

Time for Learning

Results of the Implementation of the Four-Day School
Week Calendar at Our Lady of Mount Pleasant School in
Camrose, Alberta

Interim Report

GWM Consulting Ltd.
Dr. Garnet W. Millar

January 11, 2010

Contents

Summary	ii
Overview.....	1
I. Purpose of the Study	1
II. Review of the Literature	1
III. Our Lady of Mount Pleasant – School Profile.....	3
IV. Terms of Reference.....	5
Key Questions Used to Gather Perceptions – Qualitative Data.....	6
Key Questions Used to Gather Student Outcomes – Quantitative Data.....	7
V. Procedures.....	7
VI. Results.....	8
VIII. General Impressions and Highlights.....	20
References.....	22

Summary

The purpose of this interim report is to evaluate the implementation of the four-day school week calendar at Our Lady of Mount Pleasant School in Camrose. A review of the literature shows that several states in the United States have passed legislation dealing with the implementation of the four-day week. Studies demonstrate the financial benefits of this type of school schedule and some positive learning and family implications. However, there is little research on the educational benefits for students and teaching practices for staff of the four-day week school calendar. This report, *Time for Learning*, focuses on how implementation of the four-day school week calendar impacts important learning factors in the classroom and school in general. The report demonstrates many benefits of the new calendar from the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers and support staff. All parents and staff were invited to participate in the focus groups. A sample of students from each grade was also invited to participate in the focus groups. Satisfaction ratings of the new calendar were extremely high for all three groups—an average of 9.0 on a ten-point scale. Student discipline has improved significantly during the first three months of implementation of the new calendar. Also teacher attendance has improved significantly during the first four months of the school year —this in spite of the recent H1N1 flu pandemic. Some drawbacks, such as a short lunch period providing little time to eat, relax and get some fresh air, were identified by all groups and will be examined during the remaining time of the implementation year. A follow-up evaluation will occur by June 2010 and a final report will be available in October 2010.

Overview

This section of the report deals with the purpose and background information on scheduling in schools to meet the educational needs of students and expectations of departments of education. Selected studies are cited from the United States, Canada and Alberta that relate to implementation of the four-day school week calendar with a focus on its benefits and drawbacks. The section ends with a profile of Our Lady of Mount Pleasant School in Camrose, Alberta—a junior high/senior high school in Elk Island Catholic Schools, in the midst of implementing a new calendar or schedule for students in that community.

I. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this interim report is to evaluate the effectiveness of the four-day week school calendar at Our Lady of Mount Pleasant School in Camrose, Alberta by sampling the perceptions of key groups—teachers/support staff, students and parents—and analyzing data related to student discipline, attendance and academic standing. A review of the literature will also be undertaken to provide a background and context for the study. It should be noted that a final report will be written for the trustees of Elk Island Catholic Schools in June 2010 and available in October 2010 after a complete year of implementation of the new calendar/schedule.

II. Review of the Literature

School Scheduling and Learning

The quest for the ideal school schedule reaches back in time as far as the 1890s. The pursuit of the ultimate arrangement of time, rooms, teachers, students and curriculum is still important today in 2010. Scheduling is a way of delivering the curriculum to students at schools. The four-day school week is a form of scheduling. Much has been written about various forms of scheduling and its affect on student learning. For example, a Red Deer, Alberta newspaper (1994) reported that by lengthening class periods from 80 to 160 minutes in a high school the student academic grades improved by eighteen percent, in some cases marks improved by forty-six percent.

A study by Wahlstrom (2002) in Minneapolis revealed that attendance rates improved significantly when the high schools initiated a later start time (8:40 a.m. versus 7:30 a.m.); this suggests that changing start times is one way to capture those students who might otherwise not complete high school.

Teenagers have biologically different sleep and wake patterns that affect their learning at school. Some educators and health care providers have advocated for later start times for secondary school. A report by Hansen et al (2005) published in a health journal confirmed what most teachers and parents have long known— adolescents experience sleep deprivation during the academic school year. Adolescents are naturally inclined to sleep during early morning hours. The report found that adolescents performed better on school subjects later in the day as a result of their natural circadian rhythms. They postulate that testing in the afternoon may produce better results.

What do teachers do with the extra time made possible by the four-day school week schedule that affects student learning? The literature states that they might use the instructional time more

effectively. Professional development for teachers might deal with student attitude toward learning, relevance of the curriculum, use of technology and creative opportunities to use/apply learning. The four-day school week allows teachers the opportunity to reschedule their lesson and long-term planning and professional development activities on the fifth day. Students are free to use the day as they and their parents see fit.

American Legislation

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures in the United States, the four-day school week has been an increasingly attractive option for legislators seeking to cut education costs. According to the National School Boards Association, a handful of states, with mostly rural districts are experimenting with altering their school calendar. Supporters boast of improved morale and increased attendance by both students and teachers, and more time to spend with family members. Opponents of the four-day week cite long, exhausting class days and finding daycare for younger children whose parents work outside the home. There is a lack of comprehensive studies on the effectiveness of the four-day school week and its impact on learning from the perspective of students, teachers and parents.

