Report A

Family Experiences and Parent Satisfaction with 4-year-old Kindergarten in Wisconsin

Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership

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March, 2006

For the Early Education Matters project, Wisconsin Council on Children & Families with funding from The Joyce Foundation
Acknowledgements

This research study on 4-year-old kindergarten was a team effort, with the early design of research questions done in consultation with Rachel Schumacher and Danielle Ewen from the Center for Law & Social Policy, Paula Evenson and Jon Peacock of the Wisconsin Council on Children & Families, and Jill Haglund from the Department of Public Instruction.

The Research Partnership team exhibited focused attention to detail in conducting this research. Mary Roach, Diane Adams, and Jason Bierbrauer created the instruments and sampling system needed to gather information from school districts, individual schools offering 4-year-old kindergarten, parents, and collaborating site partners in local communities. Deb Zeman helped design the system for mailing surveys, reply envelopes, and packets to teachers and parents in districts. Angie Fisher aided in many stages of recording receipt of questionnaires, and making follow-up contacts with non-respondents, as well as in summarizing the qualitative data on parent and teacher attitudes toward 4K. Chavameth (Jack) Vinijtrongjit designed the on-line version of the surveys to teachers and parents, so that data could be recorded electronically. Allen Robinson designed and sent the e-mail survey instrument to all 416 elementary school districts in Wisconsin, designed Access databases for each group in the study, entered all data, and did many of the analyses for this report. It is only because of the staff’s persistent efforts that we were able to achieve a 100% return from the e-mail survey, 100% return from the district sites involved in “community approach” 4K for the 2005-06 school year, as well a 100% return from the random sample of districts with 4K in a school setting. Dave Edie, Alan Sweet, and Dave Riley provided feedback on both the survey methodology and return results.

We are grateful to the enthusiastic participation of school district superintendents, school principals, child care and Head Start directors, mothers and fathers of 4-year-old children, and teachers of pre-kindergarten in helping us gain greater understanding of the movement known as “4K” in Wisconsin. We learned much from their responses, summarized in Report A (Parents), Report B (Baseline Communities), Report C (Mini-grant Communities), Report D (Updating Community Approach Districts, and Report E (Teachers), as well as an Executive Summary (www.uwex.edu/ces/flip/ece/wccrp/eem.html).

Funding for this research came from a partnership grant with the Wisconsin Council on Children & Families from The Joyce Foundation. We are glad to have had this opportunity, using our talents in research and evaluation to gain more comprehensive data about the “community approach” to 4K. Though several readers made comments and suggestions about early drafts of the reports, the authors take responsibility for any errors or omissions. We turn now to a report on parent satisfaction with 4K.

FAMILY EXPERIENCES AND PARENT SATISFACTION WITH 4-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN IN WISCONSIN: 2005

Introduction

Much of the existing literature on the benefits of public pre-kindergarten for 4-year-old children has to do with positive cognitive gains and readiness for school for the children (Kagan & Rigby, 2003; Gormley and Phillips, 2003). Research on parents of young children frequently centers on parent-child relations, participation in the education programs their children are enrolled in, and how that participation enhances children’s learning (Gilliam and Zigler, 2000). Few studies have looked carefully at parent experiences with a specific type of educational experience. For the Early Education Matters project, designed to promote and document collaborative 4-year-old kindergarten in the state, we wished to answer the question: What is the value of a 4-year-old kindergarten (4K) experience to families in Wisconsin?

Methodology

The 2005-06 study design (see Figure 1) was built on a multi-stage investigation into 4K in the state of Wisconsin, with information sought from superintendents and/or school leaders in all districts, from administrators of named community approach sites, from teachers in 4K programs (both in community approach sites and a random sample of 4K school programs for comparison purposes), and parents using 4K – again, both in 4K community approach settings and comparison school programs. Approval for the study was sought and granted from the UW-Madison Human Subjects Committee.

We began this study by framing questions to clarify what is meant by a “community approach.” This term was featured in a statewide article, which called for a “cooperative attitude” so that districts beginning or expanding 4-year-old programs would be encouraged to connect with local child care and/or Head Start programs to offer these programs collaboratively (Landsverk, 2003). A more precise definition would undoubtedly be helpful, but for this study, we continued to use the broad term “community approach” to mean a variety of contractual agreements or community relationships with entities outside the district to offer 4-year-old kindergarten collaboratively.
Three sites originally thought to be "Community Approach" 4K programs ended up being 4K programs, but not "Community Approach" 4K: Abbotsford Elementary (Abbotsford), Coleman Elementary (Coleman), and Nelson Elementary (Grantsburg). Also, one site originally thought to be a non-"Community Approach" 4K program ended up being "Community Approach" 4K: Elcho Elementary (Elcho).

** The number of new site districts (24) reflects the 16 completely new districts, the 3 districts that changed "Community Approach" status during the study and 5 districts that were "Community Approach" in 2004-05 also, but added more programs this year. It also fails to reflect the Elcho School District as a new "Community Approach" district.

