

A Case Study on the Expansion of Four Year Old Kindergarten and The Wisconsin Forces for Four-Year-Olds Community Initiative

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Executive Summary

The rationale for promoting and expanding four-year-old kindergarten in Wisconsin is grounded in a growing body of research that shows early education improves school readiness and long-term achievement. Some research tracks over forty years of evidence on early childhood education experiences that lay the foundation for intellectual, mental health and moral development.¹ In Wisconsin, there is also evidence that parents and the larger public are interested in and committed to expanding early childhood education experiences by providing four-year-old kindergarten (4K).

This case study examines one statewide initiative, Wisconsin Forces for Four-Year-Olds (WFFF), and its four-pronged approach to advancing the expansion of 4K. Through funds from the Trust for Early Education (TEE), WFFF's approach is to:

- Inform and influence policy and legislation. WFFF works with the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Governor's Office, other state departments and key state associations to ensure legislative support, funding and policies that will assure universal access to high quality four-year-old kindergarten and promote community approaches, a collaborative community-based system to early education services in the state.
- Develop media attention. The initiative is conducting a media strategy that fuels the public dialogue, generates support, and prompts action around early kindergarten.
- Organize at the grassroots level. WFFF is expanding a community mobilization campaign that builds community voices in support of 4K and community approaches and increases the number of districts offering four-year-old kindergarten and community approaches.
- Build a constituency base. Part of the work of WFFF is to engage key bipartisan stakeholders and unlikely partners to invest in the campaign and influence public policy.

Since its inception in 2002, WFFF has succeeded in expanding four-year-old kindergarten and community approaches continue to grow. The WFFF initiative led to a number of successes that show promise for replication in other states who are considering the expansion of early kindergarten. Success and impact of WFFF is measured by the following outcomes:

- *Evidence of expansion of 4K and community approaches.* Wisconsin's four-year-old program offerings by district grew from 40% in 2001 to 50% in 2004 (from 166 districts to 208 districts). The number of four-year-olds served grew by 31%. Of

¹ Schweinhart, L. (2004) *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions*. Ypsilanti, MI, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation <http://www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject/PerryAge40SumWeb.pdf>; Institute of Medicine (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309069882/html/>

the 208 districts offering 4K, 16 of these districts use a Community Approach to providing 4K. One hundred and thirty five districts are actively exploring or expressed interest in community approaches.

- *The establishment of collaborative relationships.* Building relationships is an important aspect of establishing community approaches at both the state and local level. An illustration of the strength of these relationships at the state level is that WFFF gained the support of the governor, the state superintendent of public instruction, a number of state associations, the state's largest teacher's union and other advocacy groups. Another illustration of the power of relationship building occurs at the local level through the community approach and the collaboration of a broad range of early childhood stakeholders such as, Head Start, child care providers, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and other city and county providers.
- *Regional Coach technical assistance and facilitative leadership.* The Regional Coaches were established to "prime the pump" in communities and thereby increase the number of school districts providing four-year-old kindergarten and special education services in community settings. Regional Collaboration Coaches are assigned regions based on an existing network system set up by the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP). Coaches provide information, offer support and technical assistance to community leaders so they might implement a wider array of preschool options for young children. To date the Regional Coaches and the WFFF initiative have provided direct technical assistance to 54 communities and information to all 416 elementary school districts. Through their actions and leadership, there is demonstrable evidence that 4K expansion is happening in Wisconsin. As well, many of the regional coaches and consultants have provided the role as facilitative leaders, a role often needed when multiple agencies collaborate to form community approaches. Such facilitative leadership requires a neutral individual who is not advocating an agency perspective. Regional coaches provide this leadership in projects that have been most successful.
- *Bottom-up reform with top-down support.* The goals of WFFF are in many ways systemic in nature. The work of systems change is far reaching: getting agencies to operate in new roles, with new relationships in a new, integrative and collaborative way around thorny issues such as legislation and funding at the state level, and breaking down old barriers at the local level. None of these are simple tasks. It requires bottom-up (or local) reform with top-down (or state level) support. The best example of top-down support is the true collaboration and the coherent message voiced by key state leaders, the state's governor, the state superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction, and the heads of the Department of Workforce Development and Health and Family Services.

Evidence of bottom-up reform is demonstrated by increased awareness in local communities, the expansion of local government agency networking, and the engagement of a diverse group of public and private stakeholders.

WFFF is only in its third year, and already indicators of significant change and 4K expansion are evident. The collective efforts of maintaining collaborative relationships, building and expanding constituent support, providing evidence-based practice, communicating the impact of a system that provides quality educational experiences for young children is keeping this initiative on course.

I. Introduction and Rationale

“Parents and educators know, and research confirms, that the first years last forever. The investments we make today in our youngest citizens through community approaches to four-year-old kindergarten will shape the future of Wisconsin and our society. We must pay now through wise investments to close the gap in achievement, or we certainly will pay later in social and corrections programs.”

Wisconsin’s Chief State School Officer, Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster, made this statement in her weekly website message (December 2004). Wisconsin, like many other states, understands the impact that early childhood education has on its future and is poised to expand four-year-old kindergarten education as a result. There is unevenness in the current offerings across the Wisconsin school districts wherein less than half of the districts provide kindergarten to four year olds. There is also evidence that suggests universal four-year-old kindergarten programs are good for Wisconsin’s children, families and communities. The state superintendent understands the disparity of offerings, and she wants to change it. Fortunately for Wisconsin, she is not alone. With state level support from the governor and other related key state agencies as well as support from community and grassroots organizations, Wisconsin is well placed to expand its four-year-old kindergarten offerings across the state. Since 2002, a state level collaborative initiative has been underway to do just that. The Wisconsin Forces for Four-Year-Olds (WFFF) initiative² was launched with the support of several key state agencies, and other early childhood partners, with funding from the Trust for Early Education (TEE). The WFFF is designed to expand pre-school and kindergarten boundaries in the form of universal four-year-old kindergarten and for good reason.

Rationale

Recent research on the impact of early learning opportunities confirms that the first years are invaluable for helping children succeed later in life and are especially important in closing the gap for children from economically disadvantaged families. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study³ a landmark, long-term study of the effect of high-quality early care and education on low-income three and four-year-olds shows that adults at age 40 who participated in a preschool program in their early years have higher earnings, are more likely to hold a job, have committed fewer crimes, and are more likely to have graduated from high school. Overall, the study documented an economic benefit approximating \$17 for every one tax dollar spent on early education for at-risk children from Ypsilanti, Michigan. The bulk of the return came from lower rates of imprisonment, taxes on participants’ higher earnings, and savings from reduced

² Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners web pages at www.collaboratingpartners.com.

³ Schweinhart, L. (2004) *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40: Summary, Conclusions, and Frequently Asked Questions*. Ypsilanti, MI, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation
<http://www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject/PerryAge40SumWeb.pdf>

reliance on public assistance. This longitudinal study sends an important message to those who doubt the impact of four-year-old kindergarten. The economic return is a good investment for taxpayers, but more importantly, the return is a good investment in children, families and communities in the long run.

Early childhood programs in Wisconsin are proving to offer a good return on investment (\$1 investment yields a \$7 return)⁴ in high quality early learning experience. That's because children who participate in early learning experiences are more likely to succeed in school, less likely to need special education, more likely to graduate, less likely to end up in the juvenile justice system and more likely to enter some sort of post-secondary school than their peers who did not have high quality early learning experiences. Given this compelling research and the state's long history of supporting four-year-old kindergarten, it is not surprising that Wisconsin is eagerly pursuing the public and private, multi-agency Wisconsin Forces for Four-Year-Olds (WFFF) initiative.

The focus of this case study is the rationale, development and status of WFFF. But in order for this study to be instructive for advocates, policymakers, parents and other interested readers, it is important to place the Wisconsin case in its own context. There is a political, cultural, and historical context that distinguishes Wisconsin from other states, and it is in this context that the reader should use caution for replication. However, there are aspects of WFFF and the Wisconsin context that offer similarities in process, design and policy levers that encourage the reader to consider Wisconsin as a model to follow. Specifically, this case study focuses on the four-pronged approach to WFFF, the processes of how the WFFF initiative is organized, and it discusses the role of the key stakeholders who are making this initiative possible. Wisconsin is one of a handful of states that offers a community approach to universally serving four-year-olds, and thus its context is distinct. The following discusses this context as well as the challenges and prospects of this distinct approach.

II. The Wisconsin Case

Historical and cultural context

In order to understand the initial success of the WFFF effort, it is important to note the historical and cultural context in Wisconsin and its long history of funding public preschool programs. Four-year-olds have been attending public school in Wisconsin for over 130 years. In 1848, the state constitution called for school districts to be as uniform as practical and offer education free to all children between the ages of

⁴ Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. Robertson, D.L. & Mann, E.A. (2001). "Long-term Effects of an Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest: A 15-Year Follow-up of Low-Income Children in Public Schools." <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/cbaexecsum4.html>

four and 20 years. The first private kindergarten in the nation opened in 1856 in Watertown, Wisconsin serving children from ages two to five years. Wisconsin's first public school kindergartens opened in 1873 and limited kindergarten to four and five-year olds and used teachers with specific training in the education of young children.

