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Exploring Four-Day School Week Adoption in Texas

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Abstract: The number of school districts across the country that have adopted a four-day school week (4DSW) is increasing. However, little is known about the characteristics of districts adopting this model in Texas. Using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics, we analyzed the calendars of Texas school districts that have adopted the 4DSW and explored the different manifestations of the model across the state. Our study found that 4DSW school districts: 1) are mostly rural and small, 2) have a larger proportion of White students and a lower proportion of students of color compared with the statewide averages, 3) are predominantly teacher-centered, with many districts using off days for professional development/collaborative plannings, 4) approach the differently, with some fluctuating between the choice of day off (Monday/Friday), and some using full versus hybrid versions of 4DSW calendars. These findings suggest that school districts are leveraging the flexibility provided by two Texas House bills passed in 2015 to create academic calendars that best meet their unique and specific needs.

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Exploring Four-Day School Week Adoption in Texas:
A Thematic Analysis

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Introduction

As of the 2018–19 academic year, more than 1,600 schools in 662 school districts across at least 24 states have implemented a four-day school week (Thompson et al., 2021). While this is a small proportion of the total number of public schools across the country—a mere 1.7%—there has been a growing number of districts employing the concept known as the 4DSW. But despite its growing popularity, research on the impacts of a four-day school week remains limited and has yielded mixed results. Often adopted as a cost-saving measure (Hewitt & Denny, 2011), the 4DSW has been shown to reduce expenses by only a small margin, typically between zero and 3% (Morton, 2021). Academically, research has not consistently found that the 4DSW positively relates to student or school outcomes. The limited research that is available has reported a spectrum of findings: a positive association with the school-level proficiency rate in fourth-grade reading and fifth-grade math (Anderson & Walker, 2015), no significant association with math and English language arts (Morton, 2021), and negative relationships with math and reading test scores (Thompson, 2021)

In Texas, the shift toward the 4DSW began with the introduction of two bills passed in 2015: House Bill (HB) 2610 and HB 1842. Before these bills, the requirement for instructional time for Texas schools was 180 days each academic year. HB 2610 shifted this requirement from a days-based system to a minutes-based system and set the minimum instructional minutes at 75,600 per academic year. In addition, HB 1842 introduced the District of Innovation (DOI) program, which allows eligible school districts to gain exemptions from certain state requirements that charter schools are not subject to follow. The flexibility afforded by allowing

school districts to count instructional time in minutes rather than days and by providing waivers for certain statutory requirements enabled districts to adopt innovations such as the 4DSW.

As of the 2024–25 school year, media outlets have reported that approximately 103 or around 8.6% of all Texas school districts in Texas have adopted the 4DSW (Adams, 2024). However, because the state agency does not collect data regarding the 4DSW, no research has been conducted to understand how widespread its adoption is in Texas or how much it has grown. To fill this gap in the literature and as a first step to ultimately understanding how the implementation of the 4DSW shapes student, teacher, and school outcomes, this study began with the collection of school calendars that Texas school districts post online. Information from school calendars was combined with publicly available school demographic data for descriptive analysis. Exploratory in nature, this study is guided by two research questions:

1. What are the demographic and geographic characteristics of school districts adopting the 4DSW calendars?
2. To what extent have Texas school districts implemented the 4DSW, and what typologies have emerged?

Employing descriptive and thematic analysis, this study describes the Texas school districts that have adopted the 4DSW to date and explores the different manifestations of 4DSW adoption across the state. The following section reviews the sparse literature that exists on the 4DSW and the Texas policy shaping the 4DSW landscape.

Literature Review

Over the past five decades, state legislatures have gradually given school districts more operational flexibility, particularly during economic downturns such as the 1970s energy crisis

and the 2008 Great Recession (Anderson & Walker, 2015). Some state legislatures have provided operational flexibility to school districts by allowing them to waive minimum instructional time requirements altogether (Thompson et al., 2021) or create unconventional schedules by converting the minimum instructional time requirements from a particular number of days to a particular number of hours—as Colorado did in 1985 (Dam, 2006)—or a particular number of minutes, as was codified in Texas in 2015.

Several versions of the 4DSW have been adopted across the United States. Some schools have adopted 4DSWs only during winter months, for example. Some have used a 4DSW every other week so that students attend nine days with a 10th day off, while others have used the 4DSW each week for the entire school year (Donis-Keller & Silvernail, 2009). Typically, the 4DSW involves closure on a Monday or Friday, with longer school days during the rest of the week to meet statutory requirements for instructional time (Kilburn et al., 2021). Despite the increased length of the school day, students attending districts with four-day school weeks have an average of 85 fewer hours per year than their peers in other districts (Thompson et al., 2021). While some school districts close completely on the fifth day of the week, others use the fifth day for extracurricular activities and sports; staff and teacher professional development; or enrichment programs or tutoring for students in need of additional support (Anglum & Park, 2021; Donis-Keller & Silvernail, 2009).