Nine states in 2003 had legislation for school districts to operate on a four-day week. They included Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Wyoming. In 2004 legislation was passed in California that required a school operating on the four-day week to meet an Academic Performance Index growth target. If it did not meet the target the ability to operate on a four-day week would be revoked.

Alberta Education does not have legislation regarding the four-day week but does have guidelines for the number of instructional hours per year for all students. Junior high school students are required to be in school for a minimum of 950 instructional hours and high school students are required to be in class for a minimum of 1000 instructional hours. School boards decide with school administration on the scheduling of those instructional hours.

American Studies: Benefits and Drawbacks

A review of the literature shows that the four-day school week has been successfully implemented in a number of school jurisdictions in the United States e.g.: Colorado, Oregon, New Mexico and New Hampshire.

The following benefits of the four-day school week have been identified in separate studies conducted by Grau and Shaughnessy (1987) and Reinke (1987): significant savings in transportation, maintenance, fuel costs, energy costs and classified staff; more time for staff development; more time for extra-curricular activities; improved attendance by staff and students; higher school morale; more parental involvement; often more instructional time; more family time, and lower dropout rates. In addition, McCoy (1983) states that there is no reason to believe that school achievement or quality of education is hindered when school jurisdictions switch to the four-day schedule. In endorsing the four-day school week Blankenship (1984) stated that teaching "smart"—that is, making more efficient use of available learning time—is the best way to promote effective learning.

A number of drawbacks to the four-day school week have also been identified in the literature. Reinke (1987) has identified the following disadvantages: school financial savings may be downloaded to parents (babysitting etc.); longer days are difficult for younger children; loss of retention occurs for special needs students; a number of three-day weeks results from

other holidays; the difficulty and expense to revert to five-day week, and the inconsistency of the four-day week with the strong world educational reform movement that advocates for even longer days and a longer school year. Because Our Lady of Mount Pleasant School is a junior/senior high school serving older students, some of the drawbacks cited above, especially the need for childcare, would not necessarily apply.

Canadian Schools

A research report prepared by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) in British Columbia (March 2003) related the four-day school week to efforts by school boards to balance their budgets. The one-sided report did not discuss the educational merits for students of the four-day school week but focused on potential implications such as disruptions to family life (hefty childcare costs for parents); loss of income and future pensions for support staff (custodians, bus drivers, some administrative staff, lunch room supervisors and substitute teachers) and utility savings (heating and air conditioning). CUPE in British Columbia relate the move toward the four-day school week to government education cuts. The paper called for broad community input regarding any discussion of school calendar changes. One school district in British Columbia, Boundary School District, reported a 40% decline in teacher and student absenteeism. No information was available on the academic progress, achievement of the students, perceptions of teachers and parents regarding delivering the curriculum or effect on family life.

A school in Olds, Alberta has operated on a compressed calendar— 9 days out of 10 since 1997. Students and staff get every second Friday off. Each day is extended by several minutes to compensate for the day off. This system has resulted in cost savings for bussing, caretaking and substitute teaching. Also the students are more rested according to the parents. Litke (1994) indicated that eighty-eight percent of parents voted to keep the calendar. Eighty-two other schools in Alberta use this same compressed calendar.

According to Alberta Education there are twenty-five schools in Alberta operating on the four-day school week schedule. Almost half of them are small, Christian schools or alternative schools operating in rural areas. The principal of Our Lady of Mount Pleasant School (OLMP) in Camrose contacted five of the schools in January 2009 to obtain information about scheduling and potential issues. She obtained information on school population, start and end times of school day, length of class periods, timetable for high school and scheduling for Career and Technology Studies (CTS) classes, number of student instructional days, and the merits and issues of the four-day school week calendar. The principal discovered that according the administrators of these schools the benefits outweighed the drawbacks. One school in southern Alberta has operated on the four-day school week calendar since 1994 (first in Alberta) and the community continues to strongly support it. Three of the twenty-five schools are in close proximity to OLMP: Cornerstone Christian Academy in Kingman, Holden School and Ryley School.

III. Our Lady of Mount Pleasant – School Profile

A. TIME IN CLASS

As of September 1, 2009, Our Lady of Mount Pleasant School in Camrose moved from a five-day school week schedule to a four-day school week—Monday to Thursday. This is made

possible by lengthening the school day by 52 minutes. Classes begin at 8:30 a.m. and end at 3:50 p.m. The lunch period has been contracted to 30 minutes from 46 minutes of the previous year. Exceptions to this schedule will be: January and June 2010 when students and staff will be expected to attend classes on a few Fridays to review, prepare for and write examinations.

Students will attend classes for the required number of instructional hours i.e. Junior High students (grades 7-9) –950 hours and Senior High students (grades 10-12) –1000 hours. The number of instructional days for students is 150 days and operational days for teachers will be 163 days. The length of instructional periods for junior high students is 50 minutes while an instructional block for high school students is 100 minutes. Junior high students will not have recess but a five-minute break between class periods in the morning and afternoon.