Four-year-old kindergarten attendance peaked in the 1920s and then declined as schools shifted their emphasis. Eventually, kindergarten became a half-day program for 5-year-olds with some exceptions. A few districts such as Milwaukee, have maintained four-year-old kindergarten for nearly a century despite the fact that state funding was suspended between 1957 and 1984. During that time compensatory programs for educationally disadvantaged and disabled four-year-olds opened such as Head Start, Title I and special education to somewhat fill the void in many communities. Coinciding with the suspension of state funding for four-year-old kindergarten, Wisconsin experienced a surge in the number of private preschools and day cares established in the early 1980s.⁵

The state legislature renewed state aid for four-year-old kindergarten (also known as 4K) and expanded state aid for full-day five-year-old kindergarten in 1985. What sets Wisconsin a part among its peers is that the state builds funding for public 4K into the state school aid formula. School districts that collect membership aid must provide access to any four-year old child whose family is interested in the program - hence a universal program.⁶

There is a culture in Wisconsin that values public education, and with the increased awareness around topics such as readiness, equity and cost benefits of early learning opportunities, citizens of Wisconsin continue to value preschool education. This was demonstrated in a survey commissioned by an early childhood advocacy group, Wisconsin Council for Children and Families (WCCF). See Appendix B for a summary of results. The survey found that most citizens viewed early childhood education as a high priority among important issues facing the state. Of the six priorities, "making sure all children are prepared for kindergarten" ranked as third. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) indicated that providing funding to guarantee that all parents who want to enroll their children in pre-kindergarten can afford to do so, and for funding to ensure that early kindergarten classes are small and of high quality.

⁵ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2002). *Policy and Information Bulletin: Four-Year-Old Kindergarten*, Madison, WI. <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/pb/pdf/advis3.pdf>

⁶ To receive 0.5 in membership aid, a district must operate a program a minimum of 437 hours per year (175 days times 2 ½ hours per day). Of that time, 87.5 hours (20 percent) of the 437 hours may be used for outreach activities for the school staff to link to the child's primary caregivers. Additional outreach hours may be added to the minimum 437 hours to enable the district to receive 0.6 in membership aid. With the additional hours, a district annually must provide at least 87.5 hours of outreach activities in addition to the 437 hours of center-based programming. The state also supports 5-year-old kindergarten with a 1.0 membership aid to operate a full day program, equal to all other grade levels.

Conditions both promising and challenging

Political, demographic, infrastructure and other favorable conditions have contributed to the feasibility of expanding four-year-old kindergarten in Wisconsin. An increase in the state share of funding for 4K makes it more financially feasible for local districts to fund the program. Political will seems to be forming alignment as demonstrated by the fact that the governor of the state of Wisconsin is as committed as the state superintendent in making child-related initiatives a priority. For example, the governor has launched *KidsFirst*⁷, a comprehensive strategic plan to invest in children. And he has appointed a Quality Counts for Kids Task Force that is looking at rating the quality of child care providers. These initiatives reveal the state's belief in the value of quality early childhood experiences. See Appendix C for description of *KidsFirst* Agenda.

In addition to these favorable political conditions, strong economic benefits have contributed to interest in expanding 4K. In the NorthStar Economics Report⁸, a recently released study funded by the Trust for Early Education (TEE), authors researched the economic impact to the K-12 education system in the state from expanding pre-kindergarten in Wisconsin. They found that the expansion of four-year-old kindergarten would generate strong benefits for the state (e.g., reduced special education referrals, retention, teacher turnovers), and to the children and their families.

Another condition for feasibility of 4K expansion in the state revolves around infrastructure and demographics. Wisconsin has made investments in facility infrastructure to promote access to resources and information in rural and other remote locations. Regional video conferencing is one more condition that connects child care organizations, Head Start, and schools with state consultants and other resources. As well, declining enrollment in some of the state's districts has made more space available in school buildings to house early childhood and preschool programs. Simultaneously, the number of two-income families has increased dramatically along with parent demands for care for their pre-school aged children. As of 2004, 95% of Wisconsin school districts with elementary schools offer full-day five-year-old kindergarten or both full-day and half-day options. With this long-standing and high rate of commitment to five year-old programming, it is not surprising that many public schools have availed themselves to the concept of universal four-year-old programming.

Finally, with the help of outside foundation support, state and local agencies have been granted needed funds to promote advocacy and a coherent set of policy procedures around 4K programs. The Trust for Early Education is funding the WFFF initiative through the Department of Public Instruction, while the Joyce Foundation is providing

⁷ Doyle, J. (2004). *KidsFirst: The Governor's Plan to Invest in Wisconsin's Future*. (2004). Madison, WI: WDWD& the Quality Count for Kids Task Force. <http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/kidsfirst>

⁸ Belfield, C. R. and D. K. Winters (2004). The Economic Returns to the Education System from Investments in Early Childhood Education for Wisconsin. Research Paper, Trust for Early Education.

local-level funding through the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. The director of TEE stated that “we usually fund advocacy groups, but Wisconsin’s state department has a strong infrastructure and can create policy that supports local communities, that makes them unique.”

While the conditions seem quite ripe in Wisconsin for expanding universal 4K, there are some challenges – political, legislative and fiscal. First among these is that school districts are reticent to move forward with their commitment due to wavering financial commitment from the state. According to the northern Regional WFFF Coach, “Rural districts are just trying to keep their district afloat, they are leery of funding that may start and then stop and they are left with nothing.” Because the school membership aid system is based on a 3 year rolling average, it takes 3 years for the districts to receive full reimbursement for the program. Therefore, districts do not immediately get full funding for 4K students in the first year of the program. This makes the first year of programming financially burdensome. The current governor of Wisconsin is committed to retaining 4K funding, and in his proposed biennial budget will provide grant money to districts to cover start up costs until they receive reimbursement in the following year.⁹

Political and funding challenges are that the state superintendent of education is an elected position, with no state school board governing its decisions. While 4K funding has been available since the 1980’s, the funding has been attacked in the last two budget cycles with key opposition coming from select Republican legislators and the private child care community who feels threatened by free education services provided by public schools to four year olds.

In the most recent budget deliberations (2001-2003), it became clear that the Wisconsin legislature could eliminate funding for four-year-old kindergarten. Senate Democrats adopted plan to fully fund 4K programs and Assembly Republicans voted to eliminate it. A compromise position was adopted by the Legislature that cut \$14 million from 4K funding, hurting but not fully eliminating the program. At that time many associations and organizations, including the state’s largest teacher’s union (WEAC) worked with the state superintendent and other pro-public education representatives to urge the governor to use his veto power to restore the \$14 million funding for 4K programs. As a result of those efforts, the governor vetoed the cuts and fully restored current legislative funding for 4K.

This debate over funding and the efforts of WFFF provoked many associations to develop position papers or policy statements in favor of continued funding of universal four-year-old kindergarten and community approaches. These articulate and well

⁹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2004). *Guide to Financing Four-Year-Old Kindergarten in community approaches*. Madison, WI.

aligned position statements kept the issue of 4K on the legislative radar. Associations such as the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA), the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC), the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB), the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF), the Wisconsin Child Care and Education Coalition (WCCEC), and the Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association (WCCAA) drafted these statements. See Appendix D for complete policy statements.

While legislative language provides some general aid to schools for 4K, when communities begin to broaden their thinking and include other early childhood services funding can become confusing. For example, there are separate public funding sources for Head Start, Title I, special education, and food programs. Wisconsin Shares subsidizes child care so that low income parents can work. Parent fees pay for the majority of child care services. And so on, as more communities work together to improve quality and reduce transitions for children, they must think differently about how various funding sources can work together.

Combining funding streams, also referred to as braided funding, becomes difficult when some children are eligible for services from several funding sources, while other children are not eligible for any services beyond 4K. Providers may have difficulty understanding how to braid funding and services so that all of the appropriate resources are utilized in an effective and efficient manner. Therefore, it is highly encouraged to involve district business managers and fiscal officers in the process. The categorical nature of some funding sources presents a challenge; they are often designed to meet specific needs and do not easily work in a collaborative model. For example, different programs have different requirements for eligibility, staffing ratios, and content standards.¹⁰ All of these challenges can work to make the very practical matter of funding seem like an insurmountable hurdle in developing a community approaches model.

Another challenge is addressing the evenness and quality of universal 4K throughout Wisconsin. Less than half of the districts offer 4K programs currently. Additionally, organizations providing for the care and the education of young children operate as separate entities in most communities, resulting in a patchwork of services provided through child care, Head Start, school, special education, transportation, and other agencies that are not tightly linked to the school districts. The fragmented system is difficult for families to navigate and demands that children be relocated daily between home, school, and child care. Worse, the fragmented system excludes some families, leaving them unable to provide quality early learning experiences for their children. According to a provider in one local community, “Many children would not be able to

¹⁰ Flynn, M., & Hayes, C. D. (2003). *Blending and Braiding Funds to Support Early Care and Education Initiatives*. Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project.

participate in preschool based on the level of income of their parents.” In other cases, children eligible for services are often segregated by disability, income level of their families, or for other reasons. As a result, some five-year-olds arrive at the kindergarten door already seriously behind their peers.

With parents demanding the availability of early kindergarten to all children and with citizens interested in a well educated, healthy and competitive work force, it is imperative that all early childhood providers and public schools collaborate in the four-year-old kindergarten expansion efforts. As a community member put it, “Wrap-around services in one setting increase the opportunity for parents, care providers, and education providers to communicate with each other about the child’s developmental learning and the support strategies for children with special needs.” With this as the vision, a theory guiding collaboration among stakeholders in Wisconsin has emerged, known as the Community Approach.

