

# Study of Modified School Schedule

Community Release

April 2022

Plentywood School District #20, Board of Trustees

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## Background and Introduction

Plentywood schools must attract and retain sufficient qualified staff to achieve positive student outcomes.

We have struggled to attract applicants for our open positions in many areas:

- Certified teachers
- Custodial
- Kitchen
- Paraprofessional
- Substitute teachers
- Transportation

This paper contains references to “Classified” and “Certified” staff.

“Classified Staff” are staff that are hired on an annual contract, but whose compensation is hour-based. These are the positions you see advertised in the paper.

“Certified Staff” are educators certified by the state to instruct in their area of education. These are PEA-represented staff (Plentywood Education Association). These positions can be advertised in the paper but are mostly advertised state-wide on various fora used by educators seeking employment.

## Plentywood School District Motivating Factors

With many veteran Certified staff retirements following the 2021-2022 school year, as well as with many open positions throughout the Classified staff, the Plentywood School Board has explored whether switching from a 5-day school week to a 4-day or modified 4-day school week would result in greater success in the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

## Board Discovery Process

The Plentywood School Board of Trustees began discussing the possibility of a modified schedule in the spring of 2021, with focused discussions by the Strategic Planning Committee in the fall of 2021.

Certified staff were considered the best source of early information on the topic, given their proximity to students and their professional relationships with instructors across northeast Montana. Accordingly, a committee of Certified staff was established to research the topic. The committee began research in December 2021 and met weekly beginning in January 2022. At the conclusion of their efforts, Certified staff was polled on the question of whether they supported the possibility of Plentywood Schools transitioning to a 4-day school week. The response rate was 94%, with 70% of respondents in support of a possible transition. The Certified staff findings are incorporated into this paper.

Members of the Board then met with Classified staff to understand their thoughts regarding a modified schedule during the first week of March 2022. By show of hands, the Classified staff largely supported the possibility of Plentywood Schools transitioning to a 4-day school week, although no poll was conducted. The classified staff findings are incorporated into this paper.

Members of the Board then met with the community to understand their thoughts regarding a modified schedule. The community forums were held March 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022. The community forum results are incorporated into this paper.

The Board of Trustees intends to vote on the potential implementation of a modified schedule at their next regularly scheduled meeting April 11, 2022.

## Classified Staff Openings

Figure 1 is an advertisement placed by Plentywood Public Schools in the Sheridan County News February 17, 2022. Some version of this ad has been running for over a year. There are three custodial openings, one of which has been open since the summer of 2021.

When most people think of school staff, they think of teachers. Parents mostly interact with teachers (or coaches, or teachers who are coaches, etc.), so that is perfectly understandable.

The classified staff are the people who make the school campus operate smoothly.

- Paraprofessional staff assist teachers.
  - Target staff: 9
  - Current staff: 8
- Custodial staff maintain the campus.
  - Target staff: 5
  - Current staff: 2
- Kitchen staff make sure your kids have food at school.
  - Target staff: 4 plus substitutes
  - Current staff: 4
- Transportation staff make sure your kids get to school (if you use a bus).
  - Target staff: 5
  - Current staff: 3
- Substitute teachers (many of them retired teachers) make sure your kids receive the quality education they deserve when Certified teachers are absent (sick, bereavement, vacation, etc.).
  - Continually seeking to maintain roster
- Office Staff are also Classified, but there are no open positions there at this time.

**PLENTYWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
100 East Laurel Ave.  
Plentywood, Montana 59254  
PHONE: (406) 765-1803  
FAX: (406) 765-1195

**HELP WANTED**

**PARAPROFESSIONAL OPENING:**

Plentywood Schools is looking to hire a full-time paraprofessional for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year (starting February 21st). Possible employment for the 2022-23 school year is available with merit shown.  
Hours: 8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. (M-Th); 8:00 a.m. – 2:15 p.m. (F).  
Salary: Starting Wage D.O.E. + health benefits and retirement.  
Job Description: Position involves working with special needs students in one-on-one or small group settings; taking directions from an immediate supervisor and administration; working cooperatively in a team setting with other staff and faculty.  
Qualities Needed: Reliable, Willingness to Learn. Ability to work with staff and students in a positive, cooperative manner, able to adapt to the unexpected.  
Background check is required.  
Please stop by the school for an application or see Mr. Rob Pedersen, Superintendent, by phone (765-1803), or by email (pederr@plentywood.k12.mt.us).

**CUSTODIAN POSITION:**

Plentywood School District is currently seeking a Full Time custodian.  
Salary: Starting Wage D.O.E. plus health benefits and retirement for the full time position.  
Hours: Evenings for 8 hour shift (typically late evening to early morning)  
Qualities Needed: Reliable, Willingness to Learn. Ability to work with others in a cooperative manner, able to adapt to the unexpected.

**SUBSTITUTE COOK/DISHWASHER POSITION:**

Plentywood School District is currently seeking a substitute prep cook/dishwasher to be available to work as needed Monday to Fridays for the upcoming school year. The hours are 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Previous experience in kitchen preferred but not required.  
Salary: Starting Wage DOE. Qualities Needed: Reliable, Willingness to Learn. Ability to work with others in a cooperative manner, able to adapt to the unexpected. Background check is required.