Length of Period Comparison

Junior High:

Previous Period – 43 minutes

Present Period – 50 minutes

Senior High:

Previous Period – 86 minutes

Present Period – Four 100 minute periods

B. STUDENT POPULATION

The following chart depicts the numbers of students attending OLMP as of September 30, 2009:

Junior High		Senior High	
Grade 7	65	Grade 10	24
Grade 8	58	Grade 11	16
Grade 9	70	Grade 12	17
Subtotal	193		57
Total: 250			

C. STAFF MEETINGS AND TEACHER PLANNING

Staff meetings are held monthly—where business is discussed. Information is disseminated to staff via a weekly staff development newsletter called "Communication". A school coordinator also shares information with staff members. The school coordinator has three (3) periods per week to devote to coordinating activities and resources. In addition, teacher lead teams meet regularly with the principal to discuss various issues, activities and student progress. Teachers have regular planning periods during the four-day school week.

D. COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Community support is a key to the success of the four-day school week. A meeting was held in February 2009 with more than 100 people in attendance. The meeting focussed on the new proposed school calendar for 2009-2010. Significant changes to the school calendar were discussed, especially the four-day school week. Students were in favour of the new schedule as it would increase student enrolment; provide for more community involvement and partnership with community facilities and organizations e.g. music lessons, sports facilities, business

connections, City of Camrose and Camrose County departments, Augustana University and the Camrose Volunteer Centre. Parents were provided the opportunity to ask questions of the administrators, transportation manager and superintendent of schools. Another public meeting at the OLMP will be held in January 2010 to discuss the four-day school calendar and the proposed school calendar for 2010-2011.

E. STUDENT SUPPORT

A questionnaire titled "What Am I Looking for in High School?" was administered to student in grades 10 and 11 during February 2009. Support (71%) was given for the four-day school week by students. Seventeen out of twenty-four students indicated that they would stay at OLMP for high school if the school instituted a four-day week. A majority of grade 8 and grade 9 students also supported the new schedule at OLMP and reported that it would be an important factor to remain at OLMP for high school.

F. BOARD APPROVAL

The four-day school week calendar for the 2009-2010 school year was approved unanimously (#18-2009) by the trustees of Elk Island Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 41 (EICS) at the meeting of February 19, 2009. Our Lady of Mount Pleasant School in Camrose is the sole school operating on the four-day school week calendar in EICS for the 2009-2010 school year.

G. BUSSING

Approximately 141 students from the county (24) and city (117) are transported by bus to the school each day. This represents 56% of the school population.

IV. Terms of Reference

The terms of reference listed below as questions were designed to obtain the perceptions of key groups—students, teachers, support staff and parents—regarding student learning, teacher practices and student outcome data (behaviour, attendance and achievement) related to implementation of the four-day school week calendar. The questions for the focus groups and student outcome data were designed in consultation with a committee established to provide advice to the process. The members of the committee are as follows:

Dr. Chris Diachuk, Superintendent of Schools, Elk Island Catholic Schools
Maureen Duguay, Assistant Superintendent, Instructional Services, Elk Island Catholic Schools
Pat Olafson, Principal of OLMP School
Bob Charchun, Assistant Principal of OLMP School
Garnet Millar, External Researcher.

Key Questions Used to Gather Perceptions – Qualitative Data

1. Focus Groups

A. Students:

In what ways has the four-day school calendar had an impact on:

- a. Your learning
- b. Your time management
- c. Your extra-curricular activities
- d. Your health
- e. Your family
- f. Your relationship with your teachers
- g. Your behaviour
- h. Other areas

B. Teachers:

In what ways has the four-day school calendar had an impact on:

- a. Your time management
- b. Your planning and delivery of the curriculum to students
- c. Your health, wellness and stamina
- d. Your assessment practices
- e. Changes in student academic performance
- f. Your relationship with students
- g. Your relationship with or connectedness to parents
- h. Your professional development
- i. Your student discipline
- j. Other areas

C. Parents:

In what ways has the four-day school calendar had an impact on:

- a. Your son's / daughter's learning
- b. Your son's / daughter's time management
- c. Your son's / daughter's extra-curricular activities
- d. Your son's / daughter's health
- e. Your family
- f. Your relationship with your son's / daughter's teachers
- g. Other areas

2. Satisfaction Rates

Each participant in the focus groups was asked to rate their general satisfaction with the four-day school week calendar using the following question:

On a ten-point scale (1=low to 10=high) how would you rate your satisfaction with the four-day school week calendar at this time of the school year?

Key Questions Used to Gather Student Outcomes – Quantitative Data

1. How has student achievement changed as a result of implementation of the four-day school week calendar?
2. How has student behaviour and discipline changed as a result of implementation of the four-day school week calendar?
3. How has student and teacher attendance changed as a result of implementation of the four-day school week calendar?

Two reports will be written: an interim report after 3 months of implementation to be available in January 2010, and a final report in June 2010 to be available in October 2010.

V. Procedures

The evaluator completed the review of the literature from research obtained at the Coutts Library in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta; ATA Library at Barnett House, and through an internet search.

An interview was conducted with the principal to gather information about the genesis and scheduling of the four-day school week calendar at OLMP School in Camrose.

