur on the off day—such as tutoring, study tables, etc. Some activities would likely occur on those days, but in a reduced amount.
4. The school will poll parents regarding possible day care needs and investigate potential on-site childcare programs that could be provided at reasonable cost (break-even for school) to parents.
5. The school will encourage students and staff to schedule doctor appointments, personal business, etc., on the off days, thereby increasing attendance and instructional time during school days.
6. Principals will look at scheduling options and monitor results of the 4-day week during the 12-week period. Further input will be gathered from parents, students, staff to evaluate the success of the program. The results will determine the future of the initiative.

THE INNOVATIVE CALENDAR COMMITTEE IS INTERESTED IN YOUR COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS. AN ONLINE SURVEY WILL BE AVAILABLE ON THIS WEBSITE BEGINNING SOMETIME WEDNESDAY, THROUGH THE END OF THE WEEK. THERE WILL ALSO BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INPUT AT A MEETING IN THE HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, AT 6:30 P.M.

Please call any of the administrators or visit with any committee member if you have questions.

Innovative Calendar Committee

Aaron Fichter

Gary Friday (848-0541)

Amber Green

Erin Hiemstra

Dave Isgrig (848-0555)

Adam Miller (848-0566)

Rich Thomas

John Turnage

Wendy Wild