**Argument Introduction**

1. In your opinion, what is the definition of an argument? Give one sentence.



2. Review the title. What do you believe may be the two opposing views in this article?

**What If Students Only Went to School Four Days a Week?**

An increasing number of rural districts are moving away from the five-day model.

Kathryn Haake / AP

[**HAYLEY GLATTER**](https://www.theatlantic.com/author/hayley-glatter/)**, MAR 20, 2017**

3. Why do you believe the author uses statistical data? Why would they choose to relay this information first?

Barring unexpected closures, students enrolled in San Francisco Public Schools will have [seven](http://www.sfusd.edu/en/news/calendars/academic-calendar.html) three-day weekends this school year; there are [five](https://www.hartfordschools.org/files/Calendars/Last_Day_PD_Update_061516.pdf) three-day weekends on the Hartford Public Schools calendar for 2016-2017; and Atlanta Public Schools students are scheduled to have [three](http://www.atlanta.k12.ga.us/cms/lib/GA01000924/Centricity/Domain/10264/20160502%20student%20calendar%20201617.pdf) three-day weekends this year. In Bonners Ferry, Idaho, however, students can plan for [29](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4DKC7IiqIE7MmZqZWNqWkNicVk/view) three-day weekends.

Boundary County School District—which includes Bonners Ferry—is one of the increasing number of rural districts adopting a four-day school-week model. Especially popular in the Mountain West region, 88 districts in Colorado, 43 in Idaho, 30 in Oregon, and nearly half of those in Montana are on the schedule, according to a new Brookings [analysis](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/03/03/a-troubling-contagion-the-rural-4-day-school-week/). In most cases, instead of coming in on Friday, students spend longer hours at school Monday through Thursday, with the end goal being that the new schedule will not only save the schools some money, but also allow teachers to collaborate more and students to receive more extracurricular enrichment. However, educational outcomes from the four-day switch have proved inconclusive, and the cost-cutting hypothesis has largely been disproven, according to Paul Hill, a professor at the University of Washington Bothell and a co-author of the Brookings piece and a [companion paper](http://www.rociidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ROCI_4DayWeek_Final.pdf) on the same topic.

4. What conclusion has been attributed to Dr. Hill?

I spoke with Hill about why districts may elect a four-day model, the trend’s trajectory, and what this means for children. Our conversation below has been slightly edited for length and clarity.

5. Consider logos, ethos, and pathos from last years’ studies. Which one best fits with the author’s choice to include an interview from Dr. Hill. Explain your reasoning.

**Hayley Glatter**: I understand why a district would be compelled to give the four-day model a try if the school board thought it would result in some savings. But as you wrote in the Brookings piece, that's actually not the case, and many districts decided to go to the model after the cost-savings idea was debunked. Why do you think they still tried it?

**Paul Hill**: It’s one of those things where people think they can do what others didn’t. They hope to save money even if the odds are low. But there are two other reasons people go to it: At least initially, I think superintendents were enthusiastically thinking they could find a way to get more time for teachers to collaborate and maybe actually improve instruction. But the other was that teachers and families with stay-at-home moms and so on were all pretty glad to have that one day extra on the weekend where they could do things like take their kids to the doctor. So it was a combination of hope for academic benefits and real family and quality-of-life benefits.

**Glatter**: It sounds like a lot of those quality-of-life benefits are more adult-centric rather than child-centric.

**Hill**: Well, practically all of them are. You can see where children of fairly privileged families said, “Oh here’s my chance to take my kid to the college-prep course or on a tour or to get involved in an enrichment project of some kind.” The kids could come out fine from that, but what we’re concerned about are two sets of kids. One, little kids who were, because of the way four-day weeks were structured, going to school a lot longer days; it wasn’t clear to anybody that they were able to handle that. Secondly, the kids of poorer families or families who weren’t two-earner families where the kids might be at loose ends on the fifth day. And we were particularly concerned in Idaho, where we were studying, about the recently settled-out migrant families, of whom some districts had a lot, where there was really no structure of any kind in the neighborhoods where those kids lived. I’m a political scientist, and I’m always wary of a situation where groups of people can make decisions in their interest and exclude the interest of others, and the big issue in education is always: Will adults make a deal that suits them but doesn’t help kids? I’m afraid that’s the case here, or it can be.