The evaluator observed students on November 18 and 19, 2009 to experience the longer day. Grades 8 and 11 were selected for observation. Focus groups were conducted on December 3, 8 and 9, 2009. All teachers and support staff were included in focus groups; students were randomly selected; and all parents were contacted by the principal by letter to attend focus group meetings during the lunch hour. Parents who were not able to attend focus groups at lunch time were encouraged to email their comments to the principal for inclusion in the interim report.

The focus groups, on average, lasted from 45 to 60 minutes and followed the same procedure:

1. Introduction of members
2. Purpose of meeting
3. Brainstorming of ideas on predetermined questions
4. Selection of most important ideas
5. Assigning a satisfaction rating by each participant.

The brainstorming of ideas for each group was captured on chart paper. Participants used "dots" to indicate the ideas most important to them. This critical thinking process is called "dotmocracy" and is a technique used to identify ideas that participants consider most important. In the tables to follow in this report this voting of important ideas is denoted with an "f" for frequency of votes. It helps in the identification and interpretation of what is most important in the listing of ideas. Participants were given a sheet containing 12 dots. They were instructed to use them to indicate the most important ideas. Two or more "dots" could be used if they felt an idea was particularly important.

Information of all the focus groups with teachers and support staff, students and parents are available from the evaluator. Only summaries of the composite results for each focus group are included in this report.

Data for student outcomes was derived from the *Student Achieve* computer program used in all Elk Island Catholic Schools.

This interim report will elaborate the results based on the terms of reference and will conclude with general impressions and highlights of the evaluation.

VI. Results

This section will present the results according to the terms of reference. The numbers of participants in the focus groups are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Numbers of Participants in Focus Groups

Groups	Number
Students:	
Junior High	46
Senior High	14
Teachers and Support Staff	20
Parents	17
Total	97

Summaries of the composite results for student, teacher and parent focus groups are presented in Tables 2-5. The information in each table is presented in order of importance as identified by participants.

SUMMARY OF STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS – QUALITATIVE DATA

Composite Results for Junior High Students (N =46)

Question: In what ways has the four-day school calendar had an impact on:

Table 2a. Your Learning?

-
- More time to do homework/study/assignments/projects on 3-day weekend (f = 19)*
 - More time to work in class and do homework (f =16)
 - Longer periods allow teachers to spend more time with me (f =13)
 - Doing better with grades/marks this year (f =12)
 - Marks are about the same as in 5-day school week calendar (f =8)
 - Seem to have more homework, especially on Thursdays because Friday is an off day (f =8)
 - Can get together with other students on Fridays to work on a project (f =6)
 - Concerned about not getting scheduled time in the school library (f =5)
 - Get more gym classes (f =4)
 - "Shut off/down" near end of period/day (f =4)
 - Time period from Friday through Sunday (3 days) is too long, can forget what you learned in the previous 4 school days (f =2)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 2b. Your Time Management?

- Lunch period (30 minutes) seems too short—can't do much homework or leave school (f =45)*
- Use Fridays at home to complete homework/projects/assignments/study; go to medical appointments; visit friends, and sleep in (f =34)
- Can use time in class to do homework (f =9)
- Able to relax on weekends—Sat./Sun. (f =7)
- Doesn't make a difference (f =6)
- Options can be rushed—Woodworking, Foods, Art, Drama, etc. (f =4)
- Hard to catch up if you miss a period(s) or day(s) (f =4)
- Parents able to pick me up after school (f =3)
- Can still participate in extra-curricular activities e.g. soccer, hockey, drama, volleyball, etc. (f =2)
- Fridays can be quite boring if you don't have a part-time job (f =1)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 2c. Your Extra-Curricular Activities?

- Lots of time as most activities start after 4:00 p.m. (f =26)*
- Getting out of school later reduces time to do things, e.g. dance, volleyball, cross-country running, confirmation classes, etc. (f =10)
- Extra-curricular activities leave little time to do homework as I'm busy on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30-8:30 with dance, basketball, choir, cadets/drums, etc. (f =8)
- Able to coordinate extra-curricular activities with other schools (f =5)
- Not a "big deal" (f =3)
- May be hard to fit everything into the day, e.g. basketball at 4:30 p.m.; Club volleyball at 6:00 p.m. and live out of town – happens twice a week (f =2)
- Do more on Fridays – volunteering, babysitting and part-time jobs (f =1)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 2d. Your Health?

- Feel tired, especially on Fridays – use day to catch up on sleep/rest (f =31)*
- Feel more stress because of teachers trying to cram a lot into period; more homework, and having to get on bus at 7:45 a.m. (f =9)
- Feel more energy knowing that there are only 4 days in my school week (f =8)
- Sleep better now because of tiredness (f =2)
- Inside school building most of the day – no fresh air! (f =0)
- Feel rushed to have breakfast/supper by 5:00 p.m. because of diabetic condition (f =0)
- Important to plan on eating healthy foods at school to keep high energy level (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 2e. Your Family?

- Doesn't really affect my family life (f =23)*
- More quality time with family on Fridays, e.g. bowling, shopping, fishing, sports and travel (f = 20)
- Parents need to get up earlier to drive me to school or need to arrange a ride for me at the end of the day–no country buses in the afternoons (f =10)
- Less time to spend with family members during the week (f =2)
- No one home with me on Friday (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 2f. Your Relationship with your Teacher?

