



REPORT

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FIVE FOR ME: A SURVEY OF MISSOURIANS REGARDING THE FOUR-DAY SCHOOL WEEK

By James V. Shuls, Ph.D.

ADVANCING LIBERTY WITH RESPONSIBILITY
BY PROMOTING MARKET SOLUTIONS
FOR MISSOURI PUBLIC POLICY



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Sixty-four percent (64%) of respondents indicated they preferred the five-day school week, while just 24% preferred the four-day school week.
- Thirty percent (30%) of respondents indicated they could not provide reliable childcare if their school used a four-day week. These individuals voiced the strongest support for the five-day model, with 84% saying they preferred five days and just 6% choosing four days.
- A majority of respondents indicated that they supported expanding educational options for students in four-day school districts. Sixty-nine percent (69%) supported interdistrict choice for students in four-day school districts. Meanwhile, 59% supported offering private school vouchers to students in four-day school districts.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, Missouri public schools are moving to a four-day school week. By the latest count, around 170 now use this reduced meeting pattern.¹ The tremendous growth in the number of school districts making this change has increased public interest in the topic. Recently, the Show-Me Institute released a systematic literature review that examined all the best research evidence on four key issues related to four-day school weeks: academic achievement, finances, teacher retention, and parent preferences.² The major takeaway from that review was that there is a lack of evidence on the topic. Since 2012, just 12 papers addressed one of the four research questions in a sufficiently rigorous way. When it came to finances (two studies) and teacher retention (three studies), there simply was not enough evidence to be confident that moving to a four-day school week would create a financial gain or improve teacher retention for local school districts. One pattern that emerged from the review was in the area of academics (eight studies), where it seems the four-day school week has, on average, a small, negative impact on

1 Frank, Avery. “Common arguments for and against the four-day school week.” Blog post, showmeinstitute.org, October 4, 2023.

2 Frank, Avery; Shuls, James. “Evidence based? A systematic literature review of the four-day school week.” Show-Me Institute, December 2023.

test scores in math and English/language arts.

The one positive story to emerge from the systematic literature review was in the area of parental satisfaction. Two studies were identified that assessed satisfaction among parents who were in four-day school week districts. In both, more than 60% expressed support for fewer days of school. These findings were consistent with national surveys of parents that also found support for the four-day school week. A 2023 EdChoice poll of 2,325 American adults, for instance, found that 60% of parents were at least somewhat supportive of their children’s school moving to a four-day school week.³

Given these results, we wanted to have a better understanding of how Missourians felt about the four-day school week. Moreover, we wanted to know what policy options Missourians would support for students in four-day school districts. After all, the best available evidence suggests that some students are worse off when their school district moves to a four-day model. It is therefore of critical importance to consider what other educational opportunities may be provided to students if their school district makes this significant change.

To assess Missourians’ opinions on issues related to the four-day school week, the Show-Me Institute contracted with Campaign Marketing Strategies (CMS) to conduct a telephone poll of Missourians. From October 5 to October 8, CMS made more than 18,000 calls to Missouri voters. A total of 11,304 answered the first screener question in our survey, which asked whether they currently had a child in kindergarten through 12th grade. A total of 1,575 individuals responded that they had a school-aged child. A total of 1,386 responded to the second question, which asked respondents if that they would prefer a four-day or five-day school week. With each additional question, there was some attrition of respondents. In the end, we received completed surveys from 1,200 Missourians with school-aged children. Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for the 1,200 individuals who completed the survey. The full survey is available in the appendix.

Our survey consisted of 11 questions. As noted, the first question was a screener question to make sure participants had a school-aged child. Some of the questions were

3 Ritter, Colyn. “Survey finds Americans’ support of school choice policies increased slightly in June.” ENGAGE by EdChoice, July 11, 2023.

demographic in nature. Ultimately, we were interested in answering three broad questions:

- What meeting pattern do Missouri parents prefer?
- What policy options do parents support for students in four-day school districts?
- What do Missouri parents see as the main purpose of education?

Preferences for Four-Day School Week

When asked whether they would prefer their children's school use the standard five-day school week or a four-day school week, a majority of respondents (64%) indicated they would prefer the five-day school week (Figure 1). By comparison, just 24% of respondents indicated they would prefer a four-day meeting pattern. Twelve percent (12%) were undecided.