Community approaches to expanding four-year-old kindergarten

Wisconsin is currently and actively promoting and expanding universal 4K through a collaborative community approach. Known simply as community approaches, this multi-agency effort weaves public and private early education and care programs into a collaborative local system that puts the well-being of all children first. This approach provides a nice solution to a couple of particular problems. First, Wisconsin found significant inequities existing in early learning opportunities available for young children. Even when early childhood and health and family support services exist, they were not always affordable, services were fragmented and inaccessible, and many programs lacked the resources to support qualified staff and to provide effective, quality services. These inequities created an achievement gap that showed up as students came to school. Consequently, public schools and communities began to look toward four-year-old kindergarten funding and collaboration among providers as a way to provide early learning opportunities to all four-year-old children.

Second, when public schools began to offer four-year-old programs, some child care providers and preschools were affected by the loss of enrollment. Families and children experienced the effect of fragmented and isolated education and care services. Communities found that children were experiencing too many transitions from one program to another, and families had difficulty transporting their child from one setting to another and communicating with all of the service providers. In addition, child care providers and education programs sometimes found themselves competing for business. Wanting to change the isolated, fragmented approach to serving four-year-olds, Wisconsin moved to the blended community approach.

The key to community approaches in Wisconsin is the involvement of a broad range of community early childhood stakeholders such as, Head Start, private and parochial

preschools and child care providers, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, family support and resource centers, city and county health and human services programs, parents and local businesses, all working with the school district to provide universal 4K. Together, these agencies share information, authority, expertise and resources so all children have access to rich and engaging early learning opportunities. Collaborative partners remain focused on a common goal that cannot be achieved by a singular agency -- achieving emotional, educational, societal, and physical well being of children. An individual in one of the community focus groups said it best, "Collaborative efforts of the Head Start, public school, child cares, and preschools in this community provide opportunities for families to communicate and learn through parent education, family fun nights, nutrition services, family literacy, and English as a Second Language classes."

Collaborative partners see the advantages and benefits to children, families and their respective agencies. Providing care and education programs in the same environment allow for fewer transitions for children, making for a family-friendly environment that unifies services which were once fragmented and duplicated. Partners enjoy shared leadership, pooled resources, and the shared responsibility for accomplishments.

While these benefits are compelling, they are only realized when collaborative partners overcome certain predictable challenges. First, successful teams allow sufficient time to develop collaborative cultures that are inclusive and trusting. Before they can tackle certain issues, staff members from different agencies need to be able to successfully work together. This challenge can be complicated by the fact that wage compensation for staff within collaboratives may be unequal. Second, it can be difficult to merge program philosophies, standards, staff responsibilities, and curricula of several programs, for example, Head Start policies for the number of hours per day and food service may differ from school district policies.

Finally, local level partners differ from community site to community site, depending on the size of, needs and services in the community. This variation can be a challenge in terms of providing an approach for interested communities. For example, small, rural districts with declining enrollment have relatively straightforward implementation routes--they may benefit from the additional four-year-old child count, they have room to house the program, and they may not have a significant private sector providing services to four-year-olds. Larger districts, even if their overall enrollments are declining, will probably not have room for all four-year-old children. Furthermore, the existing private community providers cannot be ignored. Whereas very small districts can do most of the planning within the district, large districts will need to establish a community-wide, collaborative planning process as a first step towards implementation. As more districts begin planning four-year-old kindergarten programs, a variety of approaches will be developed and the steps necessary for planning will vary.

The Community Approach to providing universal services to four-year-olds in Wisconsin is helping to break down many of the traditional barriers to success when a community starts a new program. Instead of competition and divisiveness over scarce resources that often occurs with new initiatives, these communities are collaborating through the formation of public-private partnerships for the benefit of young children and their families. According to the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC)¹¹ partnerships between schools and early childhood education programs are an effective way to provide more children with access to the good quality child care and early education experiences they need upon entrance to kindergarten. Coordinating financial and human resources can create a system that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Information regarding community approaches can be found in the WDPI resource guides *Community Approaches to Serving Four-Year-Old Children in Wisconsin: Lessons Learned*¹² and *Creating a Community Approach to Serving Four-Year old Children in Wisconsin: Public Awareness Packet*¹³. The information found in these resources describes experiences and lessons learned in communities that have already integrated 4K into the community. However, it is the creativity and energy of the local community partners that will allow a program to emerge that is tailored to the needs of children and parents in each community.

III. Wisconsin Forces for Four-Year-Olds

Into this environment, the TEE funds primed the pump for the expansion of 4K and community approaches in Wisconsin by supporting a state-level partnership called the Wisconsin Forces for Four-Year-Olds initiative (WFFF). WFFF's long-term goals are supporting achievement gains for all children by having quality care and education in the early years, and assurance to the business community for qualified workers and the cost savings in reduction of welfare and corrections. Given its goals, the WFFF initiative has a four-pronged approach to expanding universal four-year-old kindergarten and community approaches through: legislation and policymaking at the state and local level, grassroots organizing in local communities and school districts, constituency building among state and regional associations, advocacy groups and state bureaucrats and legislators, and a focused media campaign.

¹¹ NAEYC, *A Call for Excellence in Early Childhood Education: Early Years are Learning Years*
<http://www.naeyc.org>

¹² Rodgers-Rhyme, A. & Wright, A. (2003). *Community approaches to Servicing Four-Year-Old Children in Wisconsin: Lessons Learned from Wisconsin Communities*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfesp/pdf/eccommap.pdf>

¹³ Landsverk, R. (2003). *Creating a Community Approach to Serving Four-Year old Children in Wisconsin: Public Awareness Packet*, Madison, WI: Department of Public Instruction.
<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfesp/pdf/eccreata.pdf>

Policy and legislative support in Wisconsin

An important feature of the WFFF initiative has been the combined efforts of the chief state school officer, the governor's office, and other state level partners. Their shared goal is demonstrating support through collaboration, promoting viable funding methods for community approaches, and maintaining the current school funding formula that counts four-year-old kindergarteners as "members." Notably, Wisconsin's governor and state superintendent of public education have worked to align key state agencies and early childhood associations with policies that promote community approaches. The WFFF initiative draws on the shared goals and expectations of several state and local agencies. The state level agencies that are instrumental in this support include:

- Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD)
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI)
- Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS)
- Wisconsin Head Start State Collaboration Project
- Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP)
- Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA)
- Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral Network (WCCRRN)
- Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB)
- Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC)
- Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association (WCCAA)

See Appendix A: Early Childhood State-Regional Infrastructure - for the flowchart of participating organizations and further explanation of key agencies' roles.

State policy

Chief among the four features of WFFF is the work with through the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Governor's Office, other state departments, and key state associations to build legislative, political and fiscal support that will assure universal access to high quality four-year-old kindergarten and promote community approaches to early education services in the state.

An example of legislative and fiscal support to 4K from the DPI includes the promotion of early learning opportunities in the state superintendent's charter, *New Wisconsin Promise*. In this charge to educators of Wisconsin, Superintendent Burmaster encourages collaboration among existing early childhood service providers and school districts.¹⁴ She states, "Investing in early learning opportunities through the four-year-old kindergarten... is part of the commitment to ensure the opportunity of a quality

¹⁴ Burmaster, E. (2002). *New Wisconsin Promise*. WPDI, Madison, WI.
<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/sprntdnt/nwp/nwp.html>

education for every child in Wisconsin.” To accomplish the *Promise*, the State Superintendent proposed biennial budget includes \$3,000,000 GRP to create a new categorical grant program offering a start-up grant for funding to help districts during the first two years of operating a 4K program when state school aid does not fully count the students for aid purposes. The WDPI will also request statutory language that, beginning in FY07 would offer school districts that adopt community approaches an additional 0.1 FTE toward funding for each 4K pupil enrolled in the district so that schools, private child care centers, and Head Start programs can work together to serve children’s needs will be able to count.

Wisconsin’s governor is equally poised to make legislative and fiscal commitments to 4K as he stated in his *KidsFirst* initiative, “We know that the influences in the early years of a child’s life last forever. Those children who participate in high quality early childhood programs have higher overall development by the time they enter kindergarten, are less likely to be held back in school or drop out, and are less likely to need special education.” The Governor’s Task Force on Educational Excellence¹⁵-- created after his participation in the National Governor’s Forum in December 2003¹⁶ -- makes recommendations to the Governor’s *KidsFirst* Agenda.

The combined forces of the state superintendent and the governor send a coherent and consistent message about the state’s commitment to 4 K programming across the state. These forces, coupled with the work of the state departments of Workforce Development, Public Instruction, and Health and Family Services, puts Wisconsin well in front of its national peers in expanding four year old kindergarten.

In addition to providing financial support, the state’s leaders and key agencies have worked together to provide a list of developmental expectations for young children 3 through 5K that are supported by practice-based evidence and scientific research. The Wisconsin’s Model Early Learning Standards¹⁷, are in keeping with those at the national level and reflect the shared values and commitments of the citizens of Wisconsin to prepare young children for success in school. The heads of all three state agencies, DPI, DWD and DHFS signed the letter introducing the Standards stating, “Our departments are committed to quality early childhood education and care activities . . . and we believe these programs provide the foundation for successful education, employment and life experiences for citizens of Wisconsin.” Distributed to over 15,000 early care and education programs and teachers in Wisconsin since 2003, the *Standards* were developed to provide a shared framework for understanding and communicating expectations for young children's development and to align with Wisconsin’s K-12

¹⁵ Governor’s Task Force on Educational Excellence, <http://edexcellence.wisconsin.gov/>

¹⁶ NGA Center for Best Practices (2003). *Governors' Forum on Quality Preschool*, Orlando, Florida.