**SUBSTITUTE ROUTE BUS DRIVER(S):**

Plentywood School District is currently seeking to hire qualified individuals to serve as substitute school bus route drivers. Qualified applicants must meet the following requirements for the position: Be at least 18 years of age. Possess a current Commercial Driver's License or be qualified to receive one. Successfully pass a Department of Transportation physical. Complete a Basic First Aid/CPR course and hold a current First Aid/CPR certificate. Successfully complete the "S" Endorsement Certification for school bus drivers. \*\*Plentywood Schools will pay for the costs of the training, medical physical, First Aid/CPR course, and background check. Bus Route Wages - \$75.00 a day or \$37.50 for ½ day. We will hire someone who is available to only do ½ day (the route before school only or the afternoon route only)!  
Background check is required for all positions. Complete a District #20 Employment Application form (from school website: [www.plentywood.k12.mt.us](http://www.plentywood.k12.mt.us)) or see Mr. Rob Pedersen, Superintendent, at the school, by phone (765-1803), or by email (pederr@plentywood.k12.mt.us) to apply.

**SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS:**

Plentywood School District is currently seeking substitute teachers for the 2021-22 school year.  
Complete a District # 20 Employment Application form.  
Be at least 18 years of age.  
Salary: Base pay -- \$75 per day; Documentation of an accredited teaching degree -- \$80 per day; Documentation of current Montana teaching certification -- \$85 per day.  
Background check is required.  
See Mr. Rob Pedersen, Superintendent, if interested at the school, by phone (765-1803), or by email (pederr@plentywood.k12.mt.us) or stop by the school for an application.

Figure 1. Classified Advertisement February 17, 2022

## Certified Staff Openings

These are the known Certified Staff (teacher) openings as of today. There could be more over the next several of months, but we don't know.

- Family and Consumer Sciences. The Family and Consumer Sciences position has been open since the Fall of 2020 (last school year and this current school year). There have been no applicants for the Family and Consumer Sciences position in that time.
- High School English
- High School Math
- High School Science
- High School Music
- Middle School Math
- Elementary Education
- Elementary Special Education

The District begins searching for applicants immediately upon being notified of an opening.

We have 33 FTEs (full time equivalents). Eight certified openings represent 24% of all certified positions. Nearly one in four. That is a lot.

Regardless of the number of openings, at what time the Board is notified of an opening, etc., the District must be prepared to attract applicants to open positions. That is true of both Certified and Classified staff.

That means proactively creating a total Salary/Benefits/Schedule package that prospective applicants find attractive.

## Factors an Applicant Considers when Applying

There are many factors that influence a prospective applicant's decision to apply for and accept an offer. The Board considers all factors, understanding that a change in one factor may affect other factors. In particular, the focus of the modified schedule study is to determine whether and how the school schedule positively influences an applicant's decision to apply, and whether the perceived benefits of a modified schedule outweigh the perceived costs.

Salary:

- Annual salary
- Total career earnings

Benefits

- Vacation
- Health
- Retirement

Schedule

- Daily schedule
- Weekly/monthly schedule
- Yearly schedule

Location

## What Salary/Benefits does Plentywood Offer?

The Plentywood School District negotiates Certified staff salaries, benefits, working conditions, and other items with the Plentywood Education Association (PEA). A two-year collective bargaining agreement (CBA) signed June 7, 2021, covers the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years. The salaries and benefits described in this section are specific to Plentywood Schools.

### Salary

The base salary is the lowest entry salary a certified teacher can earn. Co-curricular stipends, such as coaching and advising stipends, are calculated as a percentage of the base salary.

To be competitive with area schools, the CBA allows a certified teacher with 5 or fewer years of teaching experience a starting salary equivalent to 5 years of experience, and that teacher will be paid at that level until such time as their applicable teaching experience exceeds 5 years. This is a regular practice of the District.

A certified teacher with a Master's degree with 15 or more quarters experience, and a total teaching experience of 27 years can earn the maximum salary.

Negotiated Certified Salaries, 2021-2023 Contract			
School Year	Base	Typical Start	Maximum
2021-2022	\$30,302	\$34,423	\$67,450
2022-2023	\$30,757	\$34,940	\$68,463

Below is a chart showing how Montana teacher salaries compare to states across the nation.



Figure 2. 2019 Teacher Pay State Rankings<sup>1</sup>

### Benefits & Leave, Certified Staff

Plentywood School District may offer a signing bonus of \$6,000 per newly hired certified teacher with five years or less of acceptable teaching experience. The signing bonus is paid at the rate of \$2,000 for three years.

All regularly employed Certified staff are granted 13 discretionary leave days for each year of service in the employee of the District. Annual leave accrues monthly and is earned on a proportionate basis to the teacher’s work year.

When the absence of a teacher is caused by a death in his/her (or spouse’s) immediate family, leave of absence without loss of salary and the utilization of sick leave will be granted for, not to exceed three (3) total school days, the particular number of days allowed subject to approval by the Superintendent, dependent upon the circumstances surrounding the death.

