

DATE: January 28, 2013 **Response February 4, 2013**

TO: Superintendent and Members of Lake Superior Independent School District 381

FROM: Mark Broin

SUBJECT: Four Day School Week

I extend my best to everyone, and also my congratulations to Shannon Fabini on her election to the school board.

PURPOSE

My purpose in writing you is the presentation of suggestions for information topics/questions for discussion in your public "4-Day School Week" meetings. I have been asked by a number of folks in the district to formulate these requests. The objective is to help provide a comprehensive and readily understood view of the circumstances surrounding the possible continuation of the 4-day school week program.

I have grouped the information requests into the following categories:

- I. Review Original Intent and Objectives for the Initial 4-Day Week Proposal
- II. District Financial Performance During the Initial 4-Day Week Program Period
- III. Current Financial Condition of District 381: Highlight Key Changes Since Start of 4-Day Week Program
- IV. District Key Education Delivery Program Changes Made as a Result of the 4-Day Week Program
- V. District Key Student Performance Indicator Changes During The Initial 4-Day Week Period
- VI. Presentation/Discussion of Current Technical Studies (Financial and Program/Student Performance), Pro and Con, on 4-Day Week Programs
- VII. Current Administration and Board Proposals on Continuation of the 4-Day Week Program

REVIEW ORIGINAL INTENT AND OBJECTIVES

I believe it is important to review the financial pressures, including the defeat of all the proposed funding options in the May 2010 referendum, that lead to the formal request by the School Board to the State of Minnesota Department of Education for approval to move the district to a 4-day week.

To the best of my recollection, the district indicated it was facing a roughly \$260,000 annual deficit if it were not allowed to implement the 4-day week. The move to the 4-day week for two years was to save the district approximately \$520,000. These savings were primarily to offset the need for layoffs, increases in benefit cost sharing and other program cuts. In addition, looming in the background was the possible need to replace some of the district's busses.

Question #1: Did the district achieve these projected total savings? Yes, we did achieve the projected savings in many areas, but not all areas.

First year savings: \$189,765
Second Year Savings: \$207,918
Total savings for the 2 years: \$397,683

Question #2: If the district did not achieve these total savings, why not and what savings in total (if any) were achieved? We did achieve savings in almost all areas as indicated in the original proposal. With any change in school and financial years comes inflation and price of goods changes. We saved in fuel, but cost for fuel increased. So, we still saved in fuel costs because we consumed less fuel. We saved in staffing, but staffing salaries and benefits increased, so we paid out more for the group at the same time saved due to a smaller group to pay. The same scenario occurred in the costs for utilities costs for 4 days versus 5 days.

Paraprofessional Wages did not see a reduction in costs. The number of paraprofessional staff has increased over the past 2 years as the needs in our student population have increased.

Question #3: If any savings were achieved, what expense categories did those savings come from over the two years? The cost savings came in the areas of staff wages, utilities, food service, transportation, and garbage. There will be a more detailed chart at the presentation.

Question #4: If the savings were then spent, what dollar portion of any savings went to what specific expense categories over the two years? All savings from the change to the 4 day school year have gone to the general fund unless directly related to a specific program such as food service.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE DURING THE INITIAL 4-DAY WEEK PROGRAM PERIOD

A brief review of the total budget numbers from the year prior to the implementation, during the two years of the implementation, and the projected total budget for the first year following the implementation would be helpful.

Question #5: What were the total budgets each school year during the implementation, as compared to the year prior to the implementation and compared to the year following the second year of the implementation?

This information is from our audited data that you can come to the district office to review.

Actual expenses: General fund

5 day: \$14,603,282

First year 4 day \$14,116,682

Second year: \$14,054,814

Question #6: During the two-year "4-day" implementation period, the district received money from the state representing its share of a federal pot of education monies granted Minnesota. How much money was received and specifically where was that money spent?

The money was spent on operating the district. Money granted to the district was not reduced to the district since educational time remained the same.

