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# JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## **Testimony for the Assembly Committee on Education Assembly Bills 464 and 465 Thursday, Oct. 3, 2019**

Thank you Chairman Thiesfeldt and fellow committee members for holding a public hearing and giving me the opportunity to testify on Assembly Bills 464 and 465, bipartisan legislation that makes changes to our state's 4-year-old kindergarten program.

These bills, which were drafted based on the final recommendation from the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding, are being brought forward because of the impact early childhood learning can have on individuals and on our entire society.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the early years of a child's life are critical for both health and development later on in their life, mainly because of how fast the brain grows before birth and continuing into early childhood. In fact, the rate at which the brain develops between birth and the age of 3 is the fastest of any point in a person's life.

While the brain continues to develop into adulthood, research shows the changes in the first several years have a greater effect on learning, health and life success. The CDC says the right care for children, starting before birth and continuing through childhood, ensures that the child's brain grows well and reaches its full potential.

Children are born ready to learn and rely upon parents, family members and other caregivers as their first teachers. Speaking with children and exposing them to books, stories and songs is known to help strengthen their language and communication skills, which puts them on a path towards future success. As an example, babies whose parents frequently talk to them know 300 more words by the age 2 than those whose parents rarely speak to them. CAT scans show that the brains of children who have been read to are significantly more developed than those of children who have not been read to.

While it's proven that reading aloud to children helps stimulate brain development, only 50 percent of infants and toddlers are routinely read to by their parents. If we don't reach these children at a younger age, we may miss the opportunity of helping them succeed later on in their lives.

AB 464 would help us better assist those children by changing the age at which a pupil can attend a 4-year-old kindergarten.

Under current law, a child is eligible to attend a 4K program if they are 4 years old on September 1 in the year they are looking to enter school. AB 464 allows a child to attend a 4-year-old kindergarten class if they will be 4 years old on December 31 in the school year in which they propose to enter school.

In addition, a child may be admitted to the first quarter or semester of a 4K program beginning after January 1 of that school year if they are 4 years old.

We have also introduced AB 465 to help school districts afford to offer all-day 4K. More specifically, AB 465 changes how a pupil enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten is counted by a school district for purposes of state aid and revenue limits.

Under current law, a child enrolled in a 4K program is counted as a 0.5 pupil unless the program provides at least 87.5 additional hours of outreach activities. In that case, they would be counted as a 0.6 pupil.

AB 465 would allow a child to be counted as one pupil if the 4K program requires full-day attendance for five days a week.

I believe both of these bills are important because we need to be doing everything we can to give our parents and educators the tools they need to ensure all of our students can receive a quality education and be set up for success throughout their lives.

As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, speaking with children and exposing them to books, stories and songs will help strengthen their language and communication skills. The recent release of statewide test scores in Wisconsin showed that less than 40 percent of our students are proficient in reading. Those scores are much lower in some of our state's metropolitan areas.

If we can help these students become better learners, we will have a fighting chance in helping break the cycle of generational poverty in Wisconsin, which in turn will also save significant taxpayer dollars.

According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, if a child is not reading proficiently by the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, they will have a 78 percent chance of never catching up. And two-thirds of students who cannot read proficiently by the end of 4<sup>th</sup> grade will either end up in jail or on welfare.

Wisconsin has one of the highest achievement gaps in the country and the results of these tests are very discouraging as we try to address this. I do not believe that expanding 4K alone will solve the problem. We must also look at how we are teaching our children to read. But earlier childhood intervention is an essential part of any strategy to address our achievement gap.

Thank you committee members for taking the time to listen to my testimony and I hope you will support these bipartisan bills. I would like to thank the bill's Senate lead, Sen. Olsen, and his staff for all the hard work they put into these proposals. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



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**Luther S. Olsen**  
State Senator  
14th District

**TO:** Joint Committee on Education  
**FROM:** Senator Luther Olsen  
**DATE:** Thursday, October 3, 2019  
**SUBJECT:** Testimony for Senate Bill 407/Assembly Bill 464 & Senate Bill 408/Assembly Bill 465

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Thank you members of the Senate Committee on Education, Chairman Thiesfeldt, and members of the Assembly Committee on Education for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in support of SB 407/AB 464 and SB 408/AB 465.

During the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding, the Committee heard testimony regarding the benefits of early childhood education. Early childhood education has been shown to be extremely beneficial for children between the ages of 3-5. Some of these benefits include improved social skills, better academic success later on in life, an improved attention span, as well as an enthusiasm for learning.