*** Two schools originally thought to have 4K programs did not: Quinney Elementary (Kaukauna), and Blair Elementary (Waukesha).
Background

There has been rapid growth rate in the number of districts offering 4K in collaboration with community partners, with detailed reports on the public school/child care/Head Start collaborations. But to date there has been no research on the experiences of families of 4-year-olds whose children are enrolled in public pre-kindergarten. To help answer questions about family experiences and parent satisfaction with 4-year-old kindergarten, particularly in the “community approach” 4K programs, all administrators of an existing community approach 4K program for the 2004-05 school year (n = 16) and half of a comparison group of 32 elementary schools offering 4K but not in collaboration (n = 16) were asked to distribute a “4K Parent Questionnaire” to parents whose children were enrolled in their individual sites. Parents responded to this questionnaire, either by return mail or through the on-line version. The total number of parent questionnaires sent to these 32 districts was 1,722, and 300 parents responded either with the mail return method or the on-line version. We could only estimate the number of parent questionnaires that would be needed, and asked community approach or non-collaborative sites to distribute them. Some districts have a policy of not distributing outside surveys of any sort, while others participated fully in the distribution process. Thus, since we do not know how many questionnaires were actually distributed, we are unable to calculate an exact return rate for the parent questionnaire. In the findings that follow, it is evident that the decision to exempt the new collaborating sites for 2005-06 and Head Start sites from the distribution system for parent questionnaires may have resulted in a skewed sample of higher income parents. We had few parents from Milwaukee return the questionnaire (whether because of distribution problems or simply a lack of returns), which also will have affected the number and percent of low-income families in the analyses of returns.

Given these limitations, to provide as complete a picture of families enrolled in 4K community approach programs as possible, we begin with an overview of the demographic profile of 4K parents, then discuss family experiences with 4K and parent satisfaction, based on responses to the 4K Parent Questionnaire. Open-ended questions provided qualitative data on perceptions and realities of parents’ views, while the closed-ended questions provided data on family make-up and occupations, leaving us with a fairly clear overview of parents of 4-year-olds in communities across the state. The total numbers of parent responses from the “community approach” and comparison sites is found in Figure 1, Study Design.
A. Family Demographics

We asked this sample of parents in collaborative and non-collaborative 4K programs to respond to questions about family make-up, their own racial and ethnic backgrounds, their education and employment, and family income. We will report on parent responses from both community approach (indicated as collaborative in the figures and tables below) 4K programs and the random sample comparison 4K schools that are not using a community approach (designated as non-collaborative in the figures and tables below).

“If the program were not offered at my child’s daycare, it would not meet my needs, since it begins at 9:30 a.m., and I begin work at 8 a.m. I am uncertain what other parents do who do not have children that attend the daycare.”

- Rhinelander parent in a child care/school collaborative 4K

1. Marital status. Families using 4K in Wisconsin who responded to the questionnaire appear to be predominately two-parent households (89%), with 10% of the children living with mother only and 1% living with father only. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that, for families with children under age 5, 75% are two-parent households (www.wisstat.wisc.edu).

We found no significant differences in the percentage of two-parent households between families using collaborative and non-collaborative 4K programs (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Marital Status among 4K Families

2. Parent employment. The U.S. Census reports that about 65% of Wisconsin parents with children under age 5 are employed (www.wisstat.wisc.edu). However, state planners have consistently reported that the percentage of working parents rises with each age cohort of children, so that by the time children are in middle-school, that
percentage is over 70%. This study of 4K parents found that 75% of parents responding reported both parents were employed, and reported near full-time employment hours. As a group, the employed parents using 4K worked an average of 34 hours/week for mothers (about three-quarter time), and 43 hours/week for fathers (over 100% time). There were no significant differences between community approach and non-community approach districts in terms of employment patterns for parents of 4-year-olds. Thus, the total group of 4K parents responding to this survey was made up predominately of two-parent, employed parents (see employment details provided in Table 1).

Table 1: Employment Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours Worked</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Collaborative</th>
<th>Non-Collaborative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentile</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>20.94%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.81%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.86%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10.83%</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>40 or more</td>
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<td>46.57%</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Hours Worked</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Collaborative</th>
<th>Non-Collaborative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentile</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.39%</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.39%</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
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<td>40 or more</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>92.13%</td>
<td>175</td>
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<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 illustrates the percent of hours of employment for mothers and fathers, as well as the overall hours of employment for only the sample of employed parents. A subset of 4K families (about 21% of the respondents) had a stay-at-home parent (mostly mothers), who reported they were homemakers, or who had a professional role but for the time being were at home and not employed. About 3% of employed parents described their occupations as what might be termed “self-employment” jobs (house cleaning, running a day care business, or farmers); the majority of parents were employed in a variety of service sector, manufacturing, and professional/technical jobs.
3. Ethnic and racial minorities. Nearly all (96%) parents responding to the questionnaire were from the white racial majority, with only a fraction representing Hispanic/Latino/Latina, Native American, or African American racial groups (see Figure 4 for the illustration of ethnic backgrounds of 4K Parents). The overall ethnic minority in Wisconsin is 12.7% of the population (www.wisstat.wisc.edu). Again, the lack of parent responses from Milwaukee, the state’s most diverse city, undoubtedly affected this picture of ethnic makeup.

