

*This opinion is nonprecedential except as provided by
Minn. R. Civ. App. P. 136.01, subd. 1(c).*

**STATE OF MINNESOTA
IN COURT OF APPEALS
A25-1984**

In Re the Custody of the Children of:

Matthew Prescott Beale, petitioner,
Respondent,

vs.

Sara Elizabeth Aase,
Appellant.

**Filed September 14, 2026
Affirmed
Smith, Tracy M., Judge**

Ramsey County District Court
File No. 62-FA-17-2387

Matthew Prescott Beale, Bethel, Minnesota (self-represented respondent)

Matthew L. Fling, Minneapolis, Minnesota (for appellant)

Considered and decided by Johnson, Presiding Judge; Smith, Tracy M., Judge; and
Bentley, Judge.

NONPRECEDENTIAL OPINION

SMITH, TRACY M., Judge

In this parenting-time modification dispute, appellant mother Sarah Elizabeth Aase argues that the district court erred by not considering respondent father Matthew Prescott Beale's motion to modify parenting time to be a de facto motion to modify custody and that father failed to satisfy the requirements to modify custody. In the alternative, mother

argues that the district court erred by awarding father excessive parenting time and by modifying child support. We affirm.

FACTS

Mother and father have two children together, ages eight and nine at the time of the district court order at issue. In June 2019, following the parties' stipulation, the district court filed findings of fact, conclusions of law, and an order awarding joint legal custody to the parties and sole physical custody to mother, subject to a parenting-time schedule. Father's parenting time consisted of every Tuesday from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., every other weekend from Friday at 4:00 p.m. to Sunday at 7:00 p.m., and Thursdays from 4:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. on the weeks father did not have weekend parenting time.

In October 2021, father filed a motion asking, among other things, that the district court modify the parenting-time schedule. In November 2021, the district court filed an order partially granting father's motion, modifying the parenting-time schedule. The November 2021 order did the following:

- Maintained father's parenting time every other weekend and every Tuesday from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Increased father's weekend parenting time to Friday at 4:00 p.m. to Monday morning at school drop off or 9:00 a.m. when no school.
- Added overnight parenting time on Thursdays during the summer during the week when father did not have weekend parenting time and maintained father's parenting time on Thursday from 4:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. during the school year.

In August 2024, father filed a motion seeking modification of custody to joint physical custody. In September 2024, the district court denied father's custody-modification motion, maintaining the then-existing November 2021 parenting-time schedule.

In September 2025, father filed a motion seeking modification of parenting time, modification of child support, reimbursement for work-related childcare costs, and transfer of venue to Hennepin County. Father's proposed parenting-time modification sought a week-on/week-off schedule with transitions occurring on Monday morning at school during the school year and, if the parenting-time modification was granted, modification of child-support obligations.

Father attached an affidavit in support of his motion. Father's affidavit asserted that his proposed modification of parenting time served the best interests of the children because "[t]he proposed schedule will reduce the number of exchanges between the households," reduce stress related to short visits, and allow the children to participate in more activities as they get older. Father asserted that more overnights are "developmentally appropriate" now that the children are older. The affidavit also asserted that the arrangement supports the children's spiritual development because the children attend church with father and his family during his parenting time and mother "does not support [the children's] spiritual development." Additionally, father's affidavit described that the children have been "exhibiting significant behavior issues" and have missed a significant amount of school and that father has not been effective at redirecting their behaviors due

to his limited parenting time. Father also raised concerns about the children's "unfettered access" to their mobile phones and the internet.

Mother filed a memorandum in opposition to father's motion, arguing that father's motion should be considered a de facto motion to modify custody and should be dismissed because a custody-modification motion cannot be brought within two years of a prior custody order, absent circumstances not present here. Mother filed an affidavit stating that she does not believe that a week-on/week-off parenting-time schedule would benefit the children, citing the older child's "emotional issues related to spending time at [father's] home," father's "refusal to participate in family counseling," that the children's primary residence has always been with mother, and that her home is "closer to where their friends reside" and to the children's activities. Mother's affidavit generally contends that the children's issues with behavior and school performance are not connected to father's lack of parenting time and that she has made sufficient efforts to address these concerns, such as enrolling both children in summer tutoring, and father has not offered to assist with the related transportation or cost.

In October 2025, the district court granted father's motion to modify parenting time and child support. The district court concluded that father's motion was "a request for a modification of parenting time and not a modification of custody" and applied the best-interests-of-the-child standard as provided in Minnesota Statutes section 518.175, subdivision 5(b) (2024). Additionally, the district court ordered mother to reimburse father \$1,560.54 for childcare costs and pay \$559 per month for childcare expenses and transferred venue to Hennepin County. According to mother's brief, the parties

subsequently agreed there was an error in the calculation of monthly childcare expenses, and the error was corrected by stipulation of the parties.¹

Mother appeals. The appeal was stayed pending mediation, and the stay was subsequently dissolved. Father is self-represented and did not file a brief in this appeal. This court ordered that the case be determined on the merits as provided in Minnesota Rule of Civil Appellate Procedure 142.03.