- Better (f =12)*
- Teachers take more time to explain things and spend more individual time with us (f =8)
- May get annoyed with some teachers as a result of longer periods with them (f = 7)
- Teachers are less tolerant of students not doing homework on weekends (f =3)
- Easy to forget what you've learned in the 4-day week because of the long 3-day weekend (f =3)
- Difficult to adjust to new teachers in the middle of the year (f =2)
- More time in class to do interesting/fun things, e.g. bartering process in Social Studies (f =2)
- No different from other years (f =2)
- More time for students to ask questions in class (f =1)
- Periods are too long with too much information (f =1)
- On Wednesday our schedule/timetable (grade 8) is too heavy–Math/Social Studies/Math Social Studies (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 2g. Your Behaviour?

- Pretty much the same as in other years (f =18)*
- Need a good mix of classes to stay focused e.g. CALM/Math, especially on Mondays (f =7)
- Better and more social because I can be with my friends for longer periods of time (f =6)
- Feel some stress due to shorter lunch break–no break during the day (f =5)
- Become "chatty" due to longer periods (f =5)
- Get tired/grumpy by the end of the day (f =3)
- More focused to get everything done (f =2)
- Feel sad/mad because I don't sleep well (f =2)
- Less acting out/up (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 2h. Other Areas?

- More time now to relax (f =8)*
- Bussing has worked for me (f =7)
- If you went to another school it would be on a 5-day school week calendar (f =4)
- Can use Fridays for appointments— doctor/dental etc. (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Composite Results for High School Students (N = 14)

Question: In what ways has the four-day school calendar had an impact on:

Table 3a. Your Learning?

- Marks have improved (f =9)*
- More time to work on assignments/homework in class (f =8)
- Get more help from teachers (f =5)
- Can arrange with the teacher to come to school on a Friday, if necessary (f =2)
- Feel more rushed to cover course work (f =1)
- Don't feel there is much difference (f =1)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 3b. Your Time Management?

- I use Fridays for:
 - Sports training (f=11)*
 - "Hang out" with friends (f =9)
 - Work, part-time job (f =6)
 - Sleep in (f =4)
 - Homework/projects
- Lunch period seems too short (f =9)
- Homework can be done in class (f =6)
- Cover more material in class period (f =4)
- No real difference (f =4)
- Same school start time (f = 3)
- Often have a break in class period (f =0)
- Too short a time for lunch for student council meeting and other school meetings (f =0)
- Some teachers and educational assistants manage their time by assisting students with correspondence courses in the Student Centre (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 3c. Your Extra-Curricular Activities?

- More time on Fridays to do sports etc. (f = 6)*
- Little time to transition from school to activity e.g. biathlon (f =2)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 3d. Your Health?

- More time to recover from tiredness/illness/accidents on 3-day weekend (f =3)*
- No difference (f =3)
- More tired/grumpy (f =2)
- Don't feel any more stress (f =2)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 3e. Your Family?

- More time to spend with family (f =7)*
- Need to babysit my brother/clean house (f =1)
- Parents get tired of having me home on Fridays (f =1)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 3f. Your Relationship with Your Teachers?

- Get to know teachers better (f =6)*
- More individual time with teachers (f =1)
- Same (f =1)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 3g. Your Behaviour?

- Annoyed with long periods (f =4)*
- Better focus in class (f =2)
- Better behaved–more positive about school (f =1)
- More bored in longer classes if teachers don't vary activities (f =1)
- Less detentions/suspensions (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 3h. Other Areas?

- The 4-day school week calendar is a very positive feature of OLMP (f =7)*
- Good to have Fridays off to do other things (f =6)
- Can accomplish lots of activities/work in the longer period – 100 minutes (f =3)
- Lunch could be longer–need time to socialize (f =1)

*f = frequency of votes

SUMMARY OF TEACHER AND SUPPORT STAFF FOCUS GROUPS

Composite Results for Teachers and Support Staff (N = 20)

Question: In what ways has the four-day school calendar had an impact on:

Table 4a. Your Time Management?

- More time to do homework/review in class (f = 12)*
- Have weekends (Sat./Sun.) to myself–healthy boundaries and better balance (f =11)
- More time now to prepare lessons/mark assignments–on Friday and weekend (f =9)
- More positive atmosphere in school (f =7)
- Use Fridays as a "sanity day" or for school team practices (f =4)
- Concern over curriculum pacing i.e. comparing last year's pace to this year (f =6)
- Time seems to go fast at school–Monday to Thursday (f =2)
- The longer day makes things more hectic (f =1)
- Commute time for travel interferes with evening time (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 4b. Your Planning and Delivery of the Curriculum to Students?

- Use time in class to engage students in content and cut out non-essential learning (f =9)*
- Need to review master timetable to better balance "weight" of courses e.g. 3 math periods at the junior high level on one day (f = 5)
- Rough long-range plans were developed by teachers by the end of September for all courses (f =4)
- Extra class time is used to complete assignments (f =4)
- There is a change of the traditional practice of having a regular scheduled library period (f =4)
- Farther ahead in the curriculum at this point in the year (f =3)
- Health and Physical Education is taught together e.g. at junior high level 30 minutes are devoted to Daily Physical Activity and 15-20 minutes for Health (f =0)
- Difficult to gauge "cognitive load" of subject concepts in the extended periods in high school (f =0)
- More time in Science class to do lab work and clean up (f =0)
- Tests can be administered in class–not rushed (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 4c. Your Health, Wellness and Stamina?