6. Summarize the argument presented in this answer. Do you believe the evidence presented is convincing? Why or why not?

**Glatter**: What is it about rural districts, specifically in the Mountain West, that makes them more likely to adopt this model?

**Hill**: Initially, the cost-saving thing was very attractive. ... A lot of them have kids that are in fairly remote places and have big busing issues, so they thought they could save money on buses and the like. And they were having financial trouble because not only was state funding in the periods after the Great Recession falling, but so was federal funding for rural areas. So they were concerned about it.

But, it’s funny, because you talk to superintendents about it and they knew they couldn't save money on teacher salaries because those were already under contract. So there’s no cut to be made there, and the only cut they could hope to make was to run buses less and pay ancillary, hourly help for less time. But the school runs longer, so that the hourly help is around more, and maybe you need to feed little kids in the afternoon a second time. Very few places got much help.

7. A well-designed and thoughtful argument considers both sides. How is this illustrated in the article?

But why it’s spread so fast, I really don’t know, except the explanation given to me by superintendents is that now they’re having to offer four-day weeks in order to hire any teachers at all. Teachers are saying, “Why would I go to a five-day-a-week, rural district, if I can come to you?” And furthermore, it’s a way to take teachers who might prefer to work in an urban district, everything equal, but say, “Well, that rural thing doesn't sound bad.” So the explanation we were getting was a teacher labor-market issue.

**Glatter**: Do you think this type of schedule could ever catch on in more urban areas?

**Hill**: I doubt that. It is interesting because there are private schools in urban areas that are designed on four-day weeks, but I think the pushback in urban areas from all the parents who would have hellishly new child-care issues would be pretty great. I think that newspapers and other interests would make the argument, “Why are you de-contenting the public schools?” And that would be very difficult to survive. But in a rural area where these arrangements are not terribly public and can be made pretty quietly, I don’t think it’s hard to make them.

**Glatter**: And you noted in the study that the actual education outcomes resulting from the switch to the four-day week are kind of inconclusive in the short-term and might only be seen years from now. Have there been any predictive indicators that have emerged since the study was released that might paint a clearer picture?

8. How does the author help Dr. Hill to further bolster, or strengthen, his argument?

**Hill**: Not that I know of. The only thing that we’re hearing is that the state test scores don’t look any worse than they ever did. But that’s a very slippery yardstick. For one thing, everybody knows that one class is different from another, so how much difference would be enough to bother you? And a lot of the people saying this are in localities that have a fairly changing population. I think the answer is that nothing has stuck out to the educators to the point that it panics them, but they have no idea whether this is doing good or bad. And they won’t really know until they look at long-term indicators which are problematic: the rates at which kids get admitted to college, where they go, whether they can get credit without remediation, whether they drop out. Those are the big issues that rural areas have struggled with already. And it’s very unlikely the four-day week is going to make that better. And if anything it might make that worse.

**Glatter**: Anything we didn’t get to that you’d like to add?

9. What do you believe is the author’s opinion regarding the topic at hand? Explain your reasoning.

**Hill**: Even if it doesn’t seem to do much harm, it’s kind of a step in the wrong direction in that rural areas need to do a lot better for getting their kids prepared for college and work. So the status quo’s not good news. The other thing that I mentioned in the paper was that some localities looked at that and said, “If we can do the same thing in four days, what could we do for five days if we worked harder?”

This is something that’s happening, nobody’s really evaluating it, nobody’s asking what should be the minimum required if somebody's going to do it. The states are just letting it happen, and it’s unfortunately going to be very hard to reverse because it’s one of those adult-benefit things that you can’t roll back.

10. Consider the topic/issue at hand. How could the conclusion drawn by Dr. Hill and presented by the author, Hayley Glatter, be strengthened? Write your ideas below.