

Texas Public School Offers 4-Day School Week

On the 12th of January, Olfen ISD, a small rural K-8 school district near San Angelo, approved what is believed to be the first 4-Day school week calendar by a Texas public school in modern times. All members of the board of trustees in attendance voted unanimously to approve the unorthodox calendar proposed by their Superintendent, Gabriel Zamora. Although other states have public schools that operate using this format, Olfen ISD is believed to be the first school in Texas to announce that they will take advantage of the flexibility created this past legislative session to this extent. Prior to this school year, public schools in Texas were obligated to provide 180 instructional days (waivers were sometimes approved that allowed districts to offer less than the 180 days). Under the new guidelines, schools must now offer a minimum of 75,600 minutes. Olfen ISD intends to provide 160 instructional days that total over 77,000 minutes with the equivalent of two bad weather days built into the minutes.

Olfen ISD's version of what they have coined the "4-Day Option" allows students who meet locally developed criteria to legally choose to take the designated optional days off. Parents who depend on a normal school week as a form of childcare will not be affected as the school and all of its staff will continue to operate five days per week. The district plans to offer tutoring and enrichment activities on the designated optional days. Local parents whose schedule is complimented by the additional day off, or who have the means to send their children to private lessons (piano, art, etc.) will benefit from a school district that can better accommodate their individual preferences. Zamora spent countless hours debating the pros and cons with staff, parents, and board members prior to deciding that his "4-Day Option" calendar would greatly benefit the district.

Mr. Zamora stated, "There is a real feeling of excitement among Olfen ISD's staff and students. We are continually brainstorming for new ideas to implement due to the flexibility the "4-Day Option" will provide. The enrichment/tutoring day will allow us to provide extended one on one tutoring on a weekly basis for students requiring the additional assistance. It also means that on the optional day we will be able to better involve members of the surrounding communities in providing enrichment activities such as: karate, leatherworking, pottery, tumbling, etc. These types of enrichment activities are difficult to implement for a rural district such as ours, but now the possibilities are unlimited. I'm honored that since my arrival in May of 2015 our school board has displayed continuous faith in my abilities to lead this historic district. The "4-Day Option" may not be practical for the majority of Texas school districts, but in Olfen it is an excellent fit", Zamora said.

Olfen ISD's 2016-2017 "4-Day Option" Calendar and a list of frequently asked questions can be found at www.olfenisd.net. Olfen ISD provides transportation to students in Ballinger, Paint Rock, San Angelo, and the surrounding communities. The single campus K-8 district is known as "The Small School with a Big Heart", and they are currently accepting applications for transfer students. Olfen ISD will continue to offer a traditional five day school week for the remainder of the current (2015-2016) school year. Interested individuals may contact district officials with inquiries, or for information on joining the Mustang Family at 325-442-4301.