The District arranges for participation in a Health and Major Medical Insurance Plan for eligible teachers who enroll. The District contributes a maximum of \$714.00 per month (\$8,568.00 per year) for the 2021-2022 school term for each participating Certified staff member. The District will increase their contribution up to \$40.00 per month for the 2022-2023 school term as warranted by increased rates to the school district.

## Benefits & Leave, Classified Staff

All regularly employed classified staff are granted 12 vacation/sick leave days per year.

When the absence of a staff member is caused by a death in his/her (or spouse's) immediate family, leave of absence without loss of wages and the utilization of sick leave will be granted for, not to exceed three (3) total school days, the particular number of days allowed subject to approval by the Superintendent, dependent upon the circumstances surrounding the death.

The District arranges for participation in a Health and Major Medical Insurance Plan for eligible staff members who enroll. The District contributes a maximum of \$714.00 per month (\$8,568.00 per year) for the 2021-2022 school term for each participating classified staff member.

As a general practice, the District attempts to align the benefits of Certified and classified staff, although actual figures may vary slightly from time to time. For instance, classified staff enjoy the same levels of healthcare benefits afforded to Certified staff and increases in negotiated health benefits for Certified staff are typically then extended to classified staff. Bereavement leave was added as a classified staff benefit March 2022.

## What is a Modified Schedule?

Historically, as Montana districts were required to provide 180 days of instruction, instruction began in late August and ended in late May or early June of the following year, with five instructional days per week (except Holidays, breaks, etc.).

Montana no longer requires a minimum number of days for pupil instructional.

Rather, Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 20-10-301<sup>ii</sup> requires a minimum number of Aggregate hours for pupil instruction.

- 720 Hours for Grades K-3 (360 for a ½ time Kindergarten)
- 1080 Hours for Grades 4-11
- 1050 Hours for Grade 12

Each School district is responsible for ensuring that they offer the required minimum aggregate hours of pupil instruction. Some districts have adopted modified schedules that they deem a better fit for their individual circumstances, while meeting the instructional requirements set forth in the MCA.

A modified schedule is one that differs from the traditional 5-day school week.

Examples of a modified schedule are:

- A “true” 4-day school week in which one weekday is never used for instruction. These are rare, mainly because instruction must extend past 4:00 PM to accrue the required instructional hours between the traditional late August to late May timeframe.
  - Wolf Point Schools uses a “true” 4-day schedule, with some Certified-only activities such as PDD, PIR, and TCD held on Fridays. Campus hours are 7:45AM-4:30PM, with elementary instruction 8:05AM-3:50/3:55PM and middle/high school instruction 8:00AM-4:09PM.
- A “modified” 4-day school week in which some weeks contain five days of instruction. These are more common, mainly because instruction typically does not extend past 4:00 PM to accrue the required instructional hours between the traditional late August to late May timeframe.
  - Sidney Schools uses a “modified” 4-day schedule, with some Fridays used for instruction. School hours 8:00 AM – 3:45 PM.

## What States Uses a Modified Schedule?

### 25 States Have at Least One District Using a Four-Day School Week

Approximately 550 of the Nation's School Districts Use a Four-Day Schedule<sup>2</sup>

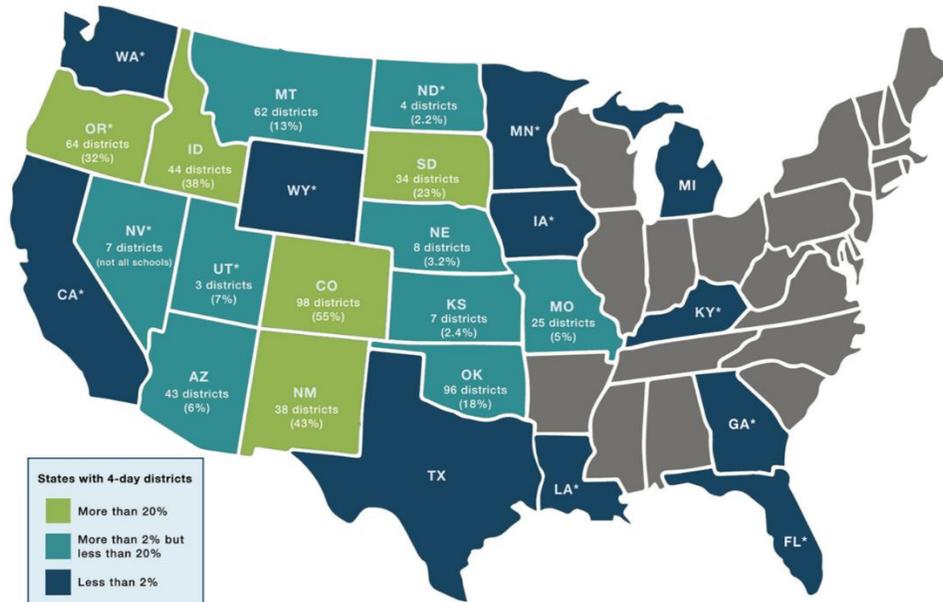


Figure 3. States using 4-Day School Weeks. \*2019 FIGURES\*. MT now has over 70 Districts using a 4-day Schedule.

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## Which Montana Districts Use a Modified Schedule?