Childcare is often listed as a potential concern when school districts consider moving to a four-day school week. To assess whether this was a concern among Missourians, we asked: "Would you or an adult in your home be able to provide reliable childcare if your school used a four-day school week?" While 65% of respondents stated "yes" (that they would be able to provide reliable childcare), 30% of respondents said they would not be able to provide reliable childcare, and 5% were not sure (Figure 2).

One might imagine the ability to provide childcare could influence one's willingness to support a four-day school week. Indeed, this is exactly what we find when we parse out the data. Individuals who indicated they were able to provide reliable childcare were much more likely to choose the four-day school model. Thirty-four percent (34%) of parents who could provide childcare indicated they would prefer the four-day school model, while 54% chose the five-day school week (Figure 3). In comparison, just 6% of parents who could not provide reliable childcare chose the four-day school week, while 84% chose the five-day school week. The percentage of those choosing the five-day school week increases to 88% when restricting the responses to elementary school parents.

While the difference in preferences among those who

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents

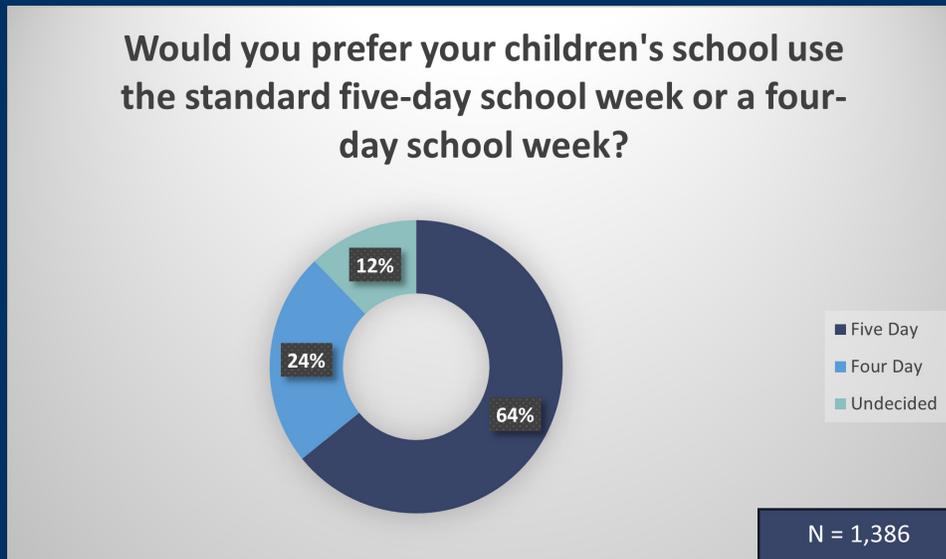
Number of individuals who completed entire survey: 1,200.

DOES YOUR STUDENT'S CURRENT SCHOOL USE A FOUR-DAY SCHOOL WEEK?	
Yes	8.3%
No	90.6%
Not Sure	1.2%
WHAT TYPE OF SCHOOL DOES YOUR CHILD ATTEND?	
Local public school	77.3%
Charter school	5.3%
Private school	14.2%
Home school	3.3%
WHAT GRADE IS YOUR YOUNGEST CHILD IN?	
K-5	54.5%
6-8	22.5%
9-12	23.0%
HOW MANY ADULTS ARE IN THE HOME?	
1	9.8%
2	78.0%
3	7.2%
4	3.3%
5 or more	1.8%
WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE YOUR COMMUNITY AS RURAL, SUBURBAN, OR URBAN?	
Rural	25.3%
Suburban	63.7%
Urban	11.1%
GENDER	
Male	50.5%
Female	49.5%
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	
Democrat	21.3%
Nonpartisan	13.6%
Republican	65.2%

Figure 1

Preferences Regarding School Meeting Patterns

Nearly two thirds of respondents preferred the standard five-day school week.