DECISION

I. The district court did not abuse its discretion by determining that father's motion was not a de facto motion to modify physical custody.

Mother argues that the district court abused its discretion by considering father's motion as a motion to modify parenting time instead of a de facto motion to modify physical custody and that grounds do not exist to modify custody.

The standard that a district court uses to address whether to modify parenting time is different from the standard a district court uses to address whether to modify custody. *Compare* Minn. Stat. § 518.175, subd. 5 (2024) (modification of parenting time) *with* Minn. Stat. § 518.18 (2024) (modification of custody). Thus, the nature of the relief sought by a movant drives the legal standard that the district court will apply to that request for relief. Generally, the “[d]etermination of the applicable statutory standard and the interpretation of statutes are questions of law that [appellate courts] review de novo.” *Christensen v. Healey*, 913 N.W.2d 437, 440 (Minn. 2018) (quotation omitted); *see Bayer*

¹ Although we do not see documentation of this stipulation in the record, the parties do not dispute it.

v. Bayer, 979 N.W.2d 507, 512 (Minn. App. 2022) (making a similar observation). But “whether a [movant’s] proposed change [in a parenting arrangement] modifies parenting time or amounts to a de facto change in physical custody is to be determined by assessing the impact of the change, not [the motion’s] label.” *Bayer*, 979 N.W.2d at 510. And a district court’s “determination of whether a proposed change [in a parenting arrangement] constitutes a de facto modification of physical custody” is reviewed for an abuse of discretion. *Id.* at 512. Accordingly, when a movant seeks parenting-arrangement-related relief, the legal question of whether the district court will apply the standard for modifying parenting time or the standard for modifying custody is driven by the district court’s underlying discretionary decision regarding whether the requested relief is to modify parenting time or to modify custody.

When a parent moves to modify parenting time rather than modify custody, the district court must grant the motion if it does not change the child’s primary residence and the “modification would serve the best interests of the child.” Minn. Stat. § 518.175, subd. 5(b). The best-interests standard requires the district court to “consider and evaluate all relevant factors” within a statutory list of 12 factors that include “the effect on the child’s well-being” and “the benefit to the child in maximizing parenting time with both parents and the detriment to the child in limiting parenting time with either parent.” Minn. Stat. § 518.17, subd. 1(a) (2024).

If, on the other hand, a motion proposes a custody modification, the standard is not simply the child’s best interests; rather, additional requirements must be met. *See* Minn. Stat. § 518.18(d). The requirement that would be relevant here is that “the child’s present

environment endangers the child's physical or emotional health or impairs the child's emotional development and the harm likely to be caused by a change of environment is outweighed by the advantage of a change to the child." *Id.* (iv).

To determine which standard applies, courts consider whether a proposed modification effectively modifies the parent with physical custody's "routine daily care and control" of the child. *Christensen*, 913 N.W.2d at 442.

In *Christensen*, the supreme court declined to establish a bright-line rule "that automatically treats a request for equal parenting time as a request to modify physical custody," *id.* at 442-43, noting that doing so would conflict with Minnesota Statutes section 518.175, subdivision 5(c), which states that "[a] modification of parenting time which increases a parent's percentage of parenting time to an amount that is between 45.1 and 54.9 percent parenting time is not a restriction of the other parent's parenting time." "In other words, a motion for equal parenting time should not be treated as a motion for joint physical custody entirely on the basis that the sole physical custodian would no longer have the majority of the parenting time." *Christensen*, 913 N.W.2d at 442. Instead, courts "should consider the totality of the circumstances to determine whether the proposed modification is a substantial change that would modify the parties' custody arrangement," considering factors such as "the apportionment of parenting time, the child's age, the child's school schedule, and the distance between the parties' homes, but these factors are not exhaustive." *Id.* at 443.