Schools across the nation that have chosen to implement the 4DSW often cite three main reasons for their choice: 1) to save money, 2) to improve student attendance, and 3) to increase teacher recruitment and retention (Kilburn et al., 2021; Thompson et al., 2022). By reducing the number of operational days, districts can lower transportation, utility, and maintenance expenses,

which can be especially beneficial for schools in rural areas and those with limited funding due to declining state aid and other factors. Offering four-day school weeks may also lower absences as students would be more likely to schedule family/medical appointments on the off day, and schools can arrange extracurricular activities—which sometimes take students out of the classroom—on the no-school day. Schools have also said that the 4DSW can make teaching positions more attractive, which can help districts compete for quality teachers (Thompson et al., 2022).

There is limited research on the effects of the 4DSW on education systems; it has not been established as a practice proven to improve student, teacher, or school outcomes. One of two multi-district studies demonstrated no differences in student achievement before and after the implementation of the 4DSW in six districts across three states (Kilburn et al., 2021). The second national examination of nearly 500 4DSW districts found a negative association between 4DSWs and standardized test performance, particularly for elementary school students (Thompson & Ward, 2022). Research exploring the impact of the 4DSW on teacher and staff outcomes asserts that morale and the quality and content of classroom instruction improved (Kilburn et al., 2021; Plucker et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2017). However, examinations of the 4DSW's impact on teacher retention have yielded no effect (Maiden et al., 2020) or negative effects (Nowak et al., 2023). Also, evidence that the 4DSW results in cost savings is quite limited and cautions against the adoption for purely financial purposes (Griffith, 2011; Morton, 2021).

This research on the increasingly widespread adoption of the 4DSW in Texas is intended as a first step to bolster the currently sparse and inconclusive research base documenting the

effects on student, family, staff, and school outcomes (Anderson & Walker, 2015; Tharp et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2021).

Background on the Texas 4DSW Policy

In 2015, the 84th Texas Legislature introduced and passed HB 2610, which changed the instructional time requirement from 180 days to 75,600 minutes. This change allowed school districts more flexibility in creating their calendars and compensating for instructional time lost due to weather or other unforeseen circumstances. Each year, school districts must post their school calendars on their websites and submit them to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), demonstrating how the operational minute criteria will be met.

Also, in 2015, the legislature approved another provision that allows school districts to implement 4DSWs: the District of Innovation, a label that exempts eligible school districts from certain state requirements that charter schools are not subject to follow (Anglin, 2021). School districts with a state accountability rating of A, B, or C are eligible to become a District of Innovation and thus can be deemed exempt from specific provisions of the Texas Education Code, including educator certification, teacher contracts, first and last day of school, length of school day, class size, and specific purchasing and contract requirements. The school district board of trustees oversees and approves a comprehensive educational plan that outlines the specific innovations to be adopted (Templeton et al., 2022).

With these flexibilities in instructional time, school districts were able to implement the 4DSW beginning in the 2016–17 school year.

Data and Methods

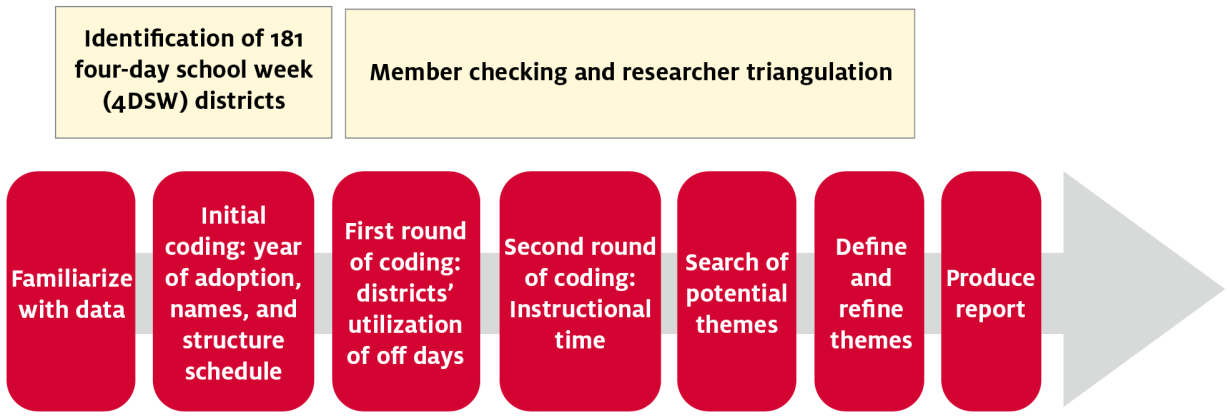
Due to the absence of official statewide data on 4DSW districts, we first conducted an identification of districts adopting the 4DSW model by reviewing calendars posted on the websites of the 1,021 independent school districts in Texas. School calendars of 4DSW districts were downloaded for all available school years. From this initial data exploration, we identified 181 school districts adopting 4DSW for the 2024-2025 school year. We then created a dataset of these 4DSW school districts that included the district's unique identifier, district name, and first year of 4DSW adoption. To answer the first research question, this initial information was then combined with publicly available demographic and administrative data from TEA and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the 2017–18 through 2024–25 academic years to create a panel dataset. District-level data included the geographic locale[1] as well as the proportion of student enrollment by race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English language learner status, and students served in the special education program. This dataset[2] was then analyzed using descriptive analysis, which allowed us to explore the demographic and geographic characteristics of school districts that adopted the 4DSW across Texas. We analyzed the 4DSW dataset using frequencies, means, and standard deviations to describe the characteristics of school districts that adopted the 4DSW.