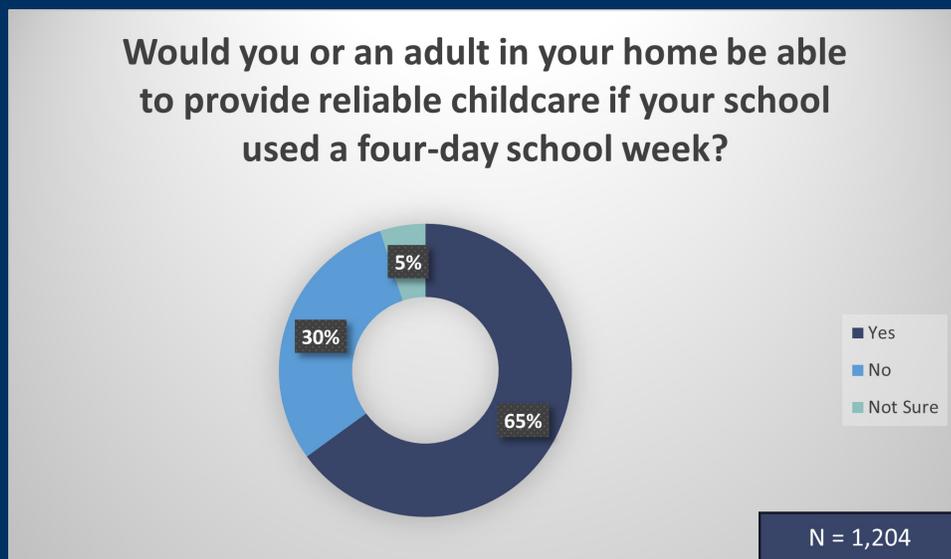


could and could not provide childcare were the most pronounced, they were not the only noticeable differences among subgroups. Thirty-one percent (31%) of parents who identified their community as “rural” chose the four-day school week, while only 21% and 23% of suburban and urban parents made that choice (Figure 4). Conversely, parents of private school students were less likely to choose the four-day school week than public and charter school parents. We should note that as we look at subgroups, the sample sizes are significantly smaller. This could affect the reliability of those results. We note the sample size of each subgroup in the figures.

Figure 2

Respondents' Ability to Provide Childcare

Three in ten respondents said they would be unable to provide in-home childcare if their school used a four-day schedule.

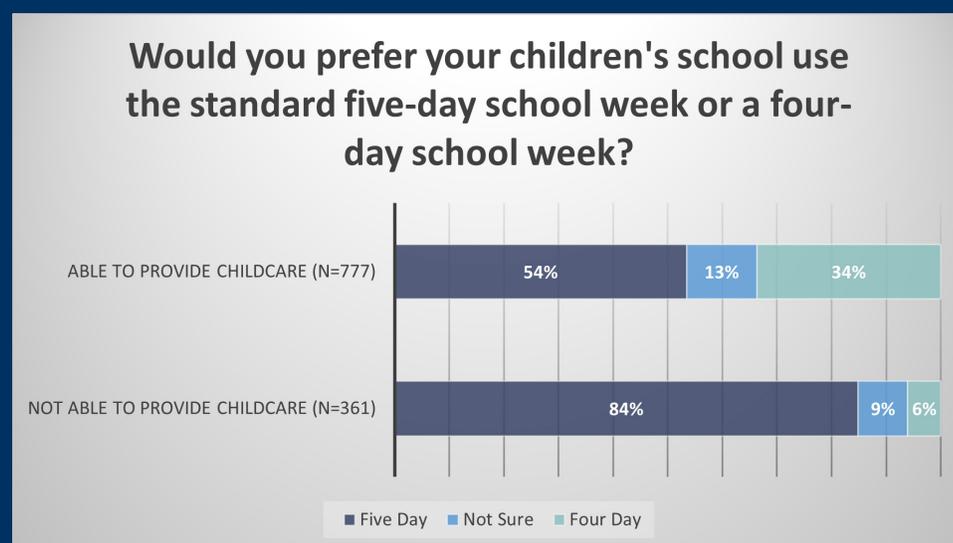


It is also important to note that parents who indicated their children are currently in a school that meets four days a week were among the strongest supporters of the four-day model. Forty-nine percent (49%) of these parents preferred four days, while 44% preferred five days. This was the only group in which the plurality of parents supported the four-day model. In comparison, just 22% of

Figure 3

Preferences Regarding School Meeting Patterns by Childcare Availability

Unsurprisingly, parents who were unable to provide childcare were more likely to prefer a five-day school week.



parents whose children are currently in a five-day school indicated they would prefer four-day weeks.

Policy Considerations

Using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, we asked survey respondents to consider two policy options for students in school districts that move to a four-day school week (Figure 5). The first statement suggested students should be given the opportunity to transfer to another public school if their district moved to a four-day school week. The second statement suggested students should be offered a voucher to attend a private school.

A majority of respondents were in support of either the interdistrict choice or the voucher policy options. In total, 69% of respondents supported the idea of allowing students to transfer to another public school if their school district moved to a four-day school week. Meanwhile, just

20.9% were opposed to this policy option. While a majority also supported the voucher idea, support was weaker and the opposition was markedly stronger. Still, 58.7% of respondents supported the idea of offering private school vouchers to students when their district moves to a four-day model, while 32.4% opposed the idea.