According to the Montana Office of Public Instruction June 2021, there were 421 school districts<sup>iv</sup> in Montana containing 826 schools<sup>v</sup>. Many districts contain more than one school. For instance, the Plentywood School District contains three schools housed in a single building: the Plentywood Elementary, Middle, and High Schools. Most, but not all districts in our area house their three schools in a single building.

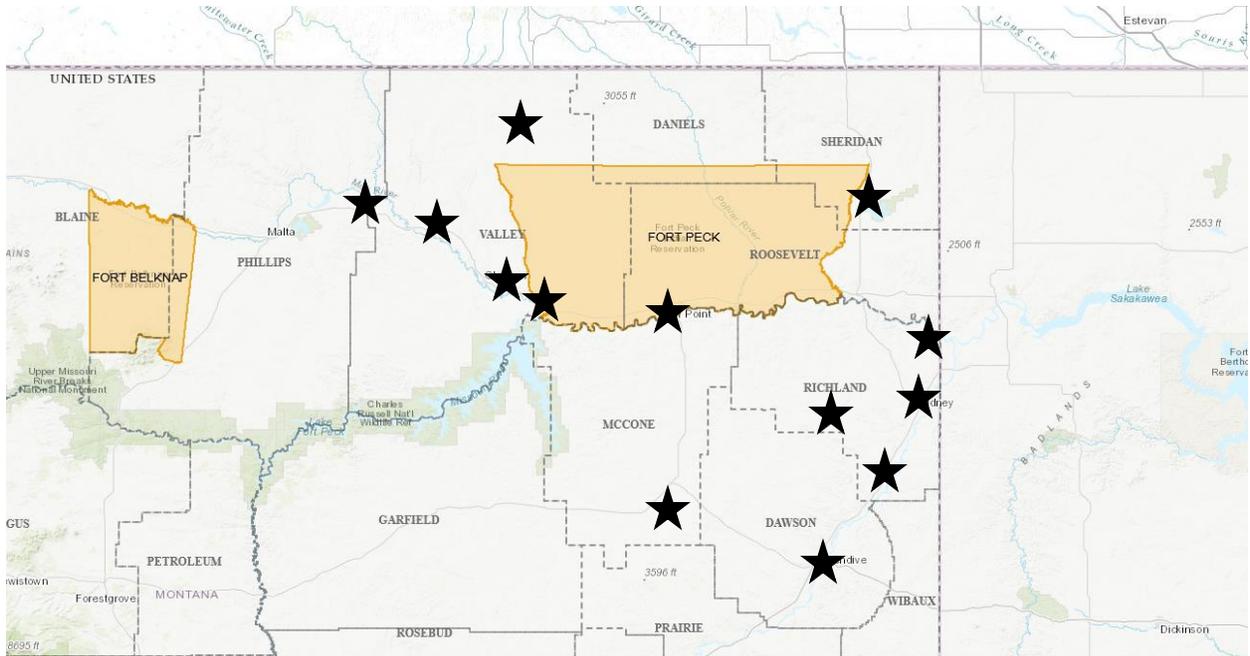
Larger districts in our area, such as the Sidney School District, house their schools in separate buildings, with some school operations managed separately for each school.

This arrangement would allow a district, if it chose, to implement a modified schedule at one school but not another. For instance, separate bus routes and schedules would allow for a traditional elementary school schedule and a modified middle and high school schedule.

Housing the three schools in a single building and operating them as a unit means, for practical reasons, all three Plentywood schools must operate on a single schedule.

To avoid potentially confusing references to both schools and districts, this paper primarily contains references to districts.

Northeast Montana Districts using a Modified Schedule						
Circle	Fairview	Glasgow	Glendive	Hinsdale	Medicine Lake	Nashua
Opheim	Richey	Saco	Savage	Sidney	Wolf Point	



Other Montana Districts using a Modified Schedule (Over 70, plus 20 Elementary Districts)

Alberton	Arlee	Ashland	Big Sandy	Birney	Cascade
Centerville	Charlo	Cooke City	Custer	Denton	Dodson
Drummond	Dutton/Brady	Ekalaka	Gardiner	Geyser	Hot Springs
Hysham	Jefferson	Jordan	Lincoln	Melstone	North Star
Ovanda	Plains	Polson	Potomac	Roberts	Ross
Roy	Rosebud	Seeley-Swan	Sheridan	Shields Valley	Stanford
Sun River Valley	Swan Lake	Turner	Vaughn	Victor	Vida
West Glacier	Wibaux				

## Certified and Classified Staff Concerns

As previously stated in this paper, a series of meetings was held between the Strategic Planning Committee and both Certified and Classified staff. The comments and concerns of both groups were strikingly similar and are reflected throughout this paper.

Please see the “Common Questions and Answers” section of this paper for more information.