To answer the second research question, we qualitatively analyzed 181 4DSW school calendars and explored the various typologies of the 4DSW adopted across the state, with thematic analysis as our method and analytical tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a method,

[1] https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/LocaleBoundaries
[2] The 4DSW dataset created for this research is publicly available at https://www.uh.edu/education/research/institutes-centers/erc/reports-publications/

thematic analysis provided a structured approach to organizing data, identifying patterns, and analyzing recurring concepts within our qualitative data. As an analytical tool, it allowed us to interpret recurring themes and examine connections and relationships, which further helped us gain a deeper understanding of the adoption of 4DSW schedules. We used researcher triangulation, as suggested by Nowell et al. (2017, p. 4), to conduct a trustworthy thematic analysis, as well as member checking in each phase of thematic analysis. Additionally, we employed several rounds of coding and discussions. This iterative process helped us improve trustworthiness by incorporating multiple perspectives and, in so doing, reducing potential bias in our attempt to identify important codes and possible emerging themes. After inductive and deductive coding, we began collating codes into preliminary themes, which allowed us to group similar concepts and refine our thematic framework for further analysis. Multiple rounds of discussion followed, during which we reviewed and discussed the emerging themes to ensure they accurately captured the data. Through these discussions, we revised and refined our themes to enhance the overall rigor and validity of the analysis. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Establishing Trustworthiness During Each Phase of Thematic Analysis



Sources: Adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006) and Nowell et al. (2017).

Findings

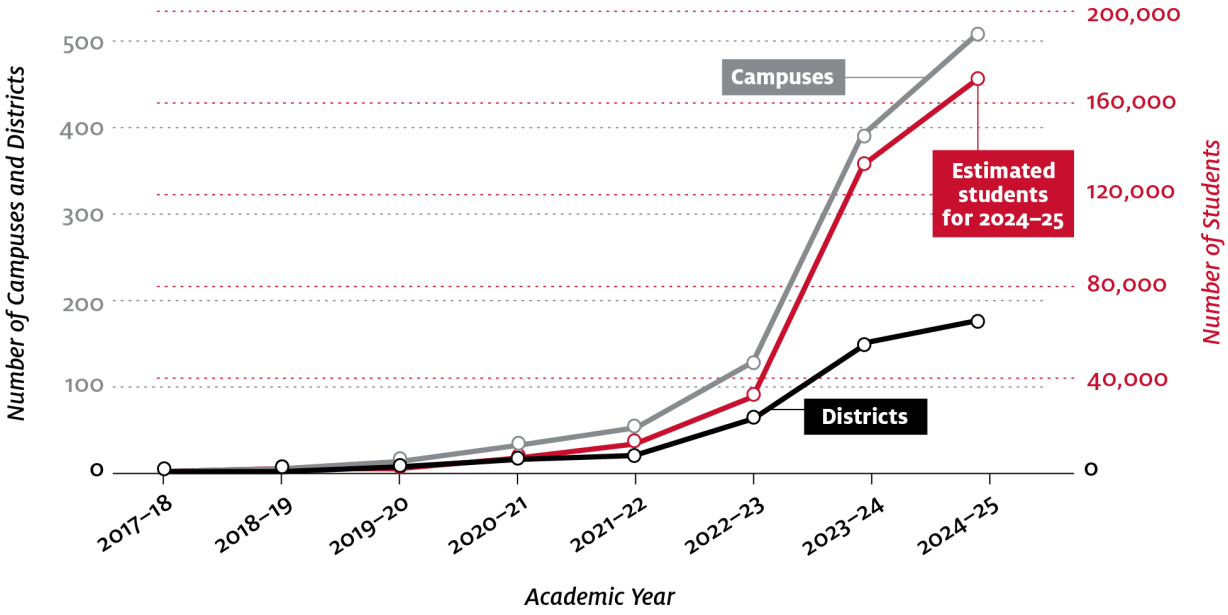
The purpose of this study is to explore the timeline of 4DSW adoption in Texas, the demographic and geographic characteristics of school districts adopting the 4DSW, and the emerging 4DSW typologies across the state. The following section describes the findings of the descriptive and thematic analyses conducted using a combination of publicly available demographic and administrative data and collected school calendars.

