

## Swink School converts to four-day school week

By Amber Hanneken  
Staff Writer

SWINK — Four-day school week — for some students going back to school this week those words sound like a dream, but in the small town of Swink, nestled between Fort Towson and Valliant, it is a reality.

Students in the first through eighth grades at Swink School — a kindergarten through eighth grade dependent school — will be attending classes from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday. On Fridays, the school is teaming up with the Boys and Girls Club in Hugo for an optional activities day called Enrichment.

State law recently changed for public schools to an hours per year requirement instead of a days per year requirement. Some schools have added 10 to 15 minutes to their school days in order to get out a few days earlier in the summer, but administrators at Swink saw a different opportunity.

“(We decided) to get more on task instructional time with our kids without short changing them a field trip or an educational opportunity like a small school typically has,” Superintendent Ed Kennedy said. “(The new requirements) gave us the opportunity to go with four days of instructional time and extend that time to meet the state requirements, then move our electives, enrichment activities and

fun things to Fridays where they don’t cut into instruction.”

Because of the extra hour of instruction Monday through Thursday, Fridays will be an optional day for students. Kennedy thinks that most students, especially the younger ones, will attend Friday Enrichment for a number of reasons. Parents who work will not have to find another child care alternative as Fridays operate like a normal school day including bus transportation and lunch. Kennedy said the activities are also going to be fun and interesting so that students will want to attend.

“What we’re finding is that the kids are making comments like, ‘this sounds fun, this sounds neat,’ and I’m talking about the older kids,” Kennedy said. “I’ve had three or four different older kids ... that came up to me and made comments about being excited about the Enrichment on Fridays.”

The idea for the change in schedule came to a head at the June board meeting after Kennedy and the previous superintendent Mark Bush, now retired, had discussed the idea.

“We threw the proposal on the table. The board was interested and asked us to do a parent focus group,” Kennedy said. “We first met with the teachers to make sure that they were supportive of it; we then had a parent focus group. Some parents came in and we discussed it with them and with some students and then started



Photo Courtesy / Swink School

**STUDENTS AT SWINK SCHOOL** work in the new computer lab on the first day of classes, Wednesday. The school recently converted to a four-day 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. school week to give students more instructional time. Fridays are optional but include enrichment activities. Pictured: Joey Smith, Nathan Jennings, Chas Tillman, Destiny Wynn, Jerilynn Baskins, Chance Donaldson, Shana Ball, Kaylee Abbott and Summer Smith.

talking to other school administrators across the state.”

Kennedy said that the teachers are excited for the change because they will get more instruction time with their students where in the past lessons could be cut short, now there will be room for more project-based learning. He compared it to the block-scheduling model that some schools are converting to around the country where classes are alternated each day in order to get larger blocks of time for each subject. Though some

parents were resistant to the idea at first, after explaining that the changes would give students more instruction time and they would not have to make special arrangements on Fridays, they were also excited.

After getting the go ahead from the school board, teachers and community, Kennedy approached the Boys and Girls Club for help because they couldn’t do it all on their own. The partnership with the Boys and Girls Club is a mutually beneficial

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one, Kennedy said. By partnering, the school and the non-profit club can apply for various grants.

“It opens up a lot of grant opportunities for us that otherwise they would have to apply for individually or we would have to apply for individually,” he said. “And grant agencies for the federal government really love to see partnerships and successful partnerships because it lets them know the money is going further than just one organization.”

This Friday, students will be spending the day at the club.

“They will be able to play at the computers; do the educational games through there and use the Internet. They’ll be able to play in the game room, which has got the pool tables and the air hockey table,” said Susan Tate, who serves as activities director for the Friday Enrichment program and a teacher. “It’s stuff that they would not have the option to do at school, so that’s a big thing for them.”

Next Friday, they have planned a Hawaiian luau at the school with water games and refreshments. Tate said that although the activities are fun, they also hope to teach the students something.

“We can talk about where a luau is usually held,” she said. “That gives them some education that they might not have gotten otherwise. We’re also taking them to the Choctaw County Fair on Sept. 11, we’re taking them to the Deer Festival the second week in October and we’re going to the Oklahoma City Expo one Friday.”

The students will be able to participate in programs through the Boys and Girls Club and once the new building and swimming pool is installed, they’ll be able to use those facilities. Because Swink is the only school going to the four-day a week schedule, the group will be taking advantage of the facilities when they are otherwise not being used since other children will be in school.

“One of the things we’re excited about in expanding out to Swink is to bring those kids in to participate in the swimming pool, participate in the club, even extending some of our proven Boys and Girls Club programs to them,” Boys and Girls Club Director Brad Greer said.

Other schools are interested to see how Swink’s method will play out to possibly incorporate it into their curriculums in the future.

“A lot of people don’t know where Swink is, but a lot of people are starting to look and ask questions and find out,” Kennedy said. “We really have people at the state department level and superintendents from around the state that are looking and wanting to know what’s going to happen ... so what I’ll do after we make this year work, we’ll have all of our teachers consult with the school districts and help them figure out a way that they can do a four-day school week as well.”

Pre-kindergarten students and kindergartners will continue an 8 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. five-day school week.

“They’ll be continuing to stay five days a week because that longer day is a lot to ask of a 3-, 4- or 5-year-old,” Tate said.

For the kindergarten or pre-kindergarten student who needs to wait until 4 p.m. for an older sibling or ride, an after school program is available that includes snacks.

“As a school administrator there are many rules and regulations to follow and many policies to set,” Kennedy said. “In the end, however, I will always do what I feel is in the best interest of that particular child at that moment in their lives. I think this is in keeping with the spirit of Swink Schools and what Mr. Bush and his faculty have established in recent years. At this point, we feel the four-day school week is in the best interest of our children and our community.”