<b>Student Health &amp; Welfare</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How will elementary students handle a longer school day?</li><li>• Will at-risk students be further at risk?</li><li>• Will food insecurity be exacerbated on non-school Fridays?</li><li>• Will Friday food packs include breakfast and lunch?</li></ul>
<b>School Schedule &amp; Calendar</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will the modified schedule potentially be implemented in 2022 or 2023?</li><li>• How will before- and after-school activity schedules be affected?</li><li>• How will cross-over instructor schedules be affected?</li><li>• Will the Special Education department be able to hold parent meetings on non-school Fridays?</li></ul>
<b>Hours, Pay &amp; Leave</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will leave benefit accrual/spend rules be affected?</li><li>• Will hourly pay increase to offset loss in hours in some positions?</li><li>• Will some positions (ie. office staff) require a 4.5-day work week?</li></ul>
<b>Budget &amp; Operations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holding kitchen staff hours to 40 hours/week but reducing served meals by 1 day (20%) may result in a kitchen staff funding shortfall.</li><li>• Morning/afternoon snacks and Friday/Weekend foods are not reimbursed. Offering these services may result in a budget shortfall.</li><li>• Friday food prep for following week may not work for perishable items such as fruits &amp; vegetables.</li></ul>
<b>Community Impacts</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will private sector employees have to change their work schedules?</li></ul>

## Community Forum Summary

Community forums were held at 6:00 PM March 16th and 23rd, 2022, in the main gymnasium. Public attendance at each forum was approximately 65 and 60, respectively.

Speakers included:

- Rob Pedersen, Superintendent of Plentywood Schools
- Luke Kloker, Superintendent of Fairview Schools
- Brent Sukut, Superintendent of Sidney Schools
- Wade Sundby, Superintendent of Glasgow Schools and former Plentywood teacher
- Sara Marsh, Plentywood teacher and organizer of the Certified Staff Committee
- Aaron Webster, Superintendent of Medicine Lake Schools
- Libby Almy, K-12 Principal, Elementary Focus, of Medicine Lake Schools

The notes below are a summary of comments made by speakers in their opening remarks and in answers to questions posed by the public. They are not verbatim.

## Rob Pedersen, Superintendent of Plentywood Schools

Introduced topic and described the reasons why the Plentywood School District is exploring the option of a modified schedule. His comments are incorporated previously in this paper.

## Luke Kloker, Superintendent of Fairview Schools

- Implementation
  - Approved by Board 3/5 on implementation, 5/5 on continuation
  - Has used a modified schedule for nine years
  - Eliminated study hall
  - Fairview uses 156 instructional days
- Benefits
  - Increased morale
  - Better teacher recruitment
  - Decrease in student absences
  - Students spend more time with teachers
  - More productive Fridays for classified staff
  - Anticipated loss of academic achievement not realized.
- Challenges
  - Lack of academic data
  - Perceived “give-away” to teachers
  - Possible requirement for additional staff to implement
  - No decrease in staff absences
  - Difficult or impossible to revert to traditional schedule
  - Difficult to make Fridays productive for Certified staff
  - Student absence of 1 day means 25% loss of that week’s instruction
  - Friday plans failed due to lack of student participation
- Recommendations
  - Ensure that Fridays are productive for all staff

## Brent Sukut, Superintendent of Sidney Schools

- Implementation
  - Has used a modified schedule for one year
  - Sidney uses 153 instructional days
- Benefits
  - Better retention of qualified staff
- Challenges
  - Lack of academic data
  - Academic achievement first remained constant, then increased, then decreased
  - No decrease in chronic student absenteeism
  - Student absence of 1 day means 25% loss of that week’s instruction
  - Teachers do not like the loss of prep time
  - Primary students are tired by the end of the day
- Recommendations
  - Be deliberate in providing time for homework to occur at school under instruction
  - Be deliberate in scheduling co-curricular activities

## Wade Sundby, Superintendent of Glasgow Schools and former Plentywood teacher

- Implementation

- Board approved implementation 5/5
- Has used a modified schedule for one year
- Glasgow uses 156 instructional days
- Glasgow uses 7 periods
- Community support of 80% prior to implementation
- Teachers/Paras on duty approximately 15 Fridays a year (2 Fridays a month) for IEP, PD, PIR, etc.
- Benefits
  - Increased student attendance
  - Increased student and staff morale
  - Decrease in disciplinary issues
  - No challenge to implementation at MS and HS level
  - More time for workshops at elementary level
- Challenges
  - Lack of academic data
  - Paraprofessionals work only 36 hours, but can work 4 additional hours on Fridays
  - Friday programs are not well-attended by students
- Recommendations
  - Schedule all teacher-only activities on Fridays
  - Change all CBA accounting to hours
  - Be proactive in addressing Friday childcare needs

### Sara Marsh, Plentywood teacher and organizer of the Certified Staff Committee

- Benefits (summary of researching other schools)
  - Extra instruction/check time
  - Reduced homework
  - One less commute day for commuting staff
  - Increased student attendance
  - Increased morale
- Challenges (summary of researching other schools)
  - Afternoon hunger
  - Longer school days (mitigated by longer morning recess and afternoon enrichment activities)
  - Friday food insecurity (mitigated by food pantry and snack pack programs)
  - Daycare (mitigated by babysitter matching, parent babysitting rotation, Friday enrichment day)
  - Academic achievement (compared Plentywood to other area schools - Circle 1st, Fairview 2nd, both have 4-day school week)