- Lunch is too short to relax as you eat or to help students who want it/require it (f =16)*
- Three-day weekend gives you time to relax more and recover energy–greater balance (f =12)
- Extra day (Friday) gives you a chance to catch up and to schedule health appointments (f =6)
- Not really an issue (f =4)

- Don't interact with colleagues as much because of "business" of extended day (f =3)
- More stressed when substitute teachers come in and often have to re-teach concepts and am concerned about "lost" time (f =2)
- Feel drained of energy at end of the day and especially on Thursdays (f =2)
- Have learned to adjust to longer periods over time (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 4d. Your Assessment Practices?

- More group work and activities in class e.g. problem-solving (f = 8)*
- More time to respond to student questions (f =2)
- Conforming with AISI practices–focus on differentiated instruction (f =2)
- Able to use longer tests/exams in high school because of longer periods (f =0)
- Book tests are often used on Monday/Tuesday as students have time to study over the 3-day weekend (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 4e. Changes in Student Academic Performance?

- Many factors affect student academic performance (f =3)*
- No discernable effect (f =2)
- Absenteeism, significantly affects performance, especially on Thursdays (f =0)
- Some students, especially weaker students, are not using the "extra" day off productively (f =0)
- Teachers have communicated importance of attendance to maintain academic standing to parents (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 4f. Your Relationship with Students?

- Seems to be more of a positive atmosphere this year–students seemed more focused and at ease/calm (f =14)*
- Discipline in school is better–fewer office referrals/detentions (f =8)
- No real difference (f =6)
- Less assemblies/fun days/pull-outs–greater focus on importance of class time (f =6)
- Thursdays do not seem as chaotic as Fridays used to be (f =2)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 4g. Your Relationship With or Connectedness to Parents?

- Fewer complaints from parents to the administrators (f =3)*
- No real change (f =1)
- Student Centre is open every day (f =1)

- Good relationship (f =0)
- No need to call parents regarding student behaviour compared to last year (f =0)
- More parents at interviews–show greater interest in student performance (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 4h. Your Professional Development?

- The following professional development activities would be useful (total = 13)*:
 - how best to use longer class periods productively (f = 6)
 - classroom strategies to reduce student stress (f =3)
 - how to energize students in longer classes (f =3)
 - effective scheduling to optimize time to learn (f =1)
 - how best to plan for longer school day
 - pros/cons of longer days. Invite staff from other schools on a four-day schedule
- No specific PD has occurred this year related to the four-day school week calendar (f =2)
- AISI project only–Differentiated instruction (f =0)
- Able to participate in more PD events this year on a Friday (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 4i. Your Student Discipline?

- No office referrals so far this year (f =6)*
- No community complaints from neighbours in school area (f =6)
- Less discipline issues in school (f =2)
- Fewer late students coming to class (f =1)
- Last portion of longer day can be challenging (f =1)
- Teachers provide "break" in class to reduce/lessen stress (f =0)
- Thursday afternoons are not as hectic as Friday afternoons were last year (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 4j. Other Areas?

- Family-wise, for teachers it is a big adjustment (f =6)*

*f = frequency of votes

SUMMARY OF PARENT FOCUS GROUPS

Composite Results for Parents (N = 17)

Question: In what ways has the four-day school calendar had an impact on:

Table 5a. Your Son's / Daughter's Learning?

- Academically doing well; improved dramatically (f =13)*

- How does new calendar/schedule affect students who are below average? (f =6)
- Do lots of work (homework/study/review) on Fridays to keep up (f =5)
- Big impact on learning if absent (f =4)
- Can apply learning during class (f =4)
- More intense learning in longer classes–100/110 minutes (f =3)
- Relevance of some content is questionable (f =3)
- Some teachers seem to give lots of homework (f =2)
- Academic standing about the same (f =1)
- Students can ask more questions in class (f =0)
- Students are mature and can adjust to longer periods at school (f =0)
- Good mix of students creating a positive environment for learning (f =0)
- Provides a positive choice for students and parents–smaller classes, 4-day school week calendar (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 5b. Your Son's / Daughter's Time Management?

- Fridays are great to do catch-up work; group work, or extra-curricular activities (f =8)*
- Has eliminated "short" Tuesdays (f =3)
- Wonder about curriculum pacing by teachers–too fast/too slow? (f =3)
- Students are more free to do part-time work on Sat./Sun. (f =0)
- Seems never in school because of 4-day calendar and holidays/P.D. days (f =0)
- Took time to adjust to longer day–attention span needed to be adjusted (f =0)
- Good preparation for attendance at post-secondary institutions (f =0)
- Health appointments are made on Fridays (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 5c. Your Son's / Daughter's Extra-Curricular Activities?

- After school activities often starts later–not an issue (f =4)*
- Starting to manage time better (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 5d. Your Son's / Daughter's Health?