All funds \$886,712 from the federal allocation last year, the breakdown is as follows:

\$470,604 was for the Title programs \$191,784 was from food service, \$65,200 was from Dept. Medical Services, Education Jobs funds \$143,162, Carl Perkins \$15,962

Question #7: During the two-year "4-day" implementation period, did the district borrow any money to cover any operating deficit? Yes we did. The money borrowed was to cover district cash flow due to the state having borrowed money from all school districts and not paying districts in full to cover operations. This practice by the state has nothing to do with the 4 day week for our district or any district in the state.

Question #8: If the district borrowed any money, how much, at what interest rate, over what period and was the cost assessed against the taxpayers?

We borrowed \$3,265,000 at an interest rate of .693% Aid anticipation bonds. The costs were not assessed against the taxpayers; this type of debt cannot be assessed.

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Question #9: How much money did the state withhold from the district under state education funds shifting during the two-year "4-day" implementation period? How much remains outstanding, and once received is this amount enough to pay off any loans the district took out during the "4-day" implementation period? The money that is received from the state is used to pay back the loans taken by the district. It is a practice that the district and the majority of districts operate under due to the practice of the state holding back on the disbursement of funds to school districts.

Question #10: Will the district use any education shift monies, once paid to the district, to pay off any loans? The money that is received from the state is used to pay back the loans taken by the district.

Question #11: Were salaries and/or benefit costs increased over the term of the “4-day” implementation period, and if so, by how much in total dollars each year? All contracts had been frozen the first year of the 4 day school year. The contracts that have been settled all received a 2% raise in salaries for last school year and this current school year. During that same time period the benefit costs have gone up 12% in both years for all employees.

Question #12: During the implementation period, did “non-core” oriented programs receive any funding increases equal to or beyond that provided “core” (such as reading comprehension, writing/communication proficiency, basic mathematics skills) programs? There was grant money received for our shop programs. Approximately \$100,000 for the shop programs through our relationship with the Applied Learning Institute. We have received grants for other areas throughout the district as well. We received \$5000 in a grant for addressing Bullying in the district. This year we did expand our reading program with additional funding from the general fund.

CURRENT FINANCIAL CONDITION OF DISTRICT 381: HIGHLIGHT KEY CHANGES SINCE START OF 4-DAY WEEK PROGRAM

Question #13: What is the current financial condition of the district as compared to its financial condition prior to the two-year “4-day” implementation period? The district is in a positive position as compared to prior to the implementation of the 4 day school year. Also, see number 14.

Question #14: What key operating areas are stronger financially and which are weaker? Both the food service and community education programs are operating stronger. Has the condition of the district’s balance sheet improved or weakened? Yes, the balance sheet has improved. We have a stronger fund balance compared to what it could have been if not for the reductions throughout the district based on the 4 day school year.

Question #15: What has happened with regard to the projected \$1,001,433 budget deficit noted by former superintendent Minkinen in a 12/15/2011 email? The district is still in a situation in which we need to be cognizant of our expenses compared to our revenues. We have deficit spent the last two school years to keep programs and staff in the district. The costs in all areas have increased and in order to balance our budget cost savings measures will need to be addressed. The district put off expenses such as roof repairs and bus purchases. We could have reached the \$1 million deficit had the district spent in all the budgeted areas.

DISTRICT KEY EDUCATION DELIVERY PROGRAM CHANGES MADE AS A RESULT OF THE 4-DAY WEEK PROGRAM

Question #15: What specific changes in the methodology for delivering education instruction programs to students has changed during two-year “4-day” implementation period, and why? The most evident change has been in the schedule. The students continue to receive the same or more amount of time that they received prior to the 4 day school year. The students are with the teacher for a longer amount of time continuously which allows for time for labs, time on projects, longer time to develop dialogue in the classroom and time to receive individualized teacher attention. In addition, this coming year schedules are being designed to address the students that are in need of assistance in the critical areas of reading and math.

Question #16: Specifically address which changes have been positive and which have been negative, and the reasoning for each assessment. See the response in number 17.