### Aaron Webster, Superintendent of Medicine Lake Schools

- Implementation
  - Has used a modified schedule for two years
  - Medicine Lake uses 156 instructional days
  - Medicine Lake uses 7 periods
  - Motivations were staff retention, morale, and student and staff attendance
  - 75% of teachers and 70% of community was in favor prior to implementation
  - Used a 3-year “snap-back” provision
- Benefits
  - Filled long-open positions for the first time in a while
  - School cancelations are made up on Fridays
- Challenges
  - Medical/Dental scheduling is still a challenge

- Some extra-curricular activity schedules were made easier, but not all
- English language classes still not staffed
- Recommendations
  - Advertising the use of a modified schedule will help recruitment

### Libby Almy, K-12 Principal, Elementary Focus, of Medicine Lake Schools

- Benefits
  - Pacing standards have helped bring discipline to the instructional process
- Challenges
  - Textbooks are based on 5-day lesson plans
  - Margin of error is smaller on a modified schedule
  - Elementary kids are “out of gas” by afternoon
- Recommendations
  - Be deliberate in creating pacing standards
  - “Pacing, pacing, pacing”

### Public Comment

Questions and comments from the public were summarized by the Board of Trustees, with similar items grouped into categories. The chart below shows the approximate number of times a given topic was included in a question or comment.

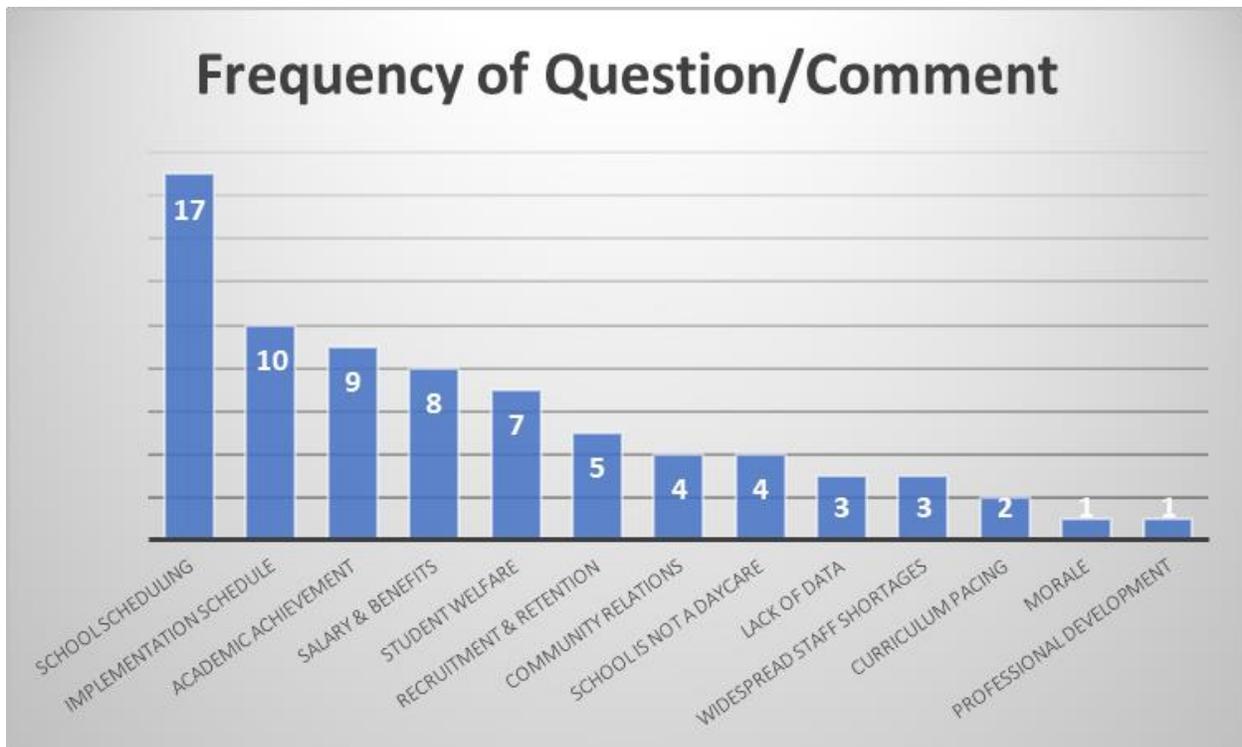


Figure 4. Frequency of Question/Comment Topics at Community Forums

The comments and concerns expressed by the public were very similar to those expressed by the Certified and classified staff during their meetings with the Strategic Planning Committee.

The Board of Trustees understands the importance of these concerns to students, parents, teachers, staff, and others.

Please see the “Common Questions and Answers” section of this paper for more information.

## Common Questions and Answers

Throughout their meetings with the Certified staff, Classified staff, and public of the Plentywood School District, a pattern of recurring themes emerged. While each question, comment, or concern was unique, the ideas fell into one or more of several categories. The top six categories were school scheduling, implementation schedule, academic achievement, salary & benefits, student welfare, and recruitment & retention. These categories are expanded below.

### School Scheduling

#### What would the school calendar look like?

A potential modified 4-day school calendar is subject to negotiation between the District and PEA. The examples below are conceptual.