Under current law, a child is only eligible to start four-year-old kindergarten if the child is four years old by September 1st of the upcoming school year. SB 407/AB 464 changes current law to allow children who will be turning four by either September 1 or December 31st to also be eligible to enroll and attend four-year-old kindergarten at the beginning of that school year. It will also allow children to be admitted after January 1st of the school year if the child will be four years old on January 1 or by June 30th of the school year.

School districts may choose to operate a four-year-old kindergarten (4K) program if they would like to, but they are not required to do so. For those that do opt to offer a 4K program they are included in the equalization aid and revenue limit counts as a 0.5 pupil. SB 408/AB 465 changes current law to allow 4K programs that require full day attendance to be able to count these pupils as a whole one pupil rather than a half.

Studies have shown that early years play a major role in a child's brain development, so the earlier we can begin to teach these children the better. It is our hope that by allowing kids to get a jump start on their education it will make a positive impact on their academic success and give them a head start towards a bright future.

Again, thank you for holding a hearing today. I ask for your support on SB 407/AB 464 and SB 408/AB 465 and I would be more than happy to answer any questions.

Senate Committee on Education and Assembly Committee on Education  
October 3, 2019

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
2019 Assembly Bill 465 and Senate Bill 408  
2019 Assembly Bill 464 and Senate Bill 407

**Assembly Bill 465 and Senate Bill 408:**

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) supports these bills, which change how a pupil enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten is counted by a school district for purposes of state aid and revenue limits. Under current law, a pupil enrolled in a four-year-old kindergarten (4K) program is counted as 0.5 pupil unless the program provides at least 87.5 additional hours of outreach activities, in which case the pupil is counted as 0.6 pupil. Under these bills, if the 4K program requires full-day attendance by pupils for five days a week, a pupil enrolled in the program is counted as one pupil.

**Assembly Bill 464 and Senate Bill 407:**

DPI is providing information only on Assembly Bill 464 (AB 464) and Senate Bill 407 (SB 407). The primary effect of these bills would be to expand the group of age-eligible children who could be admitted to a school district's four-year-old kindergarten (4K) program. The bills would allow children who are three years old at the time of admission, but who turn four in the time frame specified under the bill, to enroll in 4K. The bills would also create a twice-per-year point of entry for children into a 4K program. As such, the bill would create classrooms with a potential age range of three to five.

AB 464 and SB 407 do not change current law with respect to admission requirements to five-year-old kindergarten (5K) or first grade, nor do they allow for entry into 5K or first grade in the second half of a school year for children who reach the age of admission between January 1 and June 30.

Under current law, 4K programs are not mandatory. These programs are operated at the option of a school board, and parents are not required to enroll their children in these programs. This would not change under AB 464 and SB 407.

A school district that does operate a 4K program must make that 4K program accessible to all age-eligible children who reside in the school district. Likewise, under this bill, those school districts that do operate a 4K program would be required to comply with the proposed age-eligibility criteria and twice-per-year entry points into 4K. Those districts with a 4K program in operation during the 2019-20 school year would have a five-year period to plan and implement the new law in order to ensure universal access for age-eligible children by the 2025-26 school year.

The younger the child, the greater developmental difference there is within an age range. As a result, this proposal may be challenging for school districts and teachers to implement, especially at this very young age given the rapid development and changes over the course of a year. In a

multi-age classroom, teachers must account for varied student abilities, different rates of progress, and adjust to individual emotional and social needs. These needs vary significantly between the ages of three and five. Due to the multiple entry points created under these bills, three-year-old children could be joining classrooms of four and five-year-olds that are doing second semester activities and skills. Those students will have missed the first semester of skill and routine building and the resulting instruction may not be developmentally appropriate.

#### **Four and Five-Year-Old Kindergarten in Wisconsin**

All Wisconsin school districts offer kindergarten programs for five-year-old children. These 5K programs vary amongst districts, with many being full-day programs. Some school districts offer half-day programs, and many districts provide both options. Of the Wisconsin school districts who operate elementary grades, all but five offer four-year-old kindergarten to all children in their district.

Given the research around the positive impacts associated with high quality early childhood education, Wisconsin invested in 4K in public schools with a 4K startup grant that has been successful in helping districts implement new 4K programs. The grant program provides an eligible school district with \$3,000 per 4K student in year one of implementation, and \$1,500 per 4K student in year two of implementation. In 2008, 283 school districts in the state had a 4K program in place. That number grew to 319 school districts with a 4K program in 2009, the first year of the 4K startup grants. The number of 4K programs has risen every year since.

In recognition of the costs involved in providing high quality early childhood education, and the importance of such education on learning, the department's 2019-2021 budget requested 1.0 FTE funding for 4K programs that were operating for a full day. Ultimately, that provision was not included in the final version of 2019 Act 9.