- Providing for/planning healthy food for lunch is very important (f =4)*
- Better rested and feels less stressed (f =2)
- a) Not eating lunch because of shorter lunch period (f =0)
- b) Teachers are flexible and permit students to eat first period after lunch (f =0)
- Sons/daughters tired by the end of week (Thursday) and need to sleep in on Friday (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 5e. Your Family?

- Enables us to have more quality time on weekends—togetherness activities (f =3)*
- Other siblings in different school feel jealous as they are on a 5-day school week calendar (f =2)
- Need to impose some structure on Fridays for son/daughter e.g.: (f =0)
 - work for relative
 - volunteer activities
 - provide community service (food bank)
 - take music lessons
 - extra volleyball practice at school
 - participate in sports (golf)
 - sleep in
- Average household works five (5) days per week—school calendar not in sync with it (f =0)
- Bussing/transportation after school may be an issue for some families (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

Table 5f. Your Relationship with Your Son's / Daughter's Teachers?

- Do teachers teach differently in a longer day? Does the new calendar have professional development implications/expectations? (f =5)*
- How do teachers inform students/parents if students are absent and miss work at school? (f =4)
- Parents can determine sons'/daughters' grades by going to the Student Achieve website (f =2)
- Teachers can be contacted by parents online (f =2)
 - a) Noon hour/after school extra help is available to students
 - b) Teachers will provide time to help students on Fridays, if arranged in advance

*f = frequency of votes

Table 5g. Other Areas

- Q. Are students who experience difficulty getting the help they need? (f =4)*
- Q. If Monday is a holiday, does it make sense to have a four-day week? In order to maintain the four-day school week, make up "lost time" on Fridays (f =4)
- Q. How would a student get caught up if absent for an extended period of time? (f =0)
- Q. How many students stayed at OLMP because of the four-day school week calendar? (f =0)
- Q. What do we do with kids on Friday? How are parents coping with this and resolving it? (f =0)

*f = frequency of votes

RESULTS OF SATISFACTION RATES

Each participant in the focus group was asked to rate their satisfaction with the four-day school week calendar at the end of the focus group session. The following question was posed: "On a scale (1=low to 10=high) how would you rate your satisfaction with the four-day school week calendar at this time of the school year?" Table 6 displays the results.

Table 6. Results of Satisfaction Rating of Four-Day School Week Calendar by Group

Group	Number	Average Scale Rating
Students:		
Junior High	46	8.6
Senior High	14	9.6
Teachers and Support Staff	20	9.2
Parents	17	8.7
Total	97	9.0

RESULTS OF STUDENT AND STAFF OUTCOMES — QUANTITATIVE DATA

Tables 7-9 display data on student, teacher and support staff attendance, student academic grades and student office referrals for discipline. These tables compare information for the September to December period of 2008 to the same period of 2009 when the school implemented the four-day school week calendar. The information was gathered from the Human Resources Department and from the *Student Achieve* computer program used in Elk Island Catholic Schools.

Table 7a. Comparison of Student Attendance at OLMP Over Two Periods of Time (Five-Day School Week and Four-Day School Week)

Total Number of Days Absent	
September-December 2008 (5-day School Week)	September-December 2009 (4-day School Week)
139.17 days	135.40 days

Although there were fewer days absent in 2009 there is no significant difference between the two comparison periods. It should be noted that the 2009 period included absenteeism caused by the H1N1 influenza pandemic.

Table 7b. Comparison of Teacher Attendance at OLMP Over Two Periods of Time (Five-Day School Week and Four-Day School Week)

It is obvious from comparing these figures that teacher illness (sick leave), medical appointments and personal leaves have decreased significantly this school year (2009) for the first four months. Only family illness is slightly higher in 2009.

Total Number of Days Absent							
September-December 2008 (5-day School Week)				September-December 2009 (4-day School Week)			
Sick Leave	Medical Appointment	Family Illness	Personal Leave	Sick Leave	Medical Appointment	Family Illness	Personal Leave
21	10	4.5	6.5	5	0	5.5	0

Table 7c. Comparison of Support Staff Attendance at OLMP Over Two Periods of Time (Five-Day School Week and Four-Day School Week)

There is little difference in the attendance data for support staff. Only the category of medical appointments has decreased during this year (2009). Also, more personal leave days were taken in 2009.

Total Number of Days Absent							
September-December 2008 (5-day School Week)				September-December 2009 (4-day School Week)			
Sick Leave	Medical Appointment	Family Illness	Personal Leave	Sick Leave	Medical Appointment	Family Illness	Personal Leave
6.1	5.3	0.4	0	5.7	2.7	0	5.7

Table 8. Comparison of Academic Grades Over Two Periods of Time (2008/2009) for Same Group of Students

There is no significant difference between the academic scores of Language Arts and Math for the same group of students in the two school years—grade 7 in 2008 compared with grade 8 in 2009.

	Student Average September-December 2008 First Semester, Grade 7	Student Average September-December 2009 First Semester, Grade 8
Language Arts Grades*	75% (N = 51)	79% (N = 56)
Math Grades*	83% (N = 51)	82% (N = 56)

*Teacher assigned grades.