Characteristics of 4DSW School Districts

Our comprehensive examination of the school calendars of 1,021 independent school districts across Texas showed that, as of the 2023–24 academic year, 156 districts with 389 campuses serving 134,240 students adopted the 4DSW. Figure 2 demonstrates how the number of school districts adopting the 4DSW grew quite substantially from just two districts with two schools serving 244 students in 2017–18 to 181 districts with 506 schools by 2024–25. From

the 2017–18 school year to the 2021–22 school year, the 4DSW adoption was slow, with only one district adopting it in 2018–19, five in 2019–20, eight in 2020–21, and an additional nine in 2021–22. The peak of 4DSW adoption occurred in the 2023–24 school year, when an additional 94 school districts with 266 schools serving 100,290 students adopted the 4DSW for the first time. While at the time of this publication, the student enrollment data for 2024–25 had not been published, an additional 25 school districts adopted the 4DSW in that school year.

Figure 2
Four-Day School Week Adoption by Districts, Campuses, and Student Enrollment, 2017–18 through 2024–25



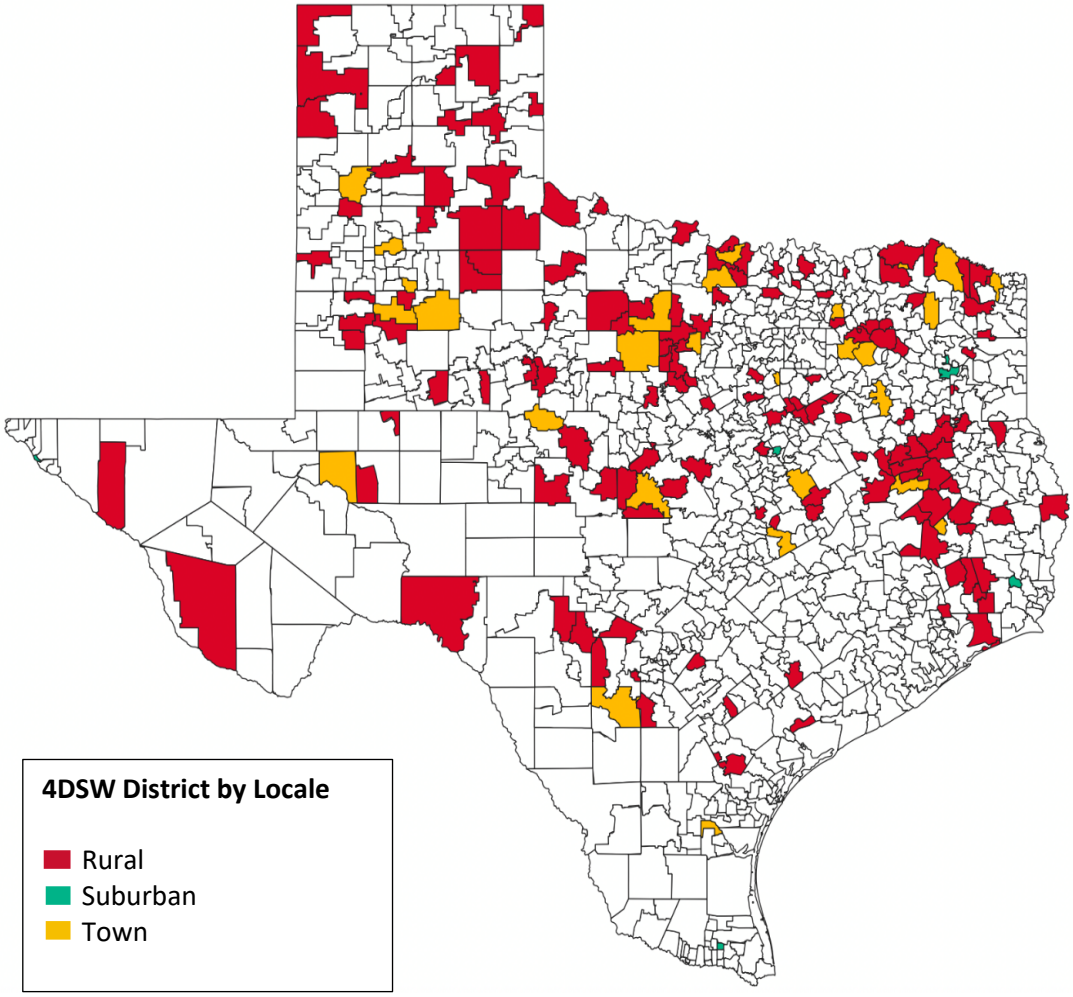
	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Districts	2	3	8	16	25	62	156	181
Campuses	2	3	13	30	49	123	389	506
Students	244	329	4,131	8,387	13,482	33,950	134,240	N/A

Sources: Texas Education Agency publicly available data and University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis.
Notes: Districts, campuses, and student enrollment is as of the last Friday in October (snapshot date), as reported in the Public Education Information Management System standard reports. Student enrollment for 2024–25 was not released at the time of this report's publication and was estimated using the previous year enrollment.

In Figure 3, a map of Texas school districts displays the 4DSW districts color-coded by the NCES locale of the district, a geographic classification. Among the Texas districts to adopt the 4DSW, rural school districts (red) are most common, followed by town school districts (yellow), and suburban school districts (green). Notably, the 4DSW has been adopted across every major region of the state.