It is important to expand access to high-quality early learning experiences. Careful consideration must be given to how that is done. The research is clear that high-quality early learning experiences have lasting positive academic and social-emotional impacts for children, especially when children learn with developmentally appropriate practices and through play-based approaches. These practices and approaches are the guiding principles of *The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards*.

The Department of Public Instruction regards partnerships between school districts and their community-based child care providers as critical to advancing early learning and maintaining strong, economically viable communities. There are many benefits to such partnerships and community-based approaches to 4K including: fewer transitions for students, availability of wrap-around care, care for younger siblings, and knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices. You can find video testimonials and significant information about this approach on our website at <https://dpi.wi.gov/early-childhood/kind/4k/4kca>.

In considering expansion of 4K, it is important to also keep in mind the critical role of child care programs and the role they play in supporting children, their families, and our communities. Attending high-quality child care programs prepares children to go to school and supports families who need to work. This is why DPI strongly encourages school districts to work with child care providers and keep the health of the entire early childhood community in mind when considering expanding 3K and/or 4K in their districts.

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Treasurer, Jerry Walters  
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October 3, 2019

Chairmen Thiesfeldt and Olson and Members of the Joint Education Committee:

My name is Kim Kaukl, I am the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Rural Schools Alliance (WiRSA). Our organization represents and supports over 220 members with 155 rural school districts, several CESAs, technical colleges, universities, businesses and individual members.

Our organization will be registering in support of Assembly Bill 465 /Senate Bill 408, relating to counting pupils enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten. This bill has strong support from our membership and the students that attend full day should be counted as full-day students no matter what their age. As we all have learned from the "No Time to Lose Report," early childhood learning is vital to a student's success moving forward. These are the programs that help all students start off on even footing in their educational careers. Many districts are running full-day programs and these companion bills will continue to provide needed support for these programs and will hopefully help other districts move to full-day programing.

In conclusion, WiRSA is supportive of these companion bills. With the recommendation of the Blue-Ribbon Commission on School Funding Report, along with the "No Time To Lose Report" the time is now to move this concept forward. With that said I ask that your committees support Assembly Bill 465/Senate Bill 408.

Thank you for your time and taking my written testimony into consideration.

*Kim Kaukl*

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*Strong Schools, Strong Communities*

## MMSD 4K testimony

Senator Olson, Representative Kitchens and members of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am Cris Carusi, and I am a member of the Madison Metropolitan School District Board of Education. Today, I am representing our school district, but I am not speaking on behalf of the school board.

First, thank you for introducing and supporting Assembly Bill 465 and Senate Bill 408. The Madison school district is honored to stand with the Wisconsin Rural Schools Association in supporting these companion bills, which reflect recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding.

These are bipartisan bills, but early childhood education is a nonpartisan cause that will benefit children across the state, in rural and urban districts alike. At the end of the day, full-day 4K is simply the right thing to do for kids.

In Madison, we have 53 4K sites, including 26 sites at our schools and 27 at accredited early care education sites in the community. We currently have 1,869 students enrolled in our half-day 4K program.

Since we started our 4K program in 2011, enrollment has steadily grown, with higher rates among students coming from low-income households.

Our program is seeing results. A research study from the Madison Education Partnership showed that 4K is one of our most promising equity strategies.

Not only do we see an overall increase in literacy skills for students who participate in 4k, but we also see a more significant increase for students coming from low-income households and students of color.

Early childhood education is not only proven to improve academic achievement, it can also lessen the effects of toxic stress on a young, developing brain.

For any person, the most crucial window for brain development is between ages 0 to 5. Through early intervention and trauma-informed care, early childhood education can mitigate

the harmful impact of excessive or prolonged stress by helping children learn impulse control, emotional regulation, and pro-social behavior, when the brain is most malleable.

Our 4K program—and 4K programs across the state—offer our youngest learners a chance to develop skills that set them up for success. In Madison, students not only learn their letters and numbers, but also learn how to perform self-help skills, problem solve, collaborate and interact with peers and adults alike.

Still, having 4K as a half-day program presents some barriers for our students and families. Research by the Madison Education Partnership found that students experiencing poverty are less likely to enroll in afternoon 4K, likely due to issues around transportation and the need for full-day child care.

Madison students experiencing homelessness are half as likely as their peers to enroll in 4K. Their families cite half-day 4K as a major barrier to their participation. They value, and need, the stability that full-day 4K offers.