Other factors, including the type of school one's children currently attend and even one's political affiliation, might also influence support for a four-day school week. Accordingly, we present subgroup breakouts by type of school and political party. Conceivably, we

might expect individuals with children in a school of choice (charter or private) to be more open to school choice policy proposals. Similarly, we might expect to find differences among individuals from different political parties.

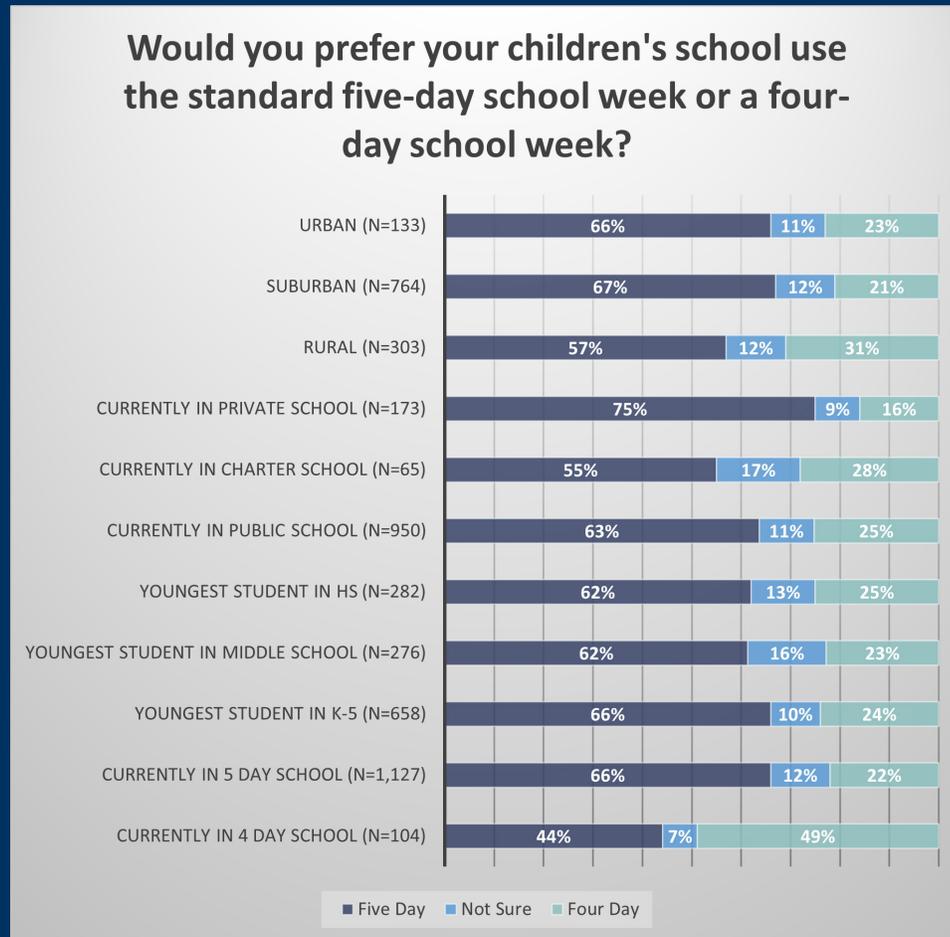
Figures 6 and 7 present the breakout for the two school schedules by school type. Majorities of parents with children in each school type supported both the interdistrict choice and voucher policy proposals. Support for interdistrict choice was strongest among charter school parents. Meanwhile, support for vouchers was strongest among parents with a child currently in a private school. Parents of public school students were least likely to support the proposals; still, 67% supported interdistrict choice and 56% supported offering private school vouchers.

Majorities of all three political groups (Democrats, Nonpartisan, and Republicans) supported both the

Figure 4

Preferences Regarding School Meeting Patterns by Subgroups

The four-day school week is most popular with those whose schools already use this schedule and with rural families.