4. Parental ages. The largest age cohort for this sample of parents responding to the questionnaire was the age bracket of 31-35 years of age, with mothers reporting an average age of 34 years and fathers reporting an average age of 36 years. Parents in the non-collaborative 4K programs were slightly older (see Figure 5).
5. Education. Families responding to the 4K Parent Questionnaire were relatively well-educated. Among respondents in the community approach districts, 56% of parents had a college degree; in the comparison districts, 44% of parents had a college degree (see Figure 6). (Note: the only statistically significant difference between the two samples was the mothers’ education). About 11% of the community approach parents and 10% of the comparison sample reported having a post-graduate degree. Overall, in the state of Wisconsin, 49.5% of adults have high school graduation as the highest education level (www.wisstat.wisc.edu).

The time scheduled for 4K programming is at a convenient time and at a convenient location. I am able to drop off my two children at the child development center on my way to work. My son is able to walk downstairs to meet his 4K classmates, and then afterward walk back upstairs.

- Port Edward parent in a child care/4K community approach program
6. Family income. We could expect that a population of two-parent employed families might have family incomes above the median for the state (or about $43,000/year for a family of 4). That was true for this population, though we found slightly lower incomes among the non-collaborative comparison 4K districts. Overall, nearly 35% of the families reported total annual incomes of over $70,000/year; fewer than 3% reported incomes of less than $20,000/year (see Table 2).

Table 2: Family Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salaries</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentile</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentile</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 - $19,999</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>97.53%</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 - $29,999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>92.58%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>93.40%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>90.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 - $39,999</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>85.87%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>86.32%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>84.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 - $49,999</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>69.96%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>70.28%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 - $59,999</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>57.24%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57.55%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>56.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 - $69,999</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42.76%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>44.81%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000 - $79,999</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30.74%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33.02%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000 - $89,999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22.97%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,000 - $99,999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.25%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.45%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 - $109,999</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.01%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.68%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$110,000+</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.36%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.08%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>300</td>
<td></td>
<td>227</td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having data from families in both community approach districts and districts that do not currently have collaborations allowed us to compare the percentage of families that report annual incomes near the state median income for a family of four ($43,000/year). Over two-thirds of families in the community-approach districts had incomes of at least $40,000 annually, with the non-collaborative districts only slightly lower (see Figure 7).
7. **Family schedules.** Part of modern U.S. society is the challenge of balanced scheduling of children’s activities, parent work schedules, and community activities. The parents in this study exemplified the very complex existence of “scheduling.” After excluding the 21% (collaborative and non-collaborative samples) in which one parent was not employed, the remaining parents in each of the samples were employed outside the home an average of 38.5 hours/week (when mothers’ and fathers’ employment hours are combined). Analyses of further questions having to do with day, night, and shift working schedules revealed that at least one parent was not employed during the day, thus having daytime availability in 20% of the collaborative and 40% of the non-collaborative families (see Figure 8).

Parents reported that their children attended the 4K program an average of 13 hours per week. Though many parents were available during the day for transporting children to and from 4K, many were not – and turned to other forms of care arrangements for their 4-year-old children.

This group of mostly-employed families reported on use of other care arrangements for their 4-year-olds. In the “community approach” districts, 4-year old
children attended a child care center or used a family child care or some other arrangement during the week just over 20 hours per week, with the non-collaborative program parents reporting slightly less use of other programs (see Figure 9).

![Figure 9: Hours Per Week in 4K and Hours in Other Programs](image)

B. Family Experiences

Families sometimes learn about public 4K programs through community outreach, announcements from the public school, participation in community planning committees, and/or individual contacts from teachers, administrators, or other parents.

Before beginning to explore parents’ perspectives on 4K, it is important to understand families’ experiences. In this section of the questionnaire, we asked the sample of parents in collaborative and non-collaborative programs to respond to questions about

- transportation and the distance from home to the 4K program, and
- relative costs associated with 4K and other child care this year compared to last year

1. Transportation and distance from home. Particularly in rural areas, riding the school bus is a normal part of public education. Between 42-67% of parents reported that their 4-year-olds rode a bus to the 4K program (see Figure 10).

![Figure 10: Children Using the Bus for 4K](image)
Parents in both samples reported that their homes were an average of just over 4 miles away from the 4K programs they attended, though the range was from 0-50 miles.

2. Costs associated with 4K. Free, universal public education is a hallmark in Wisconsin and all states, so it is not surprising that almost all 4K families report they do not pay for 4K programs. There are, of course, costs associated with extended hour care in a child care center or school-based program beyond the 4K hours. Figure 11 illustrates the percentage of families in both samples that reported no cost for 4K education.

Of those who do pay for 4K in child care programs, the amount paid is less than the average cost of child care for the 3-5 year-old age group (around $150/week). Families responding to this questionnaire paid just over $60/week in the community approach districts, and $25/week in the non-collaborative districts (see Figure 12), primarily for the cost of “other care.” There may have been confusion about “paying for 4K,” since it is offered free in public schools. However, there may be materials costs, lunch, or other small fees. These comparative costs were asked for, so as to ascertