



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON

children
& families

Raising Voices to Make Every Kid Count

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TO: Joint Finance Committee

FR: Charity Eleson, Executive Director

RE: Budget Paper #642 – Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Grants

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) supports the Governor's proposal to provide grants to school districts to implement four-year-old kindergarten (4K) programs. The proposal will help districts overcome fiscal barriers to establishing 4K programs in their communities.

One of the strengths of the proposal is the emphasis on collaborative community approaches to 4K delivery. Our experience working with 29 school districts to implement "community approach" 4K programs convinced us that these are win-win collaborations, helping public schools reach out to more children to help them get ready for school, and assisting community-based child care and Head Start programs to improve their early learning programs. In addition, integrating 4K into full-day child care programs helps working families take advantage of a preschool program while meeting their need for full-day services while they work.

Currently, choice and charter schools receive full funding in the first year of a 4K operation. The proposed grant program would have a similar approach for public 4K programs.

Scientific evidence is mounting about the cost effectiveness of high quality early education, both for at-risk children and for all children. Rigorous longitudinal studies show remarkable long-term benefits of early education, including better school success, lower special education rates, reduced delinquency and crime rates, improved earnings.

Recent research of pre-kindergarten programs in five states reported by the National Institute for Early Institution Research shows that state-funded preschool programs with qualified teachers produces significant gains in children's learning and development, across all income groups.

Investing in 4K is a wise investment for Wisconsin.