¹⁷ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2003). *Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards*. Madison, WI: Department of Public Instruction. <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/EarlyLS.htm>

Model Academic Standards. They are a guide for parents, professionals, and policymakers, all of whom share responsibility for the well being of young children.

Grassroots Organizing: Regional Collaborative Coaches

A second feature of the WFFF initiative has been the expansion of a community mobilization campaign, or grass roots effort. This effort strengthened community voices in support of 4K and increased the number of districts offering four-year-old kindergarten and community approaches. At the onset of the initiative in 2002 a majority of Wisconsin school districts did not have a 4K program, even with the state aid. Consequently, a system of Regional Collaboration Coaches was organized to offer local support, information and resources to promote the expansion of universal 4K and community approaches. Since WDPI has only 2 staff with expertise in early childhood, the intent was to try to multiply the state consultants' efforts at the local level by giving local communities more direct assistance and coaching in collaborative approaches.

Regional Collaborative Coaches

The Regional Collaboration Coaches are assigned regions based on an existing network system set up by the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (WECCP). As part of the grassroots effort the Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral Network (WCCRRN) was contracted to co-sponsor strategic regional activities to expand the support base within the child care and Head Start communities. Six Resource and Referral Agencies were designated to work with the Regional Coaches to plan and implement activities in five regions of Wisconsin and the Milwaukee area. A model strategic meeting process guide was developed to promote collaborative problem solving and decision-making.

The goal of the Regional Coaches is to increase the number of school districts providing four-year-old kindergarten and special education services¹⁸ in community settings. Coaches provide information, offer support and technical assistance to community leaders so they might implement a wider array of preschool options for young children. These leaders come from agencies such as schools Head Start, child care organizations, Even Start, family resource centers, public health, county extension, parent education programs and other community based systems. They also provide referrals to resource people, mentors, ambassadors, or other resources. Some of the Coaches surveyed

¹⁸ High quality early care and education programs, like pre-kindergarten, can help reduce the need for special education services by identifying problems early so they can more easily be addressed. In the last five years, the Wausau school district improved their success with the at-risk population and has experienced a 25 percent reduction in the number of students identified with learning disabilities at the elementary level, in part due to its community approach to 4K program.

communities with 4K programs to determine whether they were community approaches or if they were thinking about or planning to start a 4K program.¹⁹

Once a community or school district expresses interest in forming collaborative partnership to offer 4K, the Regional Coaches provide technical assistance in planning, facilitation, implementation, problem solving and understanding 4K funding. They focus on the child care and Head Start participants as valued partners. Coaches recommend a variety of approaches and delivery models and together they select one best suited to that community: school site with school district teacher, community site with school district teacher, community site with a licensed pre-K teacher, and at-home educational support.

Like the Trust for Early Education Fund at the state level, the Joyce Foundation played an instrumental role in advocating 4K by providing mini-grants to communities to encourage them to expand 4K through community approaches. The Coaches worked directly with 15 of the 21 districts that applied for the first round of Joyce mini-grants awarded by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) to aid their start up, collaborative planning, marketing and public relations and problem solving around community approaches to serving four-year-olds.

Coaches also coordinate the collection of data which includes: the number of communities utilizing community approaches, exploring community approaches, and using councils and partnership structures to share information and network between communities. Data provided by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (see chart on page 17) shows an increase in the number of schools offering 4K, and shows that the WFFF grassroots effort has been successful in many ways. The factors that contribute to this success include the strong facilitative leadership provided by the coaches and other resource personnel. These facilitators are skilled at using conversation protocols to increase distributed leadership among collaborating partners.

In addition to the successes, the WFFF grassroots effort also uncovered a number of challenges that need to be addressed: how to get the word out to more school districts, how to get more district administrators to buy-in to what's good for the community as a whole, how to encourage Wisconsin school districts with existing 4K programs to reform into community partnerships that will better serve their children and families, and how to include child care providers that have not been invited to the collaborative (and resultantly become vocal opponents of 4K in some communities).

¹⁹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2002). *Four-year-old Kindergarten Survey*. Madison, WI : Department of Public Instruction. <http://www.cesa4.k12.wi.us/programs-services/special/ec/surveys/index.htm>.

Constituency Building

The third component of the WFFF initiative is building a constituency--a broad base of key bipartisan stakeholders that will invest in the 4K campaign and influence public policy. This wide range of stakeholders primarily comes from school districts, child care organizations and Head Start communities, but any and all stakeholders are informed so that support for the initiative builds and involvement in the development of community approaches grows.

The WFFF members gave presentations at a number of statewide conferences, association board meetings, and other events. They co-sponsored strategic regional activities to expand the support base with child care administrators association, the Head Start community and Milwaukee stakeholders. Mini-grants were offered by WFFF to support association efforts to inform their constituents through conference, board meetings, publications, or other efforts.

While awareness of 4K has increased and expansion efforts are well coordinated at the state and local levels, there is still resistance from many in the child care community who view expansion of 4K as a threat to their industry. As well, district administrators view the time commitment needed for community collaboration as burdensome. WFFF will need to address how to get more buy-in from districts and child care providers; something that will grow as they begin to understand the benefits for the larger community as well as for their own interests.

Even though there has been some involvement in the business community through the Think Big Start Small campaign²⁰ and Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners²¹ initiative, another challenge that remains is finding the appropriate message and venue to communicate with business and economic development initiatives. The North Star economic analysis report cited earlier, and reports like it, should serve as a useful instrument for communicating this message to the business community.

Media campaign for awareness

A fourth feature of the WFFF initiative is an awareness campaign and media strategy to build the public and political will, and generate support for four-year-old kindergarten funding and community approaches. WFFF members work with the state superintendent and governor's offices, acting as ambassadors in development and

²⁰The Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral (WCCRR) Network is a membership organization, with a mission of providing leadership in the creation of an inclusive, high-quality child care/child development system and to promote the professional growth and development of its member agencies. *The Think Big, Start Small* public education campaign, highlights current research supporting the need for investment in early education and care. <http://www.wisconsinccrr.org/>

²¹ WECCP website: <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/>

promotional efforts. Campaign materials, resources and information about the need for universal 4K, the benefits of community approaches, and supportive policies and practices are distributed to state and local level decision makers as well as community stakeholders, such as parents, child care community, school district personnel and the business community. Dissemination of information and materials has gone through the general DPI and association communication systems and conferences as well as websites, listserves, conferences and other avenues.

The WFFF budget directed media funds to the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families to develop and disseminate a DVD called *Think Big Start Small: community approaches to Serving Wisconsin Four-Year-Olds*²² This DVD features appearances by both the governor and state superintendent of education and presents resources, assistance and public policies to protect and expand four-year old kindergarten. A companion media piece on the same DVD was created to promote community approaches for young children with disabilities called *Preschool Options: Approaches to Serving Birth-to-5 Year-Olds with Disabilities*. The DVD's were disseminated throughout Wisconsin by the WCCF's Early Education Matters project. Copies were made available on the WCCF website and other locations.

Linking with existing state initiatives that can help define and promote the universal 4K message avoids duplication of efforts. Such initiatives include the Governor's Woman's Equity Task Force, Wisconsin School Readiness Indicators Project, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act inclusion efforts, and Maternal Child Health Comprehensive System Change grant.

Media efforts to expand economic development include a contract with the Wisconsin Economic Development Association. This contract includes development of strategies for working with business leaders, community leaders, and existing economic development initiatives in order to bring focus to early learning issues. This work began with a white paper created at the Fourth Wisconsin Economic Summit, titled *Early Childhood Education and Care Challenges Facing Wisconsin*.²³

Two additional reports on this topic are in progress with a focus on raising awareness. The first is a report on the economic impact of four-year-old kindergarten on Wisconsin public schools; it is being developed in conjunction with additional PEW funding.²⁴ The

²²Wisconsin Council on Children & Families (2004). *Think Big Start Small: community approaches to Serving Wisconsin 4-Year-Olds*, Early Ed Matters Project <http://www.wccf.org/projects/eem.htm>

²³ WDPI, WDWD, & UW-Madison Waisman Center (2003) . *Early Childhood Education and Care Challenges Facing Wisconsin*. <http://www.wisconsin.edu/summit/papers/index.htm>.

²⁴Belfield, C. R. and D. K. Winters (2004). *The Economic Returns to the Education System from Investments in Early Childhood Education for Wisconsin*. Research Paper, Trust for Early Education.

second publication related to economics of early kindergarten is being completed that will provide a resource guide on braided funding for community approaches.²⁵

As part of its media campaign, the WFFF addresses opposition that they have encountered. Reasons for opposition include: the state cannot afford to provide 4K services; schools are reluctant to or don't know how to change their delivery model to work in community settings; child care organizations and Head Start programs cannot be sustained and may close when faced with 4K, and the belief of some groups that parents alone are responsible for raising their children.