Purposes of Education

In addition to knowing whether parents preferred a four- or five-day school week and their policy preferences when a school district moves to a four-day school week, we wanted to know what parents saw as the primary purpose of education. Figure 10 displays the results. Nearly sixty percent (59.5%) of parents indicated that academics were the primary purpose of education. In a distant second place, 17.5% indicated job preparation was the primary purpose. This was followed by “Other” (12.3%), “Moral Development” (7.4%), and “Citizenship” (3.3%). Interestingly, individuals who said citizenship was the primary purpose were more likely to choose a four-day school week (Figure 11)—though we should caution against putting too much stock in this finding, since that subgroup consisted of only 40 individuals.

interdistrict choice and voucher policy proposals (Figures 8 and 9). Interestingly, support for both school choice options was weakest amongst Republicans. While 67% of Republicans supported interdistrict choice options, 71% of Democrats did. Similarly, 57% of Republicans supported offering private school vouchers, compared to 62% of Democrats.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

We surveyed Missourians about their preferences for a four-day or five-day school week. Unlike other polls that have found strong support for the four-day model, our survey respondents were much less enthusiastic about the idea. Just 24% of respondents in our survey preferred the four-day school week, while 64% chose the five-day school week. Parents who could not provide reliable childcare

were much more likely to choose a five-day (84%) than a four-day (6%) school week. Of all groups, rural parents (31%) and parents whose children are currently in schools that use a four-day school week (49%) were most likely to choose the four-day model.

While more and more Missouri school districts move to the four-day school week, it seems they do it without strong support. As previously noted, the best available research evidence is inconclusive on the effect of the four-day school week on finances and teacher retention. Importantly, the evidence suggests the four-day school week has a small, negative effect, on average, on academics.

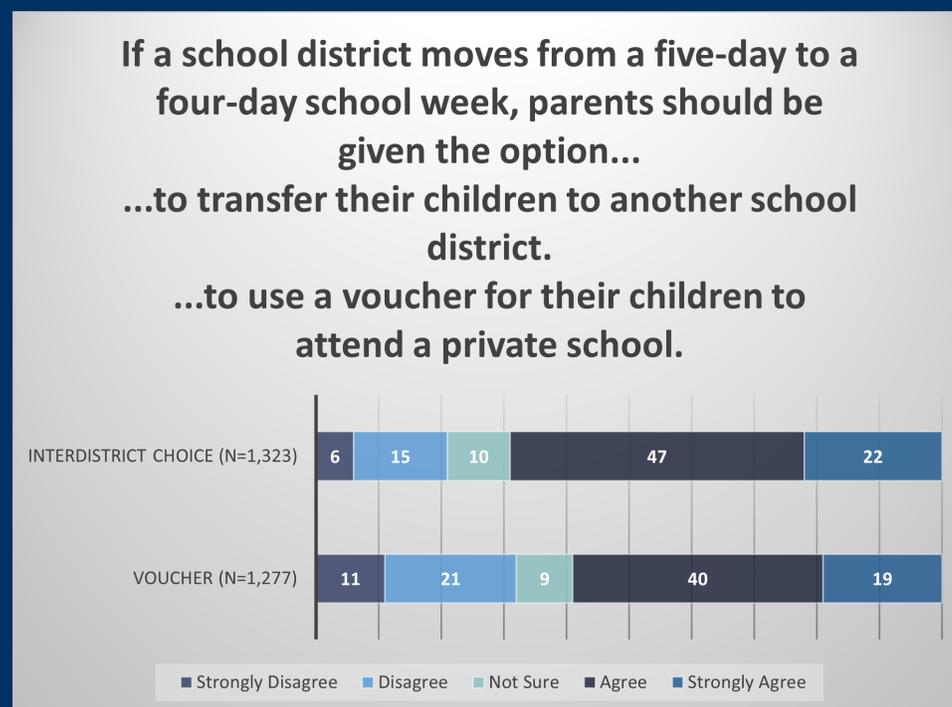
The best case for the four-day school week was that it seemed to be polling favorably among parents. Our findings contradict those assertions. We find a majority of Missourians in almost every subgroup prefer the five-day school week.

Given these findings, it is important for policymakers to consider how they will support students in school districts that move to a four-day school week. In this survey, we asked parents to consider whether the state should allow interdistrict transfers or offer private school vouchers to students when their district moves to a four-day school week. Strong majorities supported both policy options.

The four-day school week seems to be growing in popularity among school boards and educational leaders. Yet, this policy decision is being made without strong research support. Moreover, it is a decision that

Figure 5 Policy Options for Students in Four-Day School Week Districts

Most respondents favored either interdistrict choice or vouchers as options in districts that move to a four-day school week.



undoubtedly has deleterious effects on some students. State policymakers should consider how they can provide educational options for students affected by these local education policy decisions.

James V. Shuls is director of research and senior fellow at the Show-Me Institute.

Figure 6

Interdistrict Choice for Students in Four-Day School Week Districts

Regardless of what type of school thier children currently attend, parents were likely to support the option to transfer if their district moved to a four-day school week.