Figure 3

Map of Texas Four-Day School Week School Districts by Locale as of 2024-25



Sources: National Center for Education Statistics publicly available data and University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the 4DSW across the state as of the 2023–24 school year, the latest year available for school enrollment numbers. The largest number of districts, campuses, and students are located in rural areas of Texas: 85,361 students served in 279 campuses and 129 districts. The locale with the second largest number of 4DSW school districts were towns, which NCES defines as a territory inside an urban cluster. In 2023–24, 38,467 students were served in 89 campuses and 23 school districts in towns. Finally, four school districts adopted the 4DSW in suburban areas, with 21 campuses serving 10,412 students as of the 2023–24 school year.

Table 1
Count of Four-Day School Week Districts, Campuses, and Students by Locale, 2023–24

Locale	Districts	Campuses	Students
Rural	129	279	85,361
Suburban	4	21	10,412
Town	23	89	38,467
Total	**156**	**389**	**134,240**

Sources: Texas Education Agency publicly available data and University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis. Notes: Districts, campuses, and student enrollment is as of the last Friday in October (snapshot date), as reported in the Public Education Information Management System standard reports.

Table 2 shows the demographics of 4DSW districts by race/ethnicity and locale based on the latest data available at the time of this report, from the 2023–24 school year. The average 4DSW district served 55.5% White students, 34.4% Hispanic students, 5.8% Black students , and 4.3% students who identified as another race or ethnicity. School districts in rural settings that

adopted the 4DSW served, on average, a student population that was more White (59.2%) than 4DSW school districts located in towns (40.4%). In 2023–24, there were four school districts in a suburban setting that adopted the 4DSW, and they served a much more Hispanic student population (62.0%). Table 2 shows that 4DSW districts in different locales serve very different student populations.

Table 2
Average Student Race/Ethnicity Served in Four-Day School Week Districts by Locale, 2023–24

Locale	Another Race or Ethnicity	Black	Hispanic	White
Rural	4.1%	5.2%	31.5%	59.2%
Suburban	2.4%	9.4%	62.0%	26.2%
Town	4.5%	8.8%	46.3%	40.4%
Total	**4.3%**	**5.8%**	**34.4%**	**55.5%**

Sources: Texas Education Agency publicly available data and University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis.
Note: Student program participation is calculated as an average percentage of students served in districts as reported in the 2024 Texas Academic Performance Reports.

Table 3 shows the distribution of 4DSW students by socioeconomic status, special education status, and English proficiency based on the latest data available at the time of this report, from the 2023–24 school year. In 4DSW districts that school year, an average of 63.2% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged, an average of 15.9% received special education services, and an average of 8.7% had limited English proficiency. The average percentages of students receiving special education services and students classified as having

limited English proficiency vary greatly within different locales, highlighting the variation in student populations served in each region.

Table 3
Average Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged, Special Education, and Limited English Proficient Students Served in Four-Day School Week Districts by Locale, 2023–24

Locale	Economically Disadvantaged	Special Education	Limited English Proficient
Rural	61.4%	16.0%	7.0%
Suburban	75.6%	14.9%	24.9%
Town	71.3%	15.5%	15.2%
Total	**63.2%**	**15.9%**	**8.7%**

Sources: Texas Education Agency publicly available data and University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis.
Note: Student program participation is calculated as an average percentage of students served in districts, as reported in the 2024 Texas Academic Performance Reports.

Typologies of the 4DSW in Texas

After capturing the demographic and geographic characteristics of 4DSW districts, we delved further into the data to identify patterns associated with their typologies and how school districts use their off days to improve student, teacher, and school outcomes. Our analysis revealed two observed models of the 4DSW adopted across the state: full 4DSW and hybrid 4DSW. Following the analysis of data patterns and several rounds of team discussion, we established the criterion for a full 4DSW as having at least 30 four-day weeks and hybrid as having less than 30 four-day weeks. There are two factors for the selection of this 30 four-day week criterion. The first factor is related to the apparent pattern in the data where full 4DSW models typically maintain a regular day off throughout the year. The second factor involves our

calculation of the total 37 weeks for the 2024–25 academic year, which means setting up the 30 four-day week threshold leaves six to seven weeks of flexibility. As we observed in the data, districts use these weeks of flexibility to accommodate long holidays by returning to the traditional five-day weeks before or after long periods of time off, such as in August after a long summer break and in December and May before long holidays. Using such an approach, we found that within the state and as of the 2024–25 school year, 80.1% of the total school districts adopting the 4DSW used the full 4DSW model, while 19.9% adopted the hybrid version. Table 4 shows that 81.8% of these districts are located in rural areas, 15.7% in towns, and 2.8% in the suburbs.