Table 9. Comparison of Office Referrals for Discipline and Suspensions in the First Semesters of 2008 and 2009 at OLMP School in Camrose

The number of office referrals for discipline has dramatically changed this year in a very positive direction. It may be attributed, in part, to the implementation of the four-day school week calendar. Citing for inappropriate behaviour and the number of suspensions has significantly decreased in 2009.

First Semester 2008		First Semester 2009	
90 referrals		27 referrals	
Reasons Cited:			
Inappropriate Behaviour	78	Inappropriate Behaviour	20
Skipping school	3	Skipping school	6
Disrespect	6	Disrespect	1
Defiance	3		
Total = 90		Total = 27	
Number of Suspensions		Number of Suspensions	
24		8	

VIII. General Impressions and Highlights

It is premature at this point in the school year to make definitive recommendations. However, there are trends in the results/data that are worth noting about the implementation and impact of the four-day school week calendar at OLMP School in Camrose.

- Students cited the following advantages of the four-day school week calendar:
 - Use Fridays to complete homework/assignments/projects; for sport training; part-time work, socialize with friends, arrange medical appointments, and sleep in
 - Marks have improved since last year
 - More class time to work on assignments, do homework and ask teachers questions in the longer classes
 - Can recover from tiredness/illness on 3-day weekends
 - More quality time to spend with family
 - Better relationship with teachers and get to know them better
 - Mentioned that four-day school week is a very positive feature of OLMP.
- Teachers and support staff cited the following advantages and disadvantages of the four-day school week calendar:

Advantages Reported

- Better time management in class periods—more time to allow students to do homework in class, review materials and do group work and activities
- More positive atmosphere in school—students seem more focused and calm
- More personal time to prepare lessons/mark assignments
- Fewer complaints from parents to administration; no complaints from neighbours in school area
- Fewer office referrals this year
- Professional development suggestions related to implementing/operating the four-day week school calendar were made e.g. how best to use longer class periods productively.

Disadvantages Reported

- Need to ensure a good balance of courses in the timetable
- There is a change of the traditional practice of having a regular scheduled library period
- Teachers feel tired (drained of energy) by Thursday afternoon
- If students are absent, it affects academic performance

- It is a big adjustment for teachers' family life.
3. Parents cited the following advantages of the four-day week school calendar:
 - Academically, students seem to be doing better–improved marks
 - Fridays are great to do catch-up school work, group work or participate in extra-curricular activities
 - Need to impose some structure at home for son/daughter on Fridays
 - Eliminated "short" Tuesdays
 - No issue with extra-curricular activities
 - Students/children are learning to manage their time better
 - Children seem rested and less stressed
 - Planning/providing healthy lunches is important to maintain students' energy level through a longer school day
 - More quality family time
 - Big impact on learning if child is absent for an extended period
 - Wonder how students who are below average are faring–do they get the help they need?
 4. The general satisfaction with the new calendar during the first term is very high with students, teachers/administrators/support staff and parents – an average of 9.0 out of a possible 10.
 5. The number of student office referrals for disciplinary reasons, including suspensions, has decreased significantly during the first term of 2009 compared with the same period last year.
 6. a) The number of days that students were absent has decreased slightly from last year. Although it is not a significant decrease, it is noteworthy because of the impact of the H1N1 influenza pandemic this year.
 b) Teacher attendance at OLMP has improved significantly during the first semester of this year compared to last year.
 7. All groups felt that the lunch hour was too short, but for different reasons. Students felt that they couldn't do homework or leave the school for a break. Teachers wanted a longer period to relax, socialize with colleagues or help students with homework. Parents were concerned about their children not having enough time to eat properly.

References

- Blankenship, T. (1984). Update: These schools swear by the four-day week because students work harder and face fewer distractions. *American School Board Journal*, 171, 32-33.
- Elk Island Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 41: Minutes of the Regular Board Meeting held on Thursday, February 19, 2009 at 1:00 p.m., Education Centre, Sherwood Park, Alberta. (New Business: 2009/2010 School Year Calendars – Sherwood Park Schools, Fort Saskatchewan Schools, Camrose Schools and Vegreville Schools, #18/2009, Approval moved by Vice-Chair Jean Boisvert)
- Grau, E. & Shaughnessy, M. (1987). *The four-day school week: An investigation and analysis*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. ED 317 337.
- Hansen, M., Janssen, I., Schiff, A., Zee, P. & Dubacovich, M. (2005). The impact of the school day schedule on adolescent sleep. *Pediatrics*, 115, 1555-1561.
- Litke, C.D. (1994). Implementing the modified four-day school week. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 40(3), 271-81.
- McCoy, J. (1983). *A summary report on the four-day school week in New Mexico*. Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico State Department of Education, Evaluation, Testing and Data Management.
- Reinke, J. (1987). *More with four: A look at the four-day week in Oregon's small schools*. Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Education.
- Wahlstrom, K. (2002). Changing times: Findings from the first longitudinal study of Inter high school start times. *NAASP Bulletin*: Vol. 86 (633), December.
- In *Red Deer Advocate* "Students Adjust to 160-Minute Periods". Wednesday, October 26, 1994.
- A Review of the Four-Day School Week*. CUPE Research – BC, March 2003.