Question #17: Please contrast these changes with methodology that might be in place with a traditional 5-day week. The changes stated were not in the 5 day school year due to increased time provided during the day during the 4 day school year. The approach for next year is to provide time during the day for more prescribed student assistance. In comparison the time during study hall is something that could be replicated during the 5 day school year. The longer class time for labs, time on projects, longer time to develop dialogue in the classroom and time to receive individualized teacher attention is something unique to the 4 day week that would be lost during the 5 day. The time lost from school on Fridays due to travel for athletics, student appointments, or time for school group meetings would be a negative change moving to the 5 day school year. The lost time in the classroom would be in a 5 day school year where it is not lost on Fridays in the 4 day school year. A negative for the 4 day school year is the longer day in the winter with less day light hours at home for students. Based on student, staff, and parent surveys, they like the current school year model and wish to continue the 4 day school week. This information will be presented at the informational meetings. In addition, AEOA is using the welding shop at THHS to provide welding courses for the community that would be lost in a 5 day week model.

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DISTRICT KEY STUDENT PERFORMANCE INDICATOR CHANGES DURING THE INITIAL 4-DAY WEEK PERIOD

Fundamentally, the viability of maintaining a “4-day” week depends upon whether or not student performance, as measured by standardized testing, has improved, stayed the same or deteriorated since the “4-day” implementation period began.

Question #18: How have students overall, and at each school and grade level within each school, performed annually under Minnesota/Federal standardized testing since the year prior to implementation of the “4-day” school week? This information can be found on the MDE web site under Data Center >data for parents and educators

Question #19: How have high school students performed annually on the SAT, ACT and College Board tests since the year prior to implementation of the “4-day” school week? What are the average scores in each year? The ACT data for a 5 year trend has our students above the state average every year in all categories. The ACT is the test that our students take for area universities.

Question #20: What are the graduation rates during each year of the “4 day” school week program, as compared to the year prior to the implementation of the “4-day” school week? Compared to other prior years? The graduation rate dipped below the state average in 2008 and then has been above the state average from 2009-2011 with the rate of 88.5% in 2011 (info from MDE web site). Looking at the data we stayed about the same after the first year of implementation and rose in 2011.

Question #21: How do attendance records compare during the “4-day” school week program versus the year prior to the implementation of the “4-day” school week? Compared to other prior years? For the second year of the 4 day school year 2011- 2012 we had an attendance rate of 95. For the first year of 4 day week 2010 -2011 attendance rate of 94.56; the last three years of the 5 day school week attendance rates: 2009/2010 – 93.59; 2008/2009 – 94.17; 2007/2008 - 94.29. Overall, we stayed at about the same attendance rate according to MDE. There was an increase during the first two years of the 4 day week.

Question #22: Has the frequency of free school lunch program qualified recipients increased during the term of the implementation of the “4-day” school week versus the year prior to the implementation? Compared to other prior years? The qualified lunch recipient for the free or reduced program depends strictly on our student population. The change to the 4 day week has no relation to the amount of students that meet the qualifications. So, the comparison to other years is a straight comparison of our population. For our district the percentage has stayed at 32% for the last three years and according to MDE we are at 34.2% for 2012. Due to the economy there has been an increase in this group nationally.

Question #23: Have transportation costs increased, remained the same or decreased during the term of the implementation of the “4-day” school week versus the year prior to the implementation? Overall the costs due to gas prices the costs have increased. But since the district is operating under the 4 day school year we are actually saving money as compared to operating under a 5 day school year in gas consumption and wages.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION OF CURRENT TECHNICAL STUDIES (FINANCIAL AND PROGRAM/STUDENT PERFORMANCE), PRO AND CON, ON 4-DAY WEEK PROGRAMS

Question #24: Can you provide additional information on the results of studies done regarding 4-day school weeks, and other forms of shortened school weeks, with regard to pros and cons of student performance and financial operating benefits/problems? The primary reason for going to a shortened week according to research, see next response, has been to meet budget concerns. So, it is a pro to move to a 4 day week to meet the budget concerns and continue to be able to provide programming along with having the staff available for students. Some cons are the longer day, issues for day care for parents, scheduling Fridays for families, and shorter evenings at home. These are not the only issues, but some that have come up in the research. For our district the same issues are present, but from our surveys these issues have not materialized for the majority into a reason to move back to a 5 day week. Families have indicated that they have adjusted to the new schedule and have enjoyed the family time on Fridays along with the time to make appointments etc. Another pro is that both students and staff have reported morale is higher with the 4 day schedule.