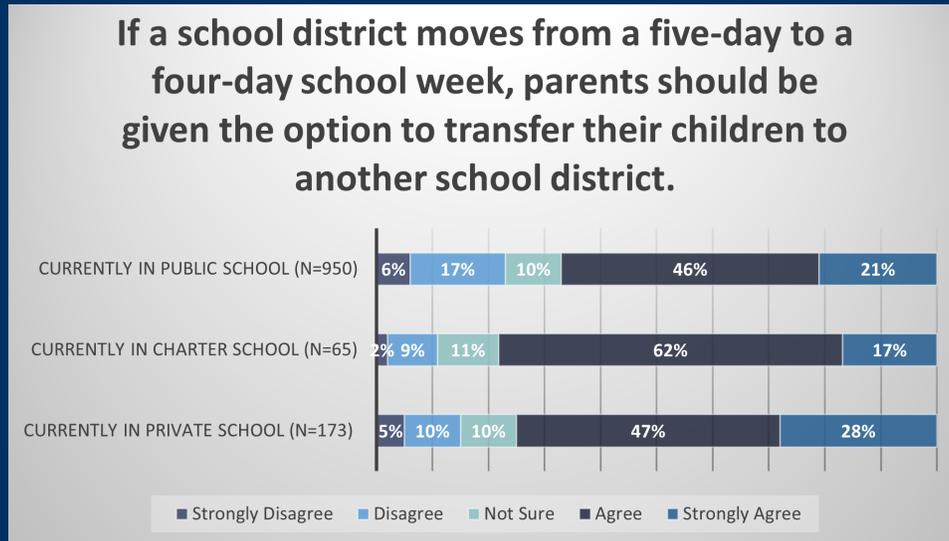


Figure 7

Vouchers for Students in Four-day School Week Districts by School Type

Support for a voucher option was not quite as strong as for a transfer option, but was still over 50 percent in all three subgroups.

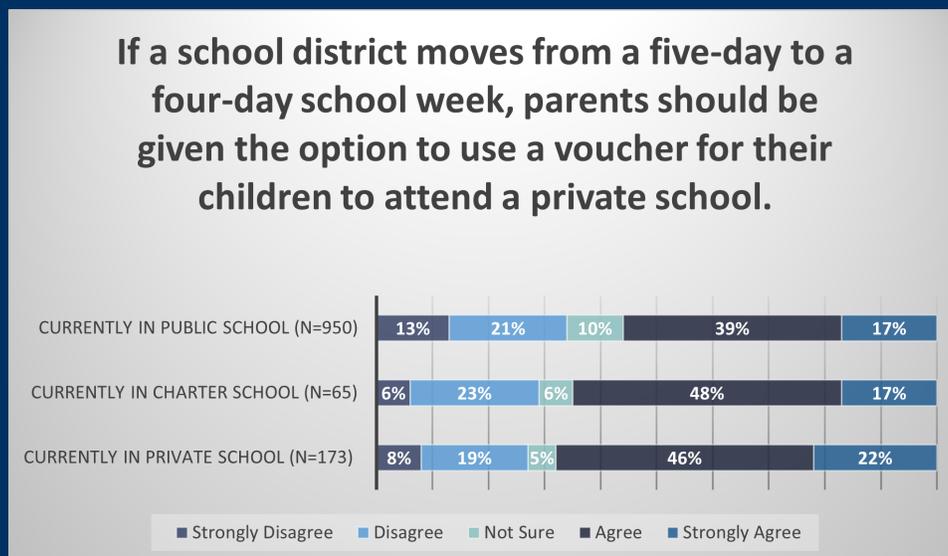


Figure 8 Interdistrict Choice for Students in Four-day School Week Districts by Political Party

Support for interdistrict choice in four-day school week districts varied little by political affiliation.