V. Impact Summary

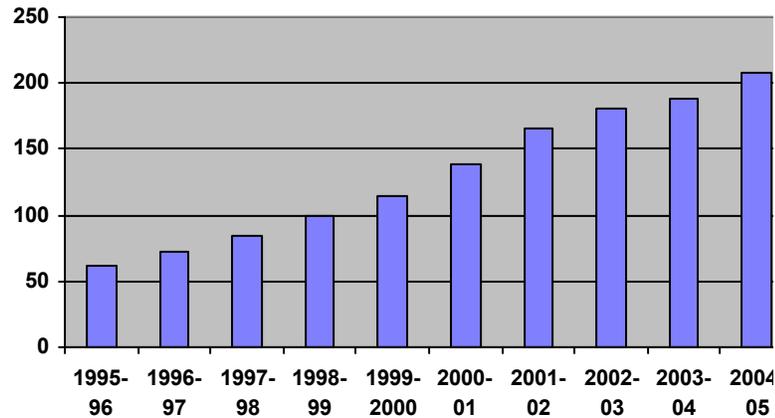
Wisconsin has succeeded in expanding four-year-old kindergarten over the past couple of years and community approaches continue to grow. The WFFF initiative led to a number of successes that show promise for replication in other states looking to expand universal pre-kindergarten. Primary among them is building collaborative relationships, the impact on local communities of the regional coach technical assistance and facilitative leadership and the strong state-level support for community-based reform efforts.

Evidence of expansion of 4K and community approaches

Before the WFFF project was initiated in 2002, approximately 23% of Wisconsin's four-year-olds attended four-year-old kindergarten and approximately 40% of the school districts offered 4K. In November of 2004 the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI) reported the expansion of four-year-old kindergarten had grown from 166 districts in 2001 to 208 districts in 2004. This means that 50% of Wisconsin schools districts with elementary schools (416) now have 4K programs as shown in the following table. The number of four-year-olds served has gone from 11,083 in 1998-99 to 18,652 children in 2004 an increase of 68%.

²⁵ WDPI, (2005) *Financing Four-Year-Old Kindergarten in Community Approaches*, <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/community4.htm>

Number of school districts with Four-Year-Old Kindergarten:



Expansion in public - private partnerships, also known as community approaches, has also increased, but at a slower rate. The WDPI has documented that it takes from 18 months to 3 years or more to move from the interest stage to collaboratively offering 4K programs in a community. Of the districts exploring and interested in community approaches, the 70% do not currently have 4K and are therefore looking at starting the program. As of December 2004, 82 school districts expressed interest in community approaches and 53 districts were actively exploring the approach. Of the 16 school districts currently using a community approach to 4K currently, some attribute their success to the support and guidance of Regional Coaches.

This degree of expansion in the short-term is indicative of the results from the concerted efforts of the WFFF initiative and the Community Approach. Further research will provide more information on these and other communities over time.

Building collaborative relationships: Community impact

One of the strongest features of the WFFF effort is the trust and collaboration that exists among the WFFF members and modeling of collaboration to all stakeholders. Over the course of the WFFF planning efforts, agreement on the importance of 4K funding has increased and commitments have been made to the promotion of community approaches. There has been increased awareness in local communities and government agencies, networking has expanded exponentially, there is a diverse, engaged group of stakeholders; and an increase in distributed leadership among collaborating partners.

Building relationships is an important aspect of establishing community approaches. When individuals and organizations work together to build a community approach they begin to develop trust and build relationships that will last long into the future. As

best said by one of the Regional Coaches, “whatever hat you wear your main responsibility is relationship building.” Many school district personnel have very little contact with the community and even less contact with child care organizations. But in school districts that have active outreach programs or have early childhood special education councils and have the experience in meeting and working with outside groups, there is a higher level of trust with parents and community organizations. The southeast regional coach maintains “School districts that have good community relationships get a jump-start in developing collaborative 4K programs.”

Barriers between the state agencies and communities are broken down in an effort to form partnerships. Administrators and staff involved benefit from the partnership by learning from each other, sharing knowledge and ideas, understanding each other’s standards, and supporting one another. Existing collaborative partnerships can pave the way for additional grant funding targeted for future collaborative ventures.

According to one of the regional coaches “An excellent way to discuss what’s best for four-year-olds and their families is to get the players in the room to think about and see the connections.” This can and has changed minds about roles and responsibilities and enabled people to see the whole child, not merely the child through the lens of the service organization. This perspective can move from the leadership circle to the community they represent. It all takes leadership, a dedicated person to get the ball rolling and keep it moving. An exemplar of this is the LaCrosse community who was the first to launch an innovative preschool partnership in Wisconsin in 1999²⁶. The LaCrosse community approach 4K program offers food service, nutrition education, counseling, social work, a resource library, parent education, family networking, and vision and hearing screenings – in addition to licensed care and a free, accredited four-year-old preschool.

An example of support building is demonstrated by the change in position of the Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association (WCCAA). This state association moved from opposing four-year-old kindergarten to seeking support for this funding because of the community approaches method. They changed their position because collaborating with school districts may mean less fear of closing their doors and greater possibility of offering the 4K programs at their facility. The impact of early care and education was also promoted at the economic development community through the January 2004 Strongest Links Conference and continues through sponsorship of speakers or hosting of events such as a business roundtable, the development of a white paper for the Fourth Wisconsin Economic Summit, and at a workshop at the conference the Governor’s Conference on Workforce Development.

²⁶ Bulebosh, N. (2000). *Sandbox Synergy*, an article that describes efforts in LaCrosse, Wisconsin to develop a community wide approach to 4-year-old kindergarten and how child care and the district became partners in 4K. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Association of School Boards Association News.

Clearly, buy-in from key collaborative stakeholders is important to the success of the community 4K approaches, as demonstrated by the LaCrosse example and others. District administrators and their boards of education understand the importance of community support. It is simply good public relations to build support among community organizations since these constituents and taxpayers will be paying to support education in the community. In reviewing effective partnerships across the nation, the National Association for the Education of Young children (NAEYC) website provides a link to the Child Care Action Campaign (CCAC)²⁷ that found school superintendents to be prime initiators in launching and sustaining 80% of the partnerships. When the impetus for these partnerships comes from within the school system, the chances of success and sustainability are greater. This holds true for Wisconsin as well.

As part of the WFFF initiative, efforts were focused to gain the support of state associations, lobbying and advocacy groups because they recognize the influence of advocacy in a local control state like Wisconsin. As stated before, WFFF gained the support of a number of other state associations, the state's largest teacher's union and other advocacy groups. An example is the Wisconsin School Board Association (a member organization and lobbying group) who developed a policy statement that encourages 4K through a community approach and emphasized this policy on their website, in their newsletter and at conference presentations. WFFF can also take credit for getting the governor and state superintendent to make 4K part of their priorities.

Another example of successful collaboration among state-level collaborators is the way that Wisconsin communities used strategies to successfully manage the complexities of combining funding streams. Many of these community strategies are grounded in communication and relationship-building activities – efforts that will mitigate more than the funding challenges. As relationships between public and private agencies and local and state policy makers develop, new possibilities come to light – including ideas for combining funding sources. For new ideas to emerge, each agency must understand all of the funding options available. For example, in addition to the general equalization aid formula, school-based funding sources that may be considered include special education, Title I, and Even Start Family Literacy. Federal and state funds are available for Head Start. Wisconsin Shares and child care subsidies support children of low income parents who work. Although there are many public sources for funding child care, most families assume nearly all of the costs associated with child care, making parent fees a major component of the funding situation. Community collaborators look for funding sources that may include flexibility. Some of the differences in funding streams are terms like “what is encouraged”, “what is allowed,” and “what is required.”

²⁷ CCAC, *Partnering For Success: community approaches to Early Learning*, NAEYC, Washington D.C.
<http://www.naeyc.org/ece/research/partnering.asp>

Most important is to be aware of the fact that a blended or braided funding system requires a more complex system to track data, allocate costs, and generate reports. District business manager and fiscal officers from community partners are encouraged to be involved in the process, as these people are probably most likely to understand the intricacies of the school and community agency finance systems.

Communities that include *all* stakeholders in the planning process early on, and view them as equal partners are most successful in breaking down many of the traditional barriers that impede start-up efforts. Missing from these communities is divisiveness that can be characteristic among collaborating agencies competing for scarce resources. Rather, communities like Wausau, LaCrosse, Portage and Eau Claire collaborate effectively for the benefit of young children and their families. In contrast, the dissolution of trust has led to setbacks for some Wisconsin communities. Different communities have different needs and in larger communities, setbacks are common. Changing school district leadership, budget cutbacks, low income levels of families and white-flight, lowered school enrollment, multiple child care facilities with varying levels of quality, and school, city, county boundaries and jurisdictions all create challenges to developing a community approach to serving four-year-olds.

Impact on communities through Regional Coaches

The Regional Coaches have played an instrumental role in promoting the expansion of four-year-old kindergarten. The success of the Regional Coaches is much greater than originally anticipated. Each of the eight regional coaches has a 38-day contract – which is not a significant amount of time to cover over 50% of Wisconsin school districts without 4K. To date the Regional Coaches provided direct technical assistance to 40 communities and information to a minimum of 200 school districts that were interested in learning about the advantages of 4K community options. Through their actions and leadership, there is demonstrable evidence that 4K expansion is happening in Wisconsin.

The role of the Regional Coach emerged as they began to work with local communities. Networking and helping school districts, child care organizations, Head Start and other collaborators make connections proved to be an important asset. Surveys were sent out to districts to find out what they were doing relative to 4K and their interest in collaborative approach and that led to targeting districts to offer planning and implementation support. Because of the challenges that multiple agency collaboration brings, many of the regional coaches and consultants provided the unique role of facilitative leader.

