



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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Exploring Educational Options

With the economy on everyone's minds, many citizens are looking closely at their budgets to see where costs can be minimized. School boards throughout Missouri are going through a similar process and are trying to find ways to cut overhead costs. One idea that has been gaining headway in some states is the four-day school week. We recently heard Senate Bill 345, sponsored by Sen. Brad Lager (R-Maryville), in the Senate Education Committee, and I am intrigued by the idea this legislation proposes.

The legislation would allow school boards to establish a four-day school week instead of a five-day school week. Any school district that adopts this policy would then need to file a calendar with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that includes a minimum term of 142 days and 1,044 hours of pupil attendance. No school district would be forced in any way to implement this schedule, but the bill would give school boards the option of adopting it.

The four-day school week could be especially helpful for small, rural school districts. These districts in particular could see considerable savings by reducing transportation, heating, and other overhead costs. The idea originally sprang up during the energy crisis in the '70s, but many schools have more recently adopted or re-adopted the policy. More than 100 schools spread across nine states host four-day school weeks. Usually, these schedules apply to small, rural districts and some of these schools noticed improved morale and increased attendance (by both students and teachers). Rural districts are especially attracted to this schedule because of the mileage busses need to travel each day to pick up students.

Last year, the American Association of School Administrators surveyed school superintendents. Nearly half said that they plan to cut back on field trips, and 15 percent were looking into cutting extracurricular activities that required transportation. Nearly a third reported having to lay off staff—all this to minimize costs. For some of these school districts, the best idea is to cut a day. Last August, a northeastern Louisiana school district began holding classes only four days a week by letting students and teachers off every Monday. School officials expected the policy to save \$135,000 a year or about 5 percent of their regular operating costs.

Education is an ever-evolving field, and those involved on all levels need to be willing to look into new and different ideas to improve our system. Senate Bill 345 will give school boards the ability to explore the option of the 4-day school week, and could help some rural districts struggling with tight budgets. I hope to see this bill reach the Senate floor so that we can discuss the idea further and ultimately provide this option for Missouri school districts.

*Senator Gary Nodler represents the people of Newton, Jasper
and Dade counties in the Missouri Senate.*