

Creativity From Necessity: A Practical Toolkit for Leaders to Address Teacher Shortages

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Case Study

How Village Tech Moved to a 4-Day Instructional Model

Context

Village Tech Schools is a public charter school serving students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in Duncanville, Texas. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, like many schools in the country, Village Tech initially went fully online. As schools started to reopen, the state of Texas provided each local education agency (LEA) with the flexibility to change calendars and schedules.

Rather than moving to a traditional hybrid approach, Village Tech stepped back, reflected, and designed a model that would increase teacher flexibility and allow for a more robust professional development and collaboration approach. Especially since Village Tech's leadership was not satisfied with the effectiveness of half-day Wednesdays, as they did not fully meet teacher or student needs, Village Tech decided to officially transition to a 4-Day Instructional Model.

Advice From Village Tech Schools

Create a Vision

Create a vision for your model that is anchored in your core principles and values, as this will drive your decision-making.

Cement Partnerships

To enhance this model, consider cementing partnerships with local community organizations to provide students with extracurricular options on Fridays.

Plan for Stakeholder Engagement

COVID-19 created conditions where 50% of the student body chose online school. Under different conditions, Village Tech recommends creating a robust stakeholder engagement process that includes staff, families, and the local community.

Control the Narrative

If you want to consider student intervention options on Fridays, be mindful of how you title your model and how you communicate it with stakeholders. Village Tech's leader stated, "Fridays off for students boxed us in a bit."

Collaborate Cross-Functionally

Collaborate with human resources, payroll, and operations teams to plan for unique challenges (e.g., non-exempt staff compensation and schedules).

Impact on Stakeholders

Staff Impact

- Longer school day Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
- Completely off/duty-free every other Friday.
- Twice a month, on Fridays, teachers engage in professional development in the morning block and grade-level collaboration time in the afternoon.
- This 4-Day Instructional Model shift translated to 27 total professional development days per year and 10 fewer work days per year for teachers at the same salary level.

Students and Family Benefits

- Longer school day Monday through Thursday; decreased need for after-school care services.
- Off every Friday, providing time for family, student jobs/internships, extracurricular activities, rest, and/or homework.

Funding

Texas provides LEAs with options for how to structure their academic calendar based on instructional days or instructional minutes. Village Tech designed its calendar based on instructional minutes, allowing it to lengthen its school day (Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.) while receiving full funding from the state.

Results

In the past two years, Village Tech has observed both qualitative and quantitative results, supporting the continuation of its model.

Qualitative

- In Village Tech's annual survey, overwhelmingly (95%+), staff, students, and parents wanted to keep Fridays off, with parents noting their appreciation for the longer school day.
- There is a lot of positive staff energy around the new model; when you walk around the campus on Thursdays, you hear, "It is a Village Tech Friday!"
- In terms of perception, the leadership team noticed an overall productivity increase, saying, "Fridays can tend to be unproductive; when you truncate the week, people express being focused and working hard during the four days. They know Thursday night comes around and you can breathe."

Quantitative

- Academic gains were made in the first year of implementation: Village Tech improved reading performance, which was its stated priority for the year. Specifically, the reading aggregate improved by 12%.
- Staff retention increased by 15%.

Considerations

If you are pondering this strategy, think through the following considerations during your decision-making process:

- Requires shifts in how a community thinks about instructional time from days of attendance to minutes (which may result in fewer days of attendance but equal minutes).
- Family support and staff impact:
 - If Fridays off are not structured, students may not be mentally stimulated or engaged on these days, and families may be tasked with arranging additional child care.
 - If you plan on providing guidance to families for Fridays off, this will require planning from staff, arranging community partnerships, and providing resources.
- School or network ecosystem impact:
 - Shifting the academic schedule will impact functions across the board. It will take energy, time, and effort to collaborate with different functions that support operations and student success to ensure alignment and minimize unintended consequences.
- Lack of an emerging research base of quantitative evidence:
 - There are small pilots happening at schools nationally, but not yet a large enough sample to generate significant quantitative evidence to support this model.

Resources for the Field

[Academic Calendar](#)

[Academic Calendar Survey](#)

[Student Weekly Schedule](#)

[Professional Development Calendar](#)

[Sample Professional Development Agenda](#)