An example of this was portrayed at a Wisconsin Western Regional collaborative meeting. The coach asked a provider to present a specific client concern to the group, one that the provider could not fully address with the limited resources of her agency.

As a result of this dilemma, the group laid out a set of questions that allowed each member to discuss how their agency would handle the problem. The questions raised included: What are the current resources in this situation? What else do we need to know more about? What are possible interpretations? What are the next steps?

Together, the collaborative group came up with a new solution and the child care organization worked with health care agency to solve the problem. This conversation resulted in a kind of epiphany among group members. When an individual organization cannot provide adequate resources alone to meet family needs, partners can guide them to other providers who have the appropriate services/resources. While this shared enlightenment may seem obvious, providers make these connections only when they view themselves as part of a larger system, act as liaisons to other agencies, and have the knowledge of what other agencies offer. These are all shifts in perspective that can be nurtured by a skilled facilitative leader, namely the regional coach.

Agency members view client issues from their unique perspective and sharing these perspectives can enrich everyone's understanding. However, agencies also view the larger change—the Community Approach—from their unique perspective, and naturally want to protect the interests of their agency. Individual players may feel they are being asked to compromise their organization's self-interest for the greater good. Questions arise, such as, "How will this affect my business revenue?" "What will this do for our union membership?" and "What state funding dollars will we have to give up?" When agencies work to forge collaborative relationships, conflict is inevitable and skillful facilitation becomes even more important. Viewing the change from the perspective of the client -- the young child and their family, is something that can build consensus and provide common ground for problem-solving-- but requires a skillful facilitator to manage.

Bottom-up reform with top-down support

A variety of studies on education and public administration have shown that unless the perspectives of individual leaders change, it is unlikely that organizational change will occur. It is even less likely that inter-organizational change will occur.²⁸ Change efforts involve a combination of systems change, capacity building and a change in infrastructure. In the case of Wisconsin, outside funding by the Trust for Early Education was directed at efforts for start-up planning. This WFFF planning grant allowed the state agencies and other organizers to develop early on trust and collaboration in order to create the infrastructure for moving project activities along and build support for common outcomes. The initial steps for changing infrastructure and establishing regional coaches were put into place. Next, the hard work of capacity

²⁸ Eilers, A. M. (2002). "School-linked collaborative services and systems change: Linking public agencies with public schools." *Administration and Society*, (3) 3: 285-308; Honig, M. (2004). "Where's the "up" in bottom-up reform?" *Educational Policy*, 18: 527-561.

building through the efforts of the regional coaches began. These efforts are on-going and ever-increasing. The work of systems change is far reaching, but the aim of Collaborative Approaches gets at the spirit of systemic change: getting agencies to operate in new roles, with new relationships in a new, integrative and collaborative way.

None of these are simple tasks. One of the strongest features, nonetheless, of the WFFF effort is the trust and collaboration that exists among the WFFF members and their modeling of collaboration to all stakeholders. The best example of top-down support is the true collaboration and the coherent message voiced by key state leaders, the state's governor, the state superintendent and the Department of Public Instruction, and the heads of the Department of Workforce Development and Health and Human Services who have developed priorities and initiatives directed at early care and education of Wisconsin's young children. According to the executive director of TEE "there are many passionate state-level consultants and policy analysts who work tirelessly to promote and implement these 4K priorities".

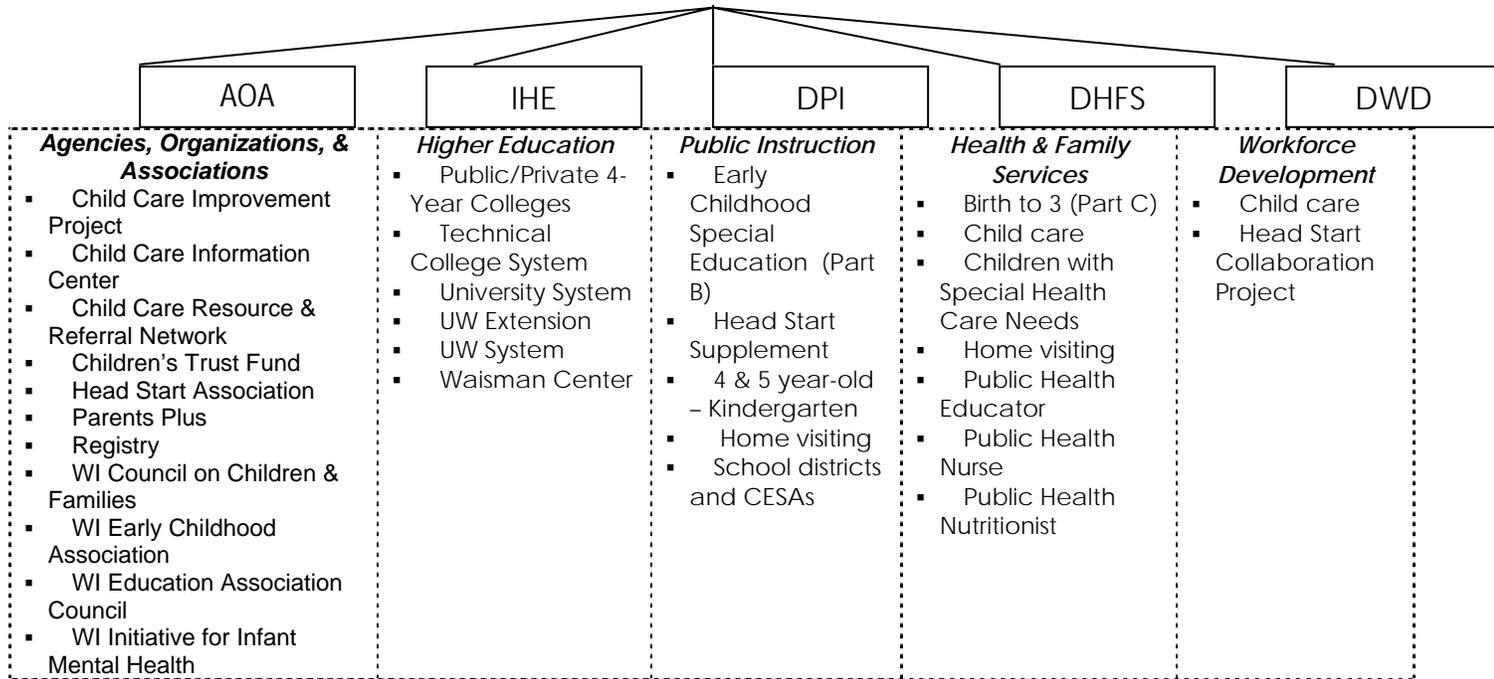
Over the course of the WFFF planning efforts, agreement on the importance of 4K funding has increased among state-level stakeholders, and commitments have been made to the promotion of community approaches. These actions and messages are significant in supporting bottom-up reform such as the grassroots effort experienced in local communities in Wisconsin. Consequently, there has been increased awareness in local communities and government agencies, networking has expanded exponentially, there is a diverse, engaged group of stakeholders, and an increase in distributed leadership among collaborating partners.

However, there is still much work to be done in realizing a full expansion of 4K programming across Wisconsin. The state's political and cultural context is not inconsequential. The Republic legislature raises opposition to 4K funding with each budget cycle. There are segments of the state culture that reflect a conservative value orientation that raises opposition to public four year old kindergarten. There is a void in communicating a targeted message to the business community about the impact of early care and education and cost savings, and the need for business involvement. And finally, there remain local-level challenges at conveying the effectiveness of a Community Approach.

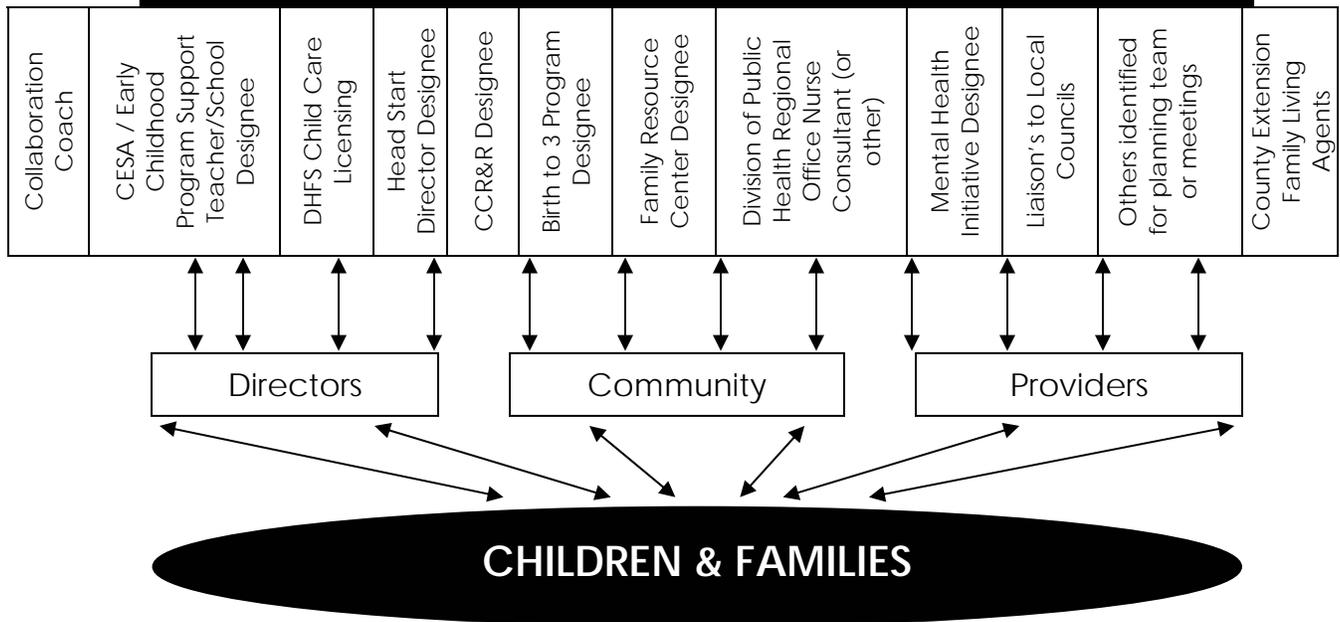
Nonetheless, these efforts have just begun. WFFF is only in its third year, and already indicators of significant change and 4K expansion are evident. The collective efforts of maintaining collaborative relationships, building and expanding constituent support, providing evidence-based practice, communicating the impact of a system that provides quality educational experiences for young children will keep this effort on course.