Table 4
Typologies of the Four-Day School Week by Locale, 2024–25

Type of School	4DSW School Districts	Percentage of 4DSW School Districts
Full 4DSW	**145**	**80.1%**
Town	21	11.6%
Rural	122	67.4%
Suburb	2	1.1%
Hybrid/Modified	**36**	**19.9%**
Town	7	3.9%
Rural	26	14.4%
Suburb	3	1.7%
Total	**181**	**100.00%**

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics and University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis

Full 4DSW

Schedule Structure. Full 4DSW school districts consistently take one day of the week off, either Mondays or Fridays or alternating both, for most of the school year. Most full 4DSW school districts (73.8%) take Fridays off, 22.1% take Mondays off, and 4.1% alternate between taking Mondays and Fridays off. To meet the state's required 75,600 instructional minutes and accommodate the instructional time lost for the day off, districts adopting the full 4DSW model have longer school hours, anywhere from 470 to 530 minutes per day, or an average of 502 minutes per day. This means that school hours are increased by at least 50 to 110 minutes per day compared with traditional school districts, which attend 180 days of school in five-day school weeks with 420 minutes of instruction per day. Generally, school districts following the full 4DSW model start their school day—as do most independent school districts in Texas—at approximately 7:30 to 8 a.m. However, their end times vary from almost an hour to 110 minutes later. While most traditional five-day districts have an end time of 3 p.m., these full 4DSW school districts end at 4 or 5 p.m. in some cases. In addition to extending the school hours to meet instructional time requirements, some districts also choose to begin the academic year one or two weeks earlier than the state's mandated start day, per section 25.0811 of the Texas Education Code. According to this statute, school districts cannot begin instruction for students earlier than the fourth Monday in August, and since these schools get an exemption, they can start earlier. By starting the school year earlier, districts get four to eight additional days, which enables them to distribute instructional time more evenly throughout the year without excessively extending the daily school hours. This explains the variation in school hours among full 4DSW districts. See Table 5.

Table 5
Full Four-Day School Week Schedule Structure, 2024–25

Day Off	Full 4DSW School Districts		Instructional Minutes per Day			
	#	%	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
Monday	32	22.1%	505.4	480	530	11.05
Friday	107	73.8%	502.3	470	525	11.07
Monday/Friday	6	4.1%	500.8	490	515	8.612
Total	**145**	**100%**	**503.0**	**470**	**530**	**10.99**

Source: University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis.

Fifth Day. For this study, we examined how 4DSW districts used the fifth day of the week. The majority of the school districts adopting the full 4DSW calendar (93.9%, 136 districts) reserve the off day for professional development, teacher in-service, workdays, or collaborative planning for their teachers and staff. Of this percentage, 75.9%, or 110 school districts, allocate their professional development regularly, such as every off day (0.7%, one school district), once a month (65.5%, 95 school districts), once to twice a month (6.2%, nine districts), or twice a month (3.5%, five districts). An additional 17.9% have a flexible approach to scheduling their professional development for teachers/staff. They also allocate fewer off days for teachers/staff, varying between one day to six days a year. An additional 6.2% (nine districts) do not allocate any of the off days for teacher/staff development on their calendars.

We also examined how school districts structure their schedules to support students academically. Surprisingly, most school districts operating on the full 4DSW model (82.8%, 120 districts) offer no academic support for students on their off days. The remaining percentage (17.3%) offer services for some students on some off days, with variations in the student population being served, timing, and duration. Some school districts reserve this tutorial time for selected students, typically for at-risk students or those seeking extra help to enhance their curriculum. Of this percentage, 9.7% (14 districts) provide their tutorials more regularly, such as once a month or twice a month, with variations on the duration of the tutorials (full day or half day). An additional 6.9% of districts (10 districts) have a more flexible tutorial schedule and offer relatively fewer tutorials, typically less than five off days in the 2024–25 academic year. In addition to those academic services, one school district provides a paid childcare option on the off days. See Table 6.

Table 6
Fifth-Day Usage Among Full Four-Day School Week School Districts, 2024–25

Professional Development and Planning		
	Full 4DSW School Districts	**Percentage of Full 4DSW School Districts**
None	9	6.2%
Irregularly Scheduled	26	17.9%
Regularly Scheduled	110	75.9%
(All off days)	(1)	(0.7%)
(Once a month)	(95)	(65.5%)
(Once to twice a month)	(9)	(6.2%)
(Twice a month)	(5)	(3.5%)
Total	**145**	**100.0%**
Student Tutorials and Enrichment		
	Full 4DSW School Districts	**Percentage of Full 4DSW School Districts**
None	120	82.8%
Irregular/Fewer	10	6.9%
Regular	14	9.7%
(Once a month)	(8)	(5.5%)
(Once a month/half day)	(1)	(0.7%)
(Twice a month)	(3)	(2.1%)
(Twice a month/half day)	(2)	(1.4%)
Paid Childcare Option	1	0.7%
Total	**145**	**100.0%**

Source: University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis.
Note: The professional development and planning and student tutorials and enrichment included here are limited to those conducted on the designated off days.