We know we have potential for greater impact on all of our youngest students—but especially those students who need it the most—in a full-day 4K program, and we could accommodate more families through a full-day program.

When we invest in our learners early in their academic career, we see the benefits over the long term. Data from full-day programs shows this increased and lasting impact.

We ask you to support this critical equity strategy—to allow school districts across the state to proactively invest in our youngest learners, so that we can see their success in the long term.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to the need for, and power of, full-day 4K in the Madison Metropolitan School District and across Wisconsin.





"Leadership in Public School Governance"

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WISCONSIN  
ASSOCIATION OF  
SCHOOL BOARDS

TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Education  
FROM: Dan Rossmiller, WASB Government Relations Director  
DATE: October 3, 2019  
RE: SUPPORT for ASSEMBLY BILL 465, relating to counting pupils enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten.

Assembly Bill 465 would fully fund four-year old Kindergarten (4K) programs in public schools that provide full-day 4K programs for students. The WASB fully supports Assembly Bill 465.

This bill **does not** mandate that school districts operate 4K programs and **does not** mandate that all 4K programs be operated on a full-day/full-week basis. Rather, this bill makes a long-overdue change in how a pupil enrolled in a 4K program that provides a full-day/full-week program is counted by a school district for purposes of state aid and revenue limits. Under the bill, all 4K pupils would be counted commensurate with the time they spend in 4K classrooms.

Current Wisconsin law requires all school districts to offer five-year-old kindergarten and permits them to offer four-year-old kindergarten. If a school district chooses to operate a four-year-old kindergarten, it must make it available to all age-eligible students, and, like other public school grade levels, it must be provided at no cost to resident students.

A school board may provide four-year-old kindergarten by offering the program in a school building, by employing a kindergarten teacher who provides the program in a child care facility, or by providing funding to a child care facility that the facility then uses to hire a kindergarten teacher.

Under current law, in order to receive state aid, a kindergarten program, including a four-year-old kindergarten program, must include at least 437 hours of direct pupil instruction delivered by a DPI-licensed kindergarten teacher, no matter where the program is provided. A four-year-old kindergarten program may use up to 87.5 of the 437 hours for certain outreach activities.

Under the school funding formula, a school district's state aid payment and revenue limit are calculated in part based on student enrollment. Subject to one exception, a school district's ability to count a four-year-old kindergarten student for state aid and revenue limit purposes is capped at 0.5 FTE irrespective of whether that student is in school for a half-day or a full-day. However, if the 4K program provides at least 87.5 hours of outreach activities in addition to the 437 required hours of direct pupil instruction, then the school district may count each four-year-old kindergarten student as 0.6 FTE for state aid and revenue limit purposes.

Assembly Bill 465 provides that if a school district operates a full-day/full week (five days a week) 4K program, a pupil enrolled in the program would be counted as 1.0 FTE pupil. The bill defines "full-day" attendance as the length of the school day for pupils in the first grade of the school district operating the 4K program.

Under the bill, a school district that operates a 4K program for less than full-day attendance for five days per week (e.g., for half days, or full days for fewer than five days per week), would continue to count its 4K pupils as either 0.5 FTE or 0.6 FTE (with additional hours of outreach activities), as under current law.

WASB members have adopted two permanent resolutions in support of the changes made by Assembly Bill 465.

- The first resolution addresses this issue head on. It “supports legislation that would allow districts to count 4-year-old kindergarten pupils on a full-time equivalency basis according to the number of hours they are in school.”
- The second resolution “supports funding, on a full-time equivalency (FTE) basis for the purposes of state equalization aids and revenues, for all students served by the district.”

The change proposed by the bill would first be effective for a district revenue limit calculations for the 2020-21 school year, and for state general aid distributed in the 2020-21 school (using prior year data, from 2019-20).

Because state aid is paid on the basis of prior-year shared costs and enrollment data, a district would not experience an increase in state aid due to fully counting a full-day, full-week 4K student until the following year. A district would be able to immediately count such a student in its revenue limit calculation; however, because revenue limits are based on a three-year average of enrollment, it would take three years for a school district to fully realize the change in its revenue limit.

Assembly Bill 465 promotes equity and fairness among both school districts and 4K students by recognizing and funding the additional costs associated with operating full-day, full-week 4K programs. It may also incentivize some districts that currently operate half-day 4K programs to expand their programs to full-day.

There is ample evidence that investments in early childhood education produce significant returns on investment and help narrow achievement gaps by helping low-income and minority students to enter five-year old Kindergarten more “school ready” and more able to do age-appropriate and academically rigorous schoolwork.

For all these reasons we encourage your support for Assembly Bill 465.