Appendix A

Early Childhood State-Regional Infrastructure State Level Partners



Early Childhood Regional Network Liaison Team



Adapted from a chart developed for an infrastructure assessment process being conducted by the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Project and the community collaboration coaches' braided funding initiative.

State-level Partners in WFFF

The WFFF initiative draws on the shared goals and expectations of several state agencies and associations. The advisory committee included representatives from:

- Association of Wisconsin School Administrators
- Children's Trust Fund
- National Black Child Development Institute-Milwaukee Affiliate
- School Administrators Alliance
- Think Big Start Small Public Awareness Team
- Waisman Center Early Intervention Project
- Office of the Governor
- Wisconsin Association of School Boards
- Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators
- Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association
- Wisconsin Child Care and Education Coalition
- Wisconsin Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies/Network
- Wisconsin Child Care Improvement Project
- Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership
- Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services
- Wisconsin Council on Children and Families
- Wisconsin Dept of Health and Family Services
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
- Wisconsin Dept of Work Force Development
- Wisconsin Early Childhood Association
- Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners
- Wisconsin Education Association Council
- Wisconsin Economic Development Association
- Wisconsin Family Child Care Association
- Wisconsin Federation of Teachers
- Wisconsin Head Start Association
- Wisconsin Head Start Collaboration Project
- Wisconsin Kindergarten Association
- Parents Plus of Wisconsin

The Wisconsin DPI is the fiscal agent of WFFF. In its capacity, it provides leadership, partnership, policy development, incentives and technical assistance throughout the state. It also administers funds to the districts through state aid. According to Jill Haglund, Early Childhood Consultant at the WDPI, "We find that people who have a common vision for making things better for young children know they can't do it alone, so they stay at the table until they find ways to bring their resources to a common effort."

The Wisconsin DWD believes that besides being good for young children and their families, community approaches to 4K programs help build stronger communities. This agency therefore works to maintain and build the current child care infrastructure. They believe that the key ingredient in quality child care and early education is an appropriately trained and compensated, stable work force. DWD provides funding through Wisconsin Head Start Collaboration Project, and it administers federal funds for Child Care Development Fund, and it has implemented a number of programs to improve the quality of child care programs in Wisconsin through Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Wisconsin Scholarship and Bonus Program, and the KidsFirst Quality Rating Scale (QRS) and Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral Network. These programs are aimed at providing day care subsidies for low-income families, improving child care teacher and director qualifications through training and scholarships, and increasing licensing and standards in child care organizations in order to improve the environment, curriculum and overall professional practices in child care organizations. DWD also advocates for improving the wages of the child care workforce. They believe that well-trained providers give better care to young children and child care workers who are paid a sustainable wage stay in a program. A strong workforce promotes a strong community. And community 4K programs help child care organizations stay in business as collaborative partners in providing coordinated, quality care and education to young children and their families.

The collaboration among state agencies to guide the WFFF initiative does not stand alone but rather builds support for the on-going collaborative efforts of the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners, a group of Wisconsin agencies interested in enhancing early care and education system in Wisconsin. The total WFFF coalition understands that expansion toward universal 4K takes time and patience to build capacity while maintaining or improving quality. WFFF also recognizes that public school efforts must be linked with other early childhood programs related to serving four-year old children.

Appendix B

**Early Childhood Education Survey conducted by
Wisconsin Council for Children and Families (WCCF)**
Conducted by the Public Policy Forum, November 2003

Summary of Preliminary Findings

Methodology: Telephone interviews were conducted October 29 through November 5, 2003, with 600 adult residents of the State of Wisconsin. Respondents were selected at random. The sampling margin of error is four percentage points. This means that, in theory, responses for the entire survey sample are within four percentage points of the results that would have been obtained if interviews had been conducted with all Wisconsin adults with listed telephone numbers who could have been interviewed by telephone on the dates of the survey.

Demographics: Survey respondents are representative of the entire State of Wisconsin with respect to educational attainment, household income, geography, the presence of children in the household, age and gender. Among all respondents, 41% are men and 59% women; 39% have children in the household, 61% do not; 9% are younger than 30, 18% in their 30s, 24% in their 40s, 18% in their 50s and 26% are 60 or older; 30% did not attend college, 32% attended college but did not graduate, 24% are college graduates, and 13% have post-graduate education; 13% live in households with less than \$20,000 annual income, 24% have household incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000, 34% between \$40,000 and \$70,000 and 20% more than \$70,000.

Overall findings:

- Wisconsinites are evenly divided on whether state government is too big or too small. Nearly half of Wisconsinites (46%) believes state government takes on too many responsibilities whereas the other half (48%) believes the state is not doing enough to help people.
- Most Wisconsinites view early childhood education as a high priority among important issues facing the state. Respondents prioritize six “goals for Wisconsin” in this order: (1) reducing taxes; (2) reducing crime; (3) making sure all children are prepared for kindergarten; (4) improving schools; (5) providing quality, affordable child care; and (6) improving roads and highways.
- Among goals relating specifically to education, early childhood education also is perceived as a high priority. Respondents prioritize six “goals for education” in this order: (1) reducing violence in schools; (2) ensuring that school buildings are safe and sound; (3) ensuring that pre-kindergarten is available to all children; (4)

reducing class size; (5) making sure all classrooms have computers; and (6) making kindergarten full day.

- Respondents are evenly divided on the proportion of children perceived to be prepared to learn to begin reading when they begin kindergarten. Roughly one in every four Wisconsinites believes that most children are adequately prepared for kindergarten whereas one in four believes that fewer than half are prepared. The largest proportion of respondents (45%) believes that about half of children are prepared for kindergarten.
- Most Wisconsin residents (59%) consider it important that four-year-old children attend a learning program outside the home, but most residents do not believe that this is important for three-year-old children.
- Most Wisconsinites believe the state is doing the right amount or too much to make sure that all parents have access to affordable, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs whereas 30% believe the state is doing too little.
- Inadequate access to pre-kindergarten programs is widely perceived as a serious problem for low-income families that receive public assistance but not for working-class or middle-class families.
- There is broad support (two-thirds of adults) for providing funding to guarantee that all parents who want to enroll their children in pre-kindergarten can afford to do so, and for funding to ensure that pre-kindergarten classes are small and of high quality. The majority (61%) also favors requiring that pre-kindergarten teachers have college degrees, and just over half (53%) favor accountability standards for pre-kindergarten.
- Wisconsinites are roughly evenly divided on whether pre-kindergarten is solely the responsibility of parents, the responsibility of the state or the responsibility of the state only for low-income parents. Respondents also are nearly evenly divided on whether the state should (47%) or should not (51%) address the issue of pre-kindergarten availability now.

Most Wisconsinites are reluctant to pay additional taxes to support early childhood education. Nearly half of respondents (46%) say they would support pre-kindergarten programs only if they can be funded within the existing state budget. Another 32% say these programs are not an important priority, and 20% say they would be willing to impose additional taxes for them.²⁹

²⁹ Public Policy Forum (2003). *Early Childhood Education Survey*, Madison WI, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) <http://www.wccf.org>

Appendix C

Wisconsin's Governor's *KidsFirst* Agenda

KidsFirst includes policy recommendations to:

- Maintain full funding of four-year-old kindergarten program in the state school aid formula,
- Create a start-up grant program to help cover the implementation costs of 4K to districts to address difficulties with the school funding three year rolling average;
- Provide financial incentives, an additional .1 FTE for school districts who adopt community approaches to early care and education.
- Explore ways to efficiently administer Wisconsin's new comprehensive early care and education system.
- Improve child care quality through a tiered rating and subsidy system, and other recommendations related to access and quality, such as :
 1. Maintain full funding of the Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program.
 2. Expand the scope of the Community Service Levy to allow for local investments in early care and education.