#### Examples

- Fairview Schools
  - School hours 8:00 AM – 3:45 PM
  - 156 instructional days
- Sidney Schools
  - School hours 7:55 AM – 3:45 PM
  - 153 instructional days
- Glasgow Schools
  - K-3 School hours 8:20 AM – 3:47 PM
  - 4-12 School hours 8:00 AM – 3:54 PM
  - 156 instructional days
- Medicine Lake Schools
  - Elementary School hours 8:25 AM – 3:50 PM
  - Middle and High School hours 8:05 AM – 3:50 PM
  - 156 instructional days

#### Expanded Example:

- Inputs:
  - School Start 8:00 AM
  - School end 3:55 PM (result of 7.07 instructional hours per day) or (7 hours 4 minutes per day)
    - Total campus time is 7 hours 55 minutes
  - Hold School on the last Friday of every month, unless that Friday is a holiday
  - Hold school on a Friday in which the preceding Monday was a holiday, unless that Friday is also a holiday
  - Hold PIR days on a non-school Friday
  - No early dismissal for parent-teacher conferences, unless for a different reason (ie. election day)
  - No tournament days or half-days considered, unless coincidental with a holiday (ie. spring break)
  - No ‘snow days’ considered
- Results:
  - School start August 22
  - School end May 26
  - 155 instructional days (153 required at 7.07 instructional hours per day)

157 Certified Staff Days

Some time spent on campus is not considered instructional time, such as hall time, lunch breaks, and recesses. Small variations in these times can affect the total hours spent on campus, the instructional time available in a day, and ultimately the number of days needed to accrue the required amount of instructional hours.

Again, please understand that the examples above are conceptual, and an actual modified schedule, if implemented, could vary from the examples.

## Implementation Schedule

If implemented, would a modified schedule begin the fall of 2022 or 2023?

The Board of Trustees intends to vote on the potential implementation of a modified schedule at their next regularly scheduled meeting April 11, 2022. No decision on implementation schedule has been made.

Can we switch back if a modified schedule doesn't work?

It is difficult to switch from a modified schedule back to a traditional schedule.

- In switching to a modified schedule, employees perceive “less work for the same pay”.
- In switching back to a traditional schedule, employees perceive “more work for the same pay”.
- Public and employees may perceive a “bait and switch”
- “Snap back” provisions with clear metrics and justifications may be required.

## Academic Achievement

How will a modified schedule affect academic achievement?

The body of research available on this topic is small. Studies and stories can be found to support the arguments that a modified schedule either increases or decreases academic achievement.

In their review of area schools, the Certified staff committee found that academic proficiency levels remained constant among and between 4-day and 5-day schools. The data available spanned only the last four to five years, which were punctuated by disruption due to COVID-19 and its effect on school closures and online learning. Therefore, while that data suggested that transitioning to a 4-day school schedule had no apparent effect on academic achievement, the relative sparsity of that data (and the deficiency of the sample) does not lend confidence to any conclusion drawn from it.

A study<sup>vi</sup> by Mark Anderson, assistant professor in the Montana State University Department of Agricultural Economics and Economics, and Mary Beth Walker, professor and dean with the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University, was done of elementary school test score data on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) from 2001-2010 across the state's rural districts.

The study by Mark Anderson and Mary Beth Walker found:

- A generally positive relationship between the four-day week and performance in reading and mathematics
- Little evidence that moving to a four-day week compromises student academic achievement.
- The researchers found the percent of students scoring either proficient or with advanced proficiency in reading:
  - Went up at schools on a four-day schedule and
  - Were higher than their peers in school districts who remained on the five-day schedule.

A study<sup>vii</sup> by Paul M. Hewitt and George S. Denny, both of the University of Arkansas, was done of elementary school test score data on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) using data retrieved from the Colorado Department of Education in 2009.

The study by Paul Hewitt and George Denny found:

- The five-day schools did slightly better than the four-day schools, with 11 of 12 achievement results favoring five-day schools.
- One statistically significant finding of higher elementary writing scores for five-day schools.
- From a policy perspective, a decision to change to a four-day school week should be made on the basis of cost savings or stakeholder preference rather than to increase test scores.
- It does not appear that concern over student academic performance should be used as a reason not to implement a four-day school week.

The two studies described above illustrate the difficulty in relying on published data to inform a decision regarding a potential transition to a 4-day school schedule. Both studies used approximately the same data from approximately the same timeframe from approximately the same schools, and each came to a different conclusion. Neither study represented their findings as of such significance that they were convinced of a clear preference between 4-day and 5-day school schedules relative to academic achievement.

Anecdotal evidence exists of academic achievement increasing or remaining constant for several years following the implementation of a modified schedule, followed by a decrease in academic achievement in subsequent years to levels at or below pre-implementation. The Board of Trustees did not review any published studies that confirmed this phenomenon.

## Salary & Benefits

### Why can't we just offer a higher salary?

Employee (Certified, Classified, and administration) salaries and benefits are paid from the General Fund only. This is state law. The District is currently operating its General Fund at the maximum spending authority, and is not authorized to levy any more funds.