Mother argues that, under *Christensen*, father's "50/50 parenting time proposal is an increase that is substantial enough to change [mother's] 'routine daily care and control'

of the children.” Mother points primarily to the facts that the proposed parenting-time schedule results in the children’s spending “more time traveling from home to school” and “a substantial increase in their time in a child care facility” compared to the “little or no” time spent in daycare prior to the change.²

In *Christensen*, like here, the parties had joint legal custody, while the mother had sole physical custody, subject to the father’s parenting time. 913 N.W.2d at 439. The parties agreed that, during the school year, the father would have visitation every other weekend from Friday after school through Monday morning, when the father would bring the child to school, and every other week during the summer. *Id.* The father subsequently brought a motion requesting that the alternating week in the summer be extended to the entire year, asserting that the child was not doing well in school and lacked stability in the mother’s home. *Id.* The district court denied the father’s motion, concluding that his motion was a de facto motion to modify custody and that, under that standard, he had failed to prove

² Additionally, mother argues that the fact that the district court adopted father’s proposed order “without any material modification” indicates that the district court did not thoroughly consider the required factors under *Christensen*. “A district court’s verbatim adoption of a party’s proposed findings and conclusions of law is not reversible error per se” and is “generally an accepted practice,” though “it raises the question of whether the court independently evaluated the evidence.” *Schallinger v. Schallinger*, 699 N.W.2d 15, 23 (Minn. App. 2005), *rev. denied* (Minn. Sept. 28, 2005). Mother points to the fact that the parties subsequently corrected part of the order by stipulation because of mathematical errors. But by mother’s own admission, the district court made some edits to father’s proposed order, such as deleting phrases and re-numbering paragraphs. In addition, the district court made other edits throughout father’s proposed order, and, though those edits were not substantive, they indicate that the court reviewed the full order in detail. Moreover, the district court’s findings appear sufficient to allow meaningful appellate review. We are not persuaded that the order shows that the district court failed to independently evaluate the evidence.

endangerment as outlined in Minnesota Statutes section 518.18(d)(iv). *Id.* We reversed. *Id.* The supreme court granted review and reversed, upholding the district court's determination that the father's motion was a de facto motion to modify custody. *Id.* at 443. The supreme court reasoned that the father's proposed modification was "substantial," would affect half of all school days, "would change [the mother's] daily care and control of the child from nearly every school day to half of all school days," and would result in the child spending approximately two hours traveling from the father's home to school each weekday during the weeks the child was at the father's home. *Id.* at 442.

The district court here distinguished this case from *Christensen*:

In the present case, and unlike *Christensen*, Father has weekday parenting time during the school year, including Tuesday, every other Thursday from after school until 8:00 p.m.^[3] in addition to every other weekend. So, Father is already an integral part of the daily control and care of the children on those days. The parties also reside in the same school district. Father indicated that the drive to school would only increase the children's commute by approximately 10 minutes.

Based on the current circumstances, the Court finds that the current motion is a request for a modification of parenting time and not a modification of custody. Therefore, the best interests standard applies.

We see no abuse of discretion in the district court's determination. *See Bayer*, 979 N.W.2d at 512. Though some of the facts of this case are similar to those in *Christensen*, there are also meaningful differences. The apportionment of parenting time under the

³ The district court's order notes that "Father's affidavit indicates that [the parents] have informally extended [Thursday evening parenting time] to 8 p.m."

modified schedule changes from one or two evenings per week during the school year (one evening plus one alternating overnight during the summer) and every other weekend to a week-on/week-off schedule. The weekend time spent with each parent does not change under the modified schedule. Father's Monday-Thursday weekday parenting time changes from afternoon/evening parenting time on three days over a two-week period (one an overnight during the summer) to four overnights every other week.

The change certainly increases father's parenting time. But other factors discussed in *Christensen* are not present. There is no large increase in the children's commute, for example. And, as father pointed out in his motion, the children are now older and longer stretches of parenting time and more overnights are more appropriate given their involvement in extracurricular activities. The distance between the parties' homes is unclear from the record, but the district court found that the children's school commute increases by approximately ten minutes from father's house. Neither party has alleged that the children's school schedule or daily routine would be significantly changed under the new schedule. Mother's "routine daily care and control" of the children would certainly decrease during her off-weeks. *Christensen*, 913 N.W.2d at 442. But, as the district court pointed out, father already spent regular time with the children during each week of the two-week schedule, and past modifications have increased his weekday parenting time over the years.

In *Bayer*, we found no abuse of discretion in the district court's determination that a modification of parenting time from a 50/50 split to a 29/71 parenting time split *was* a de facto modification of custody, noting that the new parenting schedule would mean that

father would have “almost no interaction with the children on school days” and mother would have a “substantially more important role” in the children’s daily routines. *Bayer*, 979 N.W.2d at 512 (quotations omitted). In *Bayer*, unlike here, the parents had joint physical custody. *Id.* at 509.