Hybrid 4DSW

Schedule Structure. School districts operating under the hybrid model combine five-day and four-day week schedules. Like the full 4DSW model, the hybrid 4DSW districts typically have a day off on four-day weeks, on Friday or Monday or alternating both. Table 7 shows that 80.6% of districts (29) have their off day on Friday, 11.1% (four) have it on Monday, and 8.3% (three) alternate days. Additionally, the hybrid 4DSW districts have relatively shorter school hours compared with full 4DSW districts, between 460 and 515 minutes a day or an average of 488 minutes per day. This means that the school districts on the hybrid 4DSW model extend their instructional time by 40 to 95 minutes, an average of 68 instructional minutes daily. Much like the full 4DSW districts, these districts begin the academic year one or two weeks earlier than the state's mandated start date, with some choosing to start the second week of August. The structure of schedules within the hybrid 4DSW is also varied. Eleven school districts, for example, start their four-day school weeks sometime in the fall season (e.g., September, October, and November) and end in early, mid-, or the end of spring. Five other districts start their four-day school weeks in early spring and end in May. Nineteen school districts adopt a more flexible approach by integrating four-day weeks according to their unique contextual needs and operational requirements. These hybrid or modified schedules feature four-day school weeks for approximately four to seven months or less than 30 weeks.

Table 7
Hybrid Four-Day School Week Schedule Structure, 2024–25

			Instructional Minutes per Day			
Day Off	**Hybrid 4DSW School Districts**	**% of Hybrid 4DSW School Districts**	**Average**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Standard Deviation**
Monday	4	11.1%	490	470	510	17
Friday	29	80.6%	487	460	515	14
Monday/Friday	3	8.3%	498	480	510	16
Total	**36**	**100.0%**	**488**	**460**	**515**	**15**

Source: University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis.

Fifth Day. Table 8 shows that 88.9% of school districts (32) adopting the hybrid 4DSW model reserve their off days for teacher-centered activities such as professional development, workdays, in-service activities, or collaborative planning. More than half of the total districts, around 55.6% (20 districts), provide these professional development days more regularly, most of them once a month. Others provide them most off days, once to twice a month, once a month during the 4DSW months, or alternating off days. An additional 33.3% (12 districts) adopt a flexible approach, adjusting their schedule to meet their unique needs and local contexts. The remaining percentage, approximately 11.1% (four districts), reserve no teacher-centered activities on their fifth day. Additionally, 91.7% of hybrid school districts (33) provide no student-centered activities on the off days. The rest (8.3%) provide some student-centered activities. Of this percentage, only one district provides tutorials more regularly (e.g., alternating off days), while

the other two offer flexible tutorial schedules—one with fewer designated tutorial days (less than six) and the other with a relatively higher number (nine days).

Table 8
Fifth-Day Usage Among Hybrid Four-Day School Week School Districts, 2024-25

Professional Development and Planning		
	Hybrid 4DSW School Districts	**Percentage of Hybrid 4DSW School Districts**
None	4	11.1%
Irregularly Scheduled	12	33.3%
Regularly Scheduled	20	55.6%
(Most off days)	(1)	(2.8%)
(Once a month)	(14)	(38.9%)
(Once a month in 4DSW months)	(3)	(8.3%)
(Once to twice a month)	(1)	(2.8%)
(Alternating off days)	(1)	(2.8%)
Total	**36**	**100.0%**
Student Tutorials and Enrichment		
	Hybrid 4DSW School Districts	**Percentage of Hybrid 4DSW School Districts**
None	33	91.7%
Irregular/Fewer	1	2.8%
Irregular/9 days in a year	1	2.8%
Alternating Fridays	1	2.8%
Total	**36**	**100.0%**

Source: University of Houston Education Research Center primary data collection and analysis.
Note: The professional development and planning and student tutorials and enrichment included here are limited to those conducted on the designated off days.

Discussion and Implications

This research examines the adoption of four-day school weeks in Texas and explores the demographic and geographic characteristics of districts that have adopted the model. We used thematic analysis as our methodological approach and reviewed the school calendars of 181 4DSW school districts across the state. Our main findings point toward the following patterns, which were noticed across the adoption of the 4DSW in Texas: 1) the adoption of the 4DSW model is more prevalent in rural and small-sized school districts, 2) the school districts adopting the 4DSW have larger proportions of White students and lower proportions of students of color as compared with statewide averages, 3) the adoption of the four-day school week seems to be teacher-centered, as most 4DSW calendars reserve off days for professional development and collaborative planning, and 4) each school district is approaching the 4DSW differently, as they fluctuate between the choice of day off (Monday/Friday), and full versus hybrid versions of 4DSW calendars.

The findings on the widespread adoption of the 4DSW model in rural areas echo the trend reported in other research studies, which suggests that rural districts are more likely to adopt the 4DSW model as a way to reduce operational costs, enhance attendance, and boost teacher retention (Anglum & Park, 2021; Hewitt & Denny, 2011; Thompson et al., 2022). Although these reasons are not Texas-specific, media outlets in Texas have reported similar motivations—teacher recruitment, increased student attendance, and professional development opportunities—for school districts adopting the 4DSW (Adam, 2024).