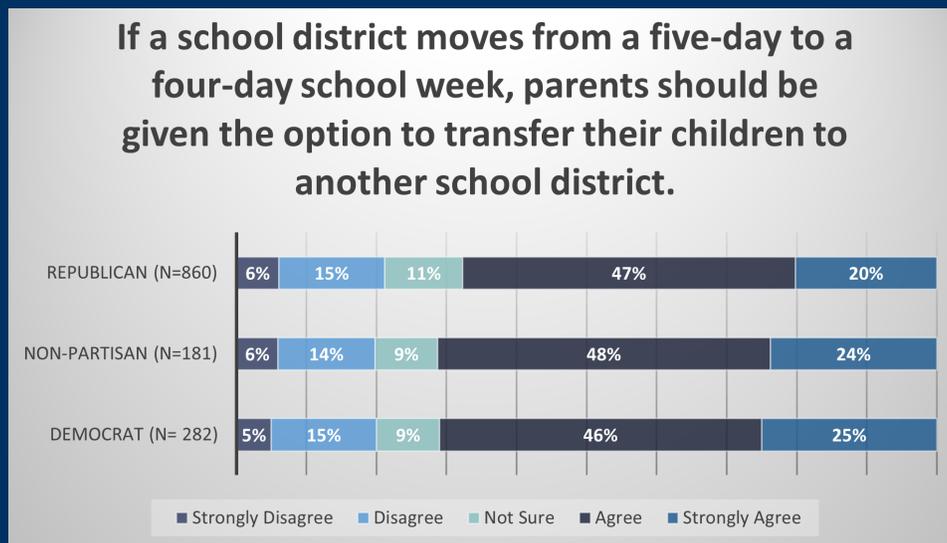


Figure 9 Vouchers for Students in Four-day School Week Districts by Political Party

As with interdistrict choice, political party had little bearing on support for a voucher option in four-day school week districts.

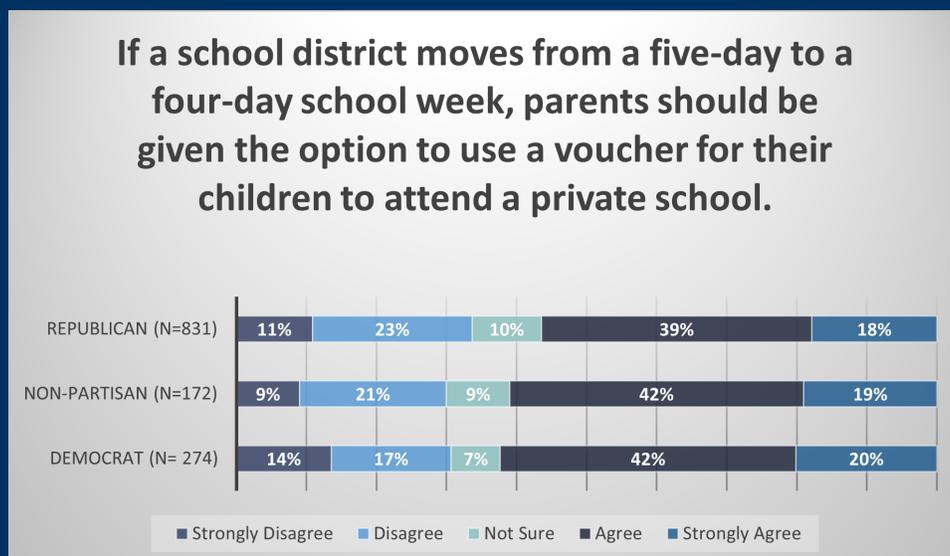


Figure 10 Purposes of Education

A clear majority of respondents listed "academics" as the primary purpose of education.