Generally, employee salaries and benefits consume roughly 81-89% of a school's general fund. This is true across the nation. Historically, Plentywood School District employee salaries and benefits have consumed roughly 86-89% of the General Fund.

### Why can't we just move teachers around?

We can, and we do. The District begins searching for applicants immediately upon being notified of an opening.

The District first advertises these positions internally for a period of time. This practice:

- Allows a teacher to move into a position they would prefer.
- Helps the District retain teachers and improve employee satisfaction.
- Can help fill "hard-to-fill" positions, opening a position that may be easier to fill (more applicants, lower certification levels, etc.).
- Creates another opening the District must fill, but with less time to fill it.

The District then advertises these positions on various state-wide fora used by educators seeking employment.

The District has some flexibility in placing teachers in a position for which they are not certified.

- A teacher can instruct in an area outside their certification for 3 years.
- In that timeframe, the teacher can work towards certification in their new role.
- Violation of the state rules negatively impacts the school's accreditation.
- Continued use of teachers outside their area of certification negatively impacts academic achievement.

### Would Classified staff (hourly) pay go down?

Cost savings were not a motivating factor for the Plentywood School District when exploring the possibility of transitioning to a modified schedule.

A “gross up” in hourly rates so that Classified staff does not feel an income loss is possible.

### Does the District expect cost savings?

Most schools that switched to a modified schedule did so to save money. This largely did not work.

A study by Michael Griffith of the Educations Commission of the States found that schools saved 0.4%-2.5%, with an estimated maximum savings of 5.43%<sup>viii</sup>. This study used financial data from 2007-2008 and was published in 2011.

## Student Welfare

### What will our kids do on Friday?

Nearly all schools we researched that switched to a modified schedule started Friday daycare or activity programs.

Most programs were unsuccessful in that they stopped being utilized within a matter of weeks or months.

One successful Friday program is Sidney’s “Homework Club” in which teachers make student attendance recommendations to the Principal. The Principal notifies the student’s parent/guardian during the week of the student’s invitation for Friday. The student’s attendance is the responsibility of that student or their parent/guardian. The “Homework Club” runs from 8:30 AM - 11:30 AM on Friday and is usually staffed by paraprofessionals or the Principal.

### What will our kids eat on Friday?

Nearly all schools that switched to a modified schedule started Friday food programs.

Most programs were unsuccessful in that they stopped being utilized within a matter of weeks or months.

One successful food program is Wolf Points’ supervised “pantry” where students can select food to take home with them on Thursday afternoon. Supervision ensures that students select a range of foods that are of nutritional value.

### Will our kids get hungry during the day?

For some grades, especially the lower elementary grades, the District would provide mid-morning or mid-afternoon snacks. The details of exactly what time snacks would be served or what they would consist of have not been determined.

## Recruitment and Retention

### Are there other ways to attract staff?

Yes, and each comes with its own opportunities and challenges.

Alternatives include:

- Higher salary/wages/benefits
  - Pro: Increased salary and benefits would likely attract more staff.
  - Con: The District is currently operating its General Fund at the maximum spending authority and is not authorized to levy any more funds. Total employee costs must be managed carefully to avoid exacerbating budget challenges that then must be addressed in following years, but with greater urgency and impact.
- Montana digital academy (MTDA) classes supervised by a paraprofessional.
  - Pro: A certified instructor would not be required for these courses.
  - Con: The total cost of instruction could be higher due to the combination of paraprofessional wages and individual student tuition fees.

- Con: Possible decrease in academic achievement due to various factors around distance learning such as classroom engagement, technology issues, inability to interact directly with the instructor, etc.
- Foreign instructors.
  - Pro: Foreign instructors seem to be plentiful.
  - Pro: Foreign instructors may be willing to accept a lower salary than domestic instructors.
  - Con: Possible decrease in academic achievement due to various factors such as classroom management, language barriers, cultural differences, etc.
  - Con: Administrative workload and other requirements to comply with foreign instructor programs is unknown.

The Plentywood School District has discussed these issues. In particular, the use of MTDA and/or foreign instructors seem to present more challenges than opportunities.

## Sources and Citings

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<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title\\_0200/chapter\\_0010/part\\_0030/section\\_0010/0200-0010-0030-0010.html](https://www.leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0200/chapter_0010/part_0030/section_0010/0200-0010-0030-0010.html)

<sup>iii</sup> The Center on Reinventing Public Education. 03/19/2019.  
<https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/legacy/2019/03/4-day-school-week-map.png>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/School%20Finance/Accounting/Indirect%20Cost%20Rate%20Instructions/FY%202022/IndirectInstructions%202023.pdf?ver=2022-01-03-135235-393#:~:text=LEA%20Profile%3A%20Montana%20Office%20of%20Public%20Instruction%20Data,School%20Districts%20%28LEA%E2%80%99s%29%2C%2021%20Educational%20Regional%20School%20District%29>

<sup>v</sup> <https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Superintendent-Docs-Images/Facts%20About%20Montana%20Education.pdf?ver=2020-09-16-132427-883>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://direct.mit.edu/edfp/article/10/3/314/10233/Does-Shortening-the-School-Week-Impact-Student>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ987605.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/93/69/9369.pdf>