In both *Bayer* and *Christensen*, the district court’s determination that a parenting-time modification constituted a custody modification was upheld as not an abuse of discretion. Though the facts in this case are somewhat comparable to those in *Bayer* and *Christensen*, the district court’s conclusion here was the opposite. Mother’s argument hinges on the factual similarity between these cases but fails to account for the deference we give to the district court’s decision, requiring that we limit our review of the district court’s application of the *Christensen* factors “to determining whether the district court misapplied the law, or delivered a decision that is against logic and the facts on record.” *Id.* at 512 (quotation omitted). And we conclude that, under the facts here, the district court’s determination does not misapply the law or go against logic or facts on the record. Again, a motion for equal parenting time does not constitute a request for de facto custody modification simply because the sole physical custodian “would no longer have the majority of the parenting time.” *Christensen*, 912 N.W.2d at 442. Because mother’s argument depends mostly on her decreased parenting time, and none of the other factors outlined in *Christensen* (children’s age, school schedule, or the distance between the parties’ homes) weigh in favor of mother, the district court did not abuse its discretion by treating father’s motion as a parenting-time motion. Therefore, it did not legally err in applying the best-interests standard.

II. The district did not err by awarding more parenting time to father.

In the alternative, mother argues that the district court abused its discretion by awarding “substantially more” parenting time to father.

Mother asserts that, even if father’s proposed modification was not a de facto custody modification, the endangerment standard still applies, citing *Braith v. Fischer*, 632 N.W.2d 716 (Minn. App. 2001), *rev. denied* (Minn. Oct. 24, 2001). But in *Braith*, one of the parents raised allegations of child endangerment and we held that “[s]ubstantial modifications of visitation rights require an evidentiary hearing *when, by affidavit, the moving party makes a prima facie showing that visitation is likely to endanger the child’s physical or emotional well being.*” 632 N.W.2d at 721 (emphasis added). Here, no party has alleged endangerment. As a result, the district court properly applied section 518.175, subdivision 5(b), and the best-interests factors outlined in section 518.17 (2024).

Mother further argues that the district court erred by failing to consider the following concerns: (1) increasing father’s parenting time to every other week is “sudden and dramatic,” (2) mother assists with the children’s educational needs, (3) father’s allegations regarding the children’s school attendance and behavioral issues as well as mother’s previous move to Crookston and relationship with her boyfriend “were inappropriate because those allegations were made by [father] as support for his” previously denied custody motion, and (4) mother has always been the children’s primary caregiver “with very little participation from [father].” Mother contends that, if the district court had reviewed the evidence, “the only conclusion it could have reached would have been a

denial of [father's] motion.” Mother does not specifically challenge any of the district court’s findings on the best-interests factors.

The arguments are unpersuasive. The district court’s order did address the concerns raised by mother within its consideration of the best-interests factors. For example, the district court explained that the proposed parenting-time schedule would result in far fewer exchanges and limit “the amount of transitions between the parties’ homes,” which the district court acknowledged “is difficult for the children” under the current schedule. The district court also noted that father’s proposed parenting schedule would “not change the children’s home, school, or community” and would allow father to be more involved in educational, extracurricular, and religious decisions. Additionally, mother cites no authority to explain why the “only conclusion” that was acceptable under these facts was to deny father’s motion. We see no abuse of discretion in the district court’s application of the best-interests standard in modifying parenting time.

III. The district court did not abuse its discretion by modifying the parties’ child support obligations.

Mother contends that, if this court reverses or remands the district court’s decision, the previously ordered child support and child obligations should be restored. Mother also argues that it is inconsistent for the district court to have “determine[d] that a parenting time modification is not substantial while simultaneously determining that the modification is substantial for purposes of determining monetary obligations.”

The district court found that its grant of father’s parenting-time motion constituted a substantial change in circumstances, noting:

Application of the child support guidelines to the parties' current circumstances results in an amount that is more than \$75 and 20% lower than Father's current child support obligation. Therefore, it is presumed that Father's current child support obligation is unreasonable and unfair. There was no evidence presented to overcome this presumption.

The district court factored in father's increased childcare costs for the school year and summer under father's proposed parenting-time schedule to make this calculation.

Mother is correct that, if we were to reverse the district court's grant of father's motion, there would no longer be a substantial change in circumstances requiring a child support modification. But, because we conclude that the district court did not abuse its discretion by modifying parenting time, we conclude that it also did not abuse its discretion by modifying child support.

Additionally, mother argues that the district court's decision is internally inconsistent because the district court determined that the proposed parenting-time modification was not "substantial" for purposes of constituting a de facto modification of physical custody but is "substantial" for purposes of child support. The argument misconstrues the standards applied to each analysis. Under *Christensen*, a modification of parenting time is not a de facto modification of physical custody when the modification is not "substantial enough" to change "the routine daily care and control" of the children—and even then, it is only part of the analysis. 913 N.W.2d at 442. The relevant question for child-support modification, on the other hand, is whether a "substantial change in circumstances" has occurred. Minn. Stat. § 518A.39, subd. 2 (2024). Child support and

parenting time are governed by different statutory provisions, and the district court appropriately applied the respective standards to each determination.

Affirmed.