Question #25: Is Lake Superior Independent School District 381's experience consistent with the results of these studies, and, if not, why?

Research from: Anderson, Mark (2012). *Does Shortening the School week Impact student Performance? Evidence from the Fur-Day School Week.* P. 22.

In a time of tough budget situations for most public school systems, a variety of cost-saving measures have been adopted. To relieve financial pressures, a growing number of smaller and more rural school districts are switching from the traditional Monday through Friday school week to a four-day-week schedule. One concern, however, is that student academic performance may be compromised by such a switch. The results presented in this paper illustrate that academic outcomes are not sacrificed under the four-day week; in fact, we provide some evidence that math and reading achievement scores in elementary schools actually improve following the schedule change.

Below research is from the National Conference of State Legislatures with the link to the research:

<http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/educ/school-calendar-four-day-school-week-overview.aspx>

Four-Day School Weeks

Overview

With strapped state budgets and alluring promises of significant reductions in overhead and transportation costs, the four-day school week has been an increasingly attractive option for legislators seeking to cut education costs. For small, remote school districts, instituting a four-day school week may provide a savings by reducing transportation, heating, and staff costs. Supporters of the shortened week also boast of improved morale and increased attendance (by both students and teachers); open Fridays for sporting events and doctor appointments, and more time to spend with loved ones. Opponents of the four-day school week cite problems with long, exhausting class days and finding day care for children whose parents work outside the home. Additionally,

educational experts worry longer weekends could lead to a regression in learned concepts while also making it more difficult to offer elective classes. However, the jury is still out on many of these issues, as there is a lack of comprehensive studies.

Yes, the district's experience with results of studies has been met. The research above describes the Lake Superior School District as a district in which the 4 day model is designed to address budget concerns. Through implementation of the 4 day school year, the district has realized savings that have in turn saved staff and programs. In the area of student performance, the students have not fallen from the trend of the district. The first year of the 4 day week there was a significant increase in growth followed by a decrease in the second year (MDE web site).

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CURRENT ADMINISTRATION AND BOARD PROPOSALS ON CONTINUATION OF THE 4-DAY WEEK PROGRAM

Question #26: What is the current position of the administration and the school board regarding requesting a continuation of the 4-day week from the State of Minnesota Department of Education? **The position of the school board is to apply for a continuation of the 4 day school year.**

Question #27: What are the specific financial justifications and the specific education outcome measurements that support the position the administration and the school board wish to pursue? **Financially, the savings that have been realized through operating on the 4 day school year will be gone if or when the district returns to a 5 day school year. The district will have to make substantial reductions in all areas to recognize the 4 day school year savings in moving back to a 5 day school year. Educationally, the district will continue to provide the best programming to the students in the district. We have a great staff that provides our students with a fine education. Time in front of the students will remain the same. Operations will be changed due to shortened class times in a 5 day week. The adjustment of schedules will need to be reviewed to provide assistance to students in need and will be done**

Question #28: What are alternative strategies the school board may be considering? **The board is asking the administrative team to provide them with ideas on efficiency and effectiveness for the district. They were asked if there are any areas that cannot be looked at for consideration when looking at reductions and they stated there were none. They are aware that the district needs to balance the budget and cannot continue operating under a deficit spending model.**

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Thanks for your time, and any efforts you can make to thoroughly address these questions. I would rather you had the “heads up” opportunity to consider responses before the meetings, so you can prepare your general presentation to address as many as possible.

If you can provide your answers to me prior to the scheduled meetings, I would be most appreciative

If you have any questions of me, please call.

Sincerely,

Mark Broin

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