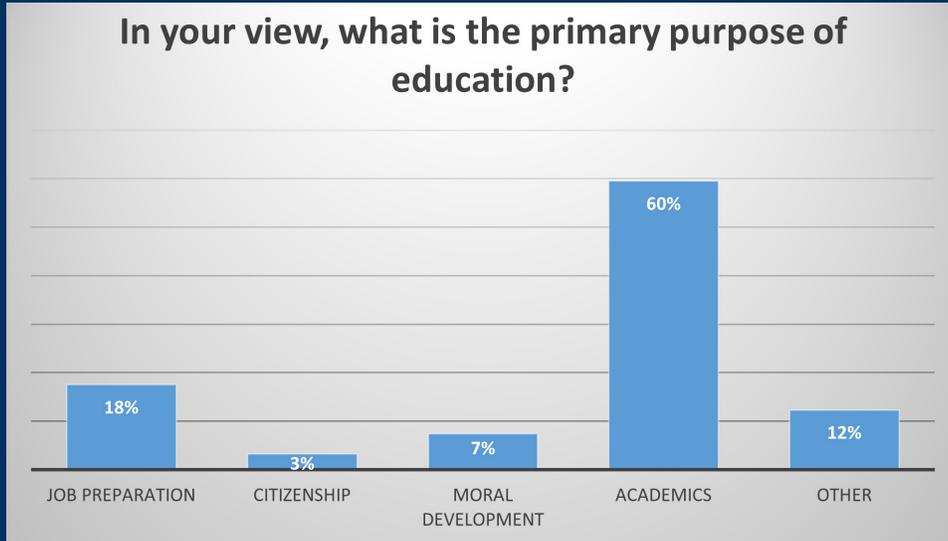
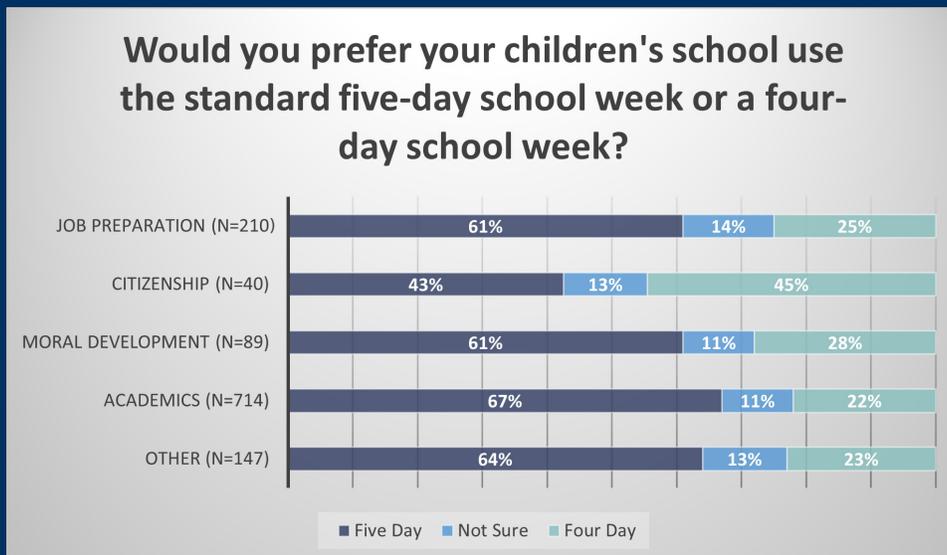


Figure 11 Preference Regarding School Meeting Pattern by Purposes of Education

Support for a four-day school week was strongest among respondents who listed "Citizenship" as the primary purpose of education.



APPENDIX – FULL SURVEY SCRIPT AND RESPONSE COUNTS

Q1. Do you currently have a child in Kindergarten through 12th grade?

1575	1. Yes
9729	2. No/All other responses

Q2. Would you prefer your child's school use the standard five-day school week or a four-day school week?

890	1. Five Day
327	2. Four Day
169	3. Undecided

Q3. If a school district moves from a five-day to a four-day school week, parents should be given the option to transfer their child to another school district.

78	1. Strongly Disagree
199	2. Disagree
625	3. Agree
288	4. Strongly Agree
133	5. Not Sure

Q4. If a school district moves from a five-day to a four-day school week, parents should be given the option to use a voucher for their student to attend a private school.

143	1. Strongly Disagree
271	2. Disagree
512	3. Agree
238	4. Strongly Agree
113	5. Not Sure

Q5. Does your student's current school use a four-day school week?

104	1. Yes
1127	2. No
16	3. Not Sure

Q6. What type of school does your child attend?

950	1. Local Public School
65	2. Charter School
173	3. Private School
40	4. Homeschool

Q7. What grade is your youngest child in?

140	1. Kindergarten
159	2. 1st
111	3. 2nd
90	4. 3rd
94	5. 4th
64	6. 5th
106	7. 6th
66	8. 7th
104	9. 8th
72	10. 9th
73	11. 10th
64	12. 11th
73	13. 12th

Q8. How many adults are in the home?

119	1. 1
943	2. 2
86	3. 3
39	4. 4
21	5. More than 5

Q9. Would you or an adult in your home be able to provide reliable childcare if your school used a four-day school week?

777	1. Yes
361	2. No
66	3. Not Sure

Q10. Would you characterize your community as rural, suburban, or urban?

- | | |
|-----|-------------|
| 303 | 1. Rural |
| 764 | 2. Suburban |
| 133 | 3. Urban |

Q11. In your view, what is the primary purpose of education?

- | | |
|-----|----------------------|
| 210 | 1. Job Preparation |
| 40 | 2. Citizenship |
| 89 | 3. Moral Development |
| 714 | 4. Academics |
| 147 | 5. Other |



5297 Washington Place | Saint Louis, MO 63108 | 314-454-0647
1520 Clay Street, Suite B-6 | North Kansas City, MO 64116 | 816-561-1777

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