Appendix D

Selected policy statements issued by associations and advocacy organizations

Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC)

- Four-year-old kindergarten programs provide young learners with opportunities to reach their full potential. The benefits last well beyond the early grades. That is why appropriate funding for 4K is important. WEAC position: WEAC supports funding to count pupils enrolled in a 4K program on a full-time equivalency basis for the purposes of calculating revenue limits and general school aids. This would make funding for 4K the same as funding for 5K programs. (2003)

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) policy statements:

- The WASB supports legislation that would allow districts to count four-year-old kindergarten pupils on a full-time equivalency basis according to the number of hours they are in school. (1999)
- The WASB supports permanent funding for four-year-old kindergarten. (2002)
- The WASB supports high quality early child care/education services that benefit all Wisconsin children. If school districts choose to play an active role in expanding the availability of such services, the WASB supports them doing so in collaboration with parents, other public agencies and/or private businesses. Such services should meet the comprehensive needs of young children and families in their communities through the sharing of personnel, finances and facilities as available and appropriate. (1993)

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF), nonprofit, multi-issue child and family advocacy agency, policy priorities for 2003:

- WCCF believes that one strategy to improve the quality of care that young children receive is to utilize Wisconsin's long-standing commitment to fund four year-old kindergarten as a means to direct resources - both financial and educational- to local child care programs. When schools, communities and families work together shared resources are used most effectively and efficiently.

Wisconsin Child Care and Education Coalition (WCCEC) position on four-year-old kindergarten (approved 12/2003):

- WCCE Coalition supports efforts to build partnerships between schools and child care programs that result in high quality early education in community settings. These collaborations can meet the goals of the four-year-old kindergarten program, while also strengthening the community's early care and education services needed by families and children. For instance, to implement collaborative four-year-old kindergarten programs, under current law, schools can contract with early care and education programs to deliver the services, which would be required to meet quality standards.
- WCCE Coalition supports establishment of a set of conditions school districts must meet when using Pre-K state funds, to ensure collaborations with the communities' early care and education services, where it is appropriate and feasible. We also support creation of incentives for collaborative programs.

Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) position statement on four-year-old care and education programs (adopted January 2003):

- Collaborative- Programs view families as partners, and coordinate with other family support services to provide the most seamless and efficient services to families. Policies regarding four-year-old programs should support collaborative efforts that blend existing care and education programs, to make the most effective use of resources in the community to serve children and families.

In a September 2002 the **Wisconsin Child Care Administrators Association (WCCAA)** issued a statement that the association believes in the potential for collaboration for 4K as benefiting children and families in some school districts, however the private child care administrators in the association had concerns in a number of areas: the on-going stability of the organization for different aged children, quality of the care and education program, lack of appropriate space in schools and possible economic issues including the raising of taxes. WCCAA ultimately opposed state funding of 4K programs during that budget cycle.

Appendix E

WFFF Documents and Related Resources

Community Approaches to Serving Four-Year-Old Children in Wisconsin: Lessons Learned from Wisconsin Communities

One of the funded activities of the Wisconsin project, Forces for Four-Year-Olds, was to collect resource information and data from communities with existing four-year-old kindergarten collaboratives, by a process of focus group interviews. *Community Approaches...* begins by providing an overview of a community approach to serving four year olds. The next sections contain lessons learned in creating community approaches and descriptions of the benefits and challenges of community approaches. Appendices supply resource documents, helpful websites, contact persons, sample documents, focus group questions, and background questionnaires. The document can be found at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/ec4yrpag.html>.

Creating a Community Approach to Serving Four-Year-Old Children in Wisconsin: Public Awareness Packet

This pamphlet offers a concise guide to begin the process of raising awareness for the need for a community approach to establishing universal access to quality care and learning services for four-year-old children. It includes a rationale for universal access and for using a community approach, what such an approach looks like, how to organize an inclusive meeting, what options a program can take, how to handle issues addressed, how to approach the media, and relevant research. The document can be found at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/ec4yrpag.html>.

4K and Community Approaches DVD/Video

A DVD/video was created to promote public and political will for 4K and community approaches. "*Community Approaches to Serving Wisconsin 4-Year-Olds*" features the Governor the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and community leaders talking about the importance of 4K and working with child care and Head Start in community approaches. The video can be accessed through streaming video at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/ec4yrpag.html>.

Web Pages

The Department of Public Instruction four-year-old kindergarten home page contains additional information on 4K programs including two Wisconsin School Board Association Magazine articles about community partnerships which place 4K programs in child care settings as well as in schools. It will give you information to consider on

the Advantages and Disadvantages of Public School Four-Year-Old Kindergarten and who "educates" four year olds in Wisconsin as well as resources to look further into the issue. It includes laws, policy guidance and links to best practices. There is a question and answer slide show that will answer all of your specific questions on four-year-old kindergarten. The address is

<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/ec4yrpag.html>.

A second web site will soon host specific information on the Forces for Four-Year-Old project and community approaches. This site serves as the hub for information on early childhood collaboration and partnerships. The address is

<http://www.collaboratingpartners.com>.

Forces For Four PowerPoint Presentations

A PowerPoint slide show details the rationales, research supporting, benefits of, processes involved in creating, service delivery models, challenges, and lessons learned from existing programs that provide universal access for four-year-old care and education through using a community partnerships approach. The PowerPoint is available from the Department of Public Instruction, Jill Haglund, at jill.haglund@DPI.state.wi.us and will soon be located on the web at <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com>.

Consensus Building facilitator Guide

This document offers tools for the facilitator who, in a 2- to 4-hr session, gathers stakeholders to build consensus (on how to provide services through a community collaborative approach) through a process that allows participants to gain a better understanding of the issues and concerns facing the stakeholder organizations. The processes includes grounding (greeting circle), introductions, panel or PowerPoint presentation, forming small groups, exploring conflicts, worst and best outcomes, strategies and actions, and closing. The PowerPoint is available from the Department of Public Instruction, Jill Haglund, at jill.haglund@DPI.state.wi.us and will soon be located on the web at <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com>.

Funding Guide

It is clear that some general aid is available to schools for 4K. However, when communities begin to broaden their thinking to include other early childhood services, it begins to get confusing. There are also public funding sources for Head Start, Title I, special education, and food programs. Wisconsin Shares subsidizes child care so that low income parents can work. Parent fees pay for the majority of child care services. As more communities work together to improve quality and reduce transitions for children, they must think differently about how these funding sources can work

together. Combining funding streams can be difficult because some children may be eligible for services from several funding sources while other children may be eligible only for 4K services. Providers may have difficulty understanding how to braid services and funding so that all of the appropriate resources are utilized in an effective and efficient manner. The categorical nature of some funding sources presents a challenge; as they are often designed to meet specific needs and do not easily work in a collaborative model. For example, different programs have different requirements for eligibility, staffing ratios, and content standards. All of these challenges can work to make the very practical matter of funding seem like an insurmountable obstacle to implementing a community approaches model. Yet there are communities that have worked through these issues, and they provide us with some insights and strategies for facing the funding component. The document is available from the Department of Public Instruction, Jill Haglund, at jill.haglund@DPI.state.wi.us and will soon be located on the web at <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com>.

Coaches Can Help Descriptive Documents

Community Collaboration Coaches have been contracted for each of the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners Networking Regions and Milwaukee. Coaches are available to support the exploration of community approaches to services for young children. A coach will guide select communities by acting as an information broker, helping identify resources, offering guidance for a planning process, promoting utilization of new Model Early Learning Standards, and linking programs to carry out community approaches within their community. Descriptive documents are available from the Department of Public Instruction, Jill Haglund, at jill.haglund@DPI.state.wi.us.

Coaches Funding

This document outlines performance expectations and activities for each of the goals of the collaboration coaches: building the regional early childhood networks, promoting community approaches to early childhood care and education through four-year-old kindergarten and preschool options for young children with disabilities; promoting the implementation of Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standard; participating in a qualitative environmental scan of early childhood resources, best practices, and identifying service gaps in the region to focus on mental health, parenting education, and family support. It includes the technical assistance areas and backgrounds of the collaborating coaches and outlines funding sources for their support. Documents describing the braided funding are available from the Department of Public Instruction, Jill Haglund, at jill.haglund@DPI.state.wi.us.

Report on Impact of 4K on School Funding

A report is currently being finalized on the economic impact of four-year-old kindergarten on Wisconsin public schools. This study is being completed by Clive Belfield, Queens College, City University of New York and Dennis Winters, NorthStar Economics, Inc., Madison, Wisconsin. It will be available from the Department of Public Instruction, Jill Haglund, at jill.haglund@DPI.state.wi.us and will soon be located on the web at <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com>.

Resources Related to TEE Efforts

Economic Development

The white paper “Early Childhood Education and Care Challenges Facing Wisconsin” was created for the Fourth Wisconsin Economic Summit. This paper advanced the argument that any efforts toward building the state's future economic capacity must start with providing high quality early childhood education and care for our youngest residents.

The major premise is that consideration of public policy issues associated with early childhood education and care must be included in any comprehensive economic planning effort intending to improve Wisconsin’s future economic conditions. The paper can be found at <http://www.wisconsin.edu/summit/papers/index.htm>.

Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards

Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards have been developed by the Wisconsin Departments of Public Instruction, Health and Family Services, and Workforce Development. These standards reflect the shared values and commitments of the citizens of Wisconsin to prepare young children for success in school. They include performance standards and provide a framework for the development of program standards and assessment practices. Children who meet the developmental expectations outlined in the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards will be prepared to master Wisconsin’s Model Academic Standards. Go to <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/EarlyLS.htm> for copies and related information.

4K Survey

Four-Year-Old Kindergarten parent satisfaction and provider surveys (2003) and provider survey results (1999-2000 and 2003) are included at the Cooperative Educational Services Agency #4 website at <http://www.cesa4.k12.wi.us/programs-services/special/ec/surveys/index.htm>.