The 4DSW model seems to be viewed as a budget-neutral alternative to financial crises that school districts are facing (Raise Your Hands Texas, 2024). A study of school districts with four-day weeks by the Education Commission of the States found that the largest savings in a 4DSW structure could be produced by reducing operational, transportation, maintenance, and food services-related costs (Griffith, 2011). But according to Griffith (2011), all these savings combined can only result in a cost reduction of about 3%.

Beyond possible cost reduction, our findings—particularly the notable differences in how schools allocated time for teacher-centered activities vs. student-centered activities—indicate that the adoption of 4DSW in Texas is largely driven by a desire to improve working conditions. Much like the rest of the country, school districts in Texas continue to report teacher shortages and face challenges with the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers (Templeton et al., 2024). A task force created by Texas Governor Greg Abbott found that amid decreasing student enrollment, traditional public schools were increasingly hiring uncertified teachers, offering salaries that failed to keep up with inflation, and experiencing increased teacher attrition (TEA, 2023). A recent examination of Texas teacher workforce trends across the past decade corroborates those findings, iterating that compared with a decade ago, the Texas teacher workforce has less pre-classroom preparation and fewer standard teacher certifications, teaches courses across more subjects, earns less, and is more likely to leave the classroom for a different career (Templeton et al., 2024). Given the increasingly precarious working conditions for teachers across Texas, a four-day workweek may act as an incentive for highly qualified teachers to join smaller and more rural school districts. In our analysis of all 4DSW calendars, we found that most of the participating school districts, around 71%, had recurring professional

development/teacher in-service days on their off days. The additional time for lesson planning may also work as an incentive for teachers as it could significantly improve working conditions.

The issues around rising educational costs, decreasing state allotments, and statewide teacher shortages are inextricably tied to the academic underperformance of students, especially those from historically marginalized and underserved groups. The recent rapid popularity of the 4DSW in Texas made us question who is being served in these school districts. We found that, overall, the students in 4DSW districts represent a diverse population where about 63.2% come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, 8.7% are bilingual/English language learners, 5.8% identify as Black, 34.4% identify as Hispanic, and 55.5% identify as White. However, if we compare 4DSW student populations to statewide student populations, we find that districts that follow a 4DSW have higher proportions of students who identify as White (55.5% vs. 26.7% statewide) and lower proportion of bilingual/English language learners (8.7% vs. 26.6% statewide) (Templeton et al., 2024). Statewide, Hispanic students make up the highest majority at 52%, and about 12.5% of students identify as Black. Contrastingly, in the 4DSW districts, the largest proportion of students identify as White at 55.5% and Black students make up about 5.8% of all students. This is an interesting finding as it suggests that the school districts taking up 4DSW calendars are more White, have a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students and a lower proportion of students of color. The lower proportion of students from historically marginalized groups may be why most of the 4DSW districts provide professional development/in-service days for teachers (92.8%) on off days but few (15.5%) offer planned intervention, enrichment, or tutorials for students on off days.

While our review of the school calendars did not identify any specific strategies or time allocated to ensure educational equity—particularly for historically marginalized student populations—we argue that the 4DSW adoption in Texas is primarily teacher-centered. Given that teachers are the most direct influence on student outcomes (Chetty et al., 2014; Goldhaber et al., 2015; Hanushek, 2011; Rivkin et al., 2005), a major underlying assumption of the 4DSW adoption seems to be that teacher-centered activities will lead to improved student outcomes. However, as our findings highlight the region-based variations in populations served within the 4DSW districts across Texas, future research must consider students' outcomes within these districts.

Overall, we found that school districts are approaching the implementation of the 4DSW in different ways. Not only did we find great fluctuation between the choice of the off-fifth day (Monday/Friday/a combination), we also found great variations in the 4DSW calendars. While most of the 4DSW districts start the four-day week in late August or September and last until late April to May, others only use four-day weeks in one of their semesters (fall or spring), and some fluctuate the four-day weeks and the fifth off day throughout the year. This finding suggests that schools are using the freedom given to them through HB 2610 and HB 1842 and adopting academic calendars that suit their needs the most.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the adoption of the 4DSW in Texas. Our study—which focused on identifying typologies, the use of off days, and the geographic and demographic makeup of 4DSW districts—found that districts adopting the 4DSW models are primarily rural, serve a larger proportion of White students, higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students,

and lower proportion of students of color. The demographics and the consistent use of the fifth day for professional development/in-service indicate that the 4DSW is centered mainly on teachers. Considering teachers' direct impact on student outcomes, the underlying assumption behind the adoption of the 4DSW seems to be that prioritizing teacher-centered activities will lead to improved student outcomes. By offering a deeper understanding of the conditions and inputs associated with the 4DSW in Texas, our study serves as a preliminary framework for future studies. Future research can look into how students fare under longer school days and if schools face additional disciplinary challenges. Similarly, whether the off day balances the fatigue of longer school days is an important question for teachers, as the United States, specifically Texas, faces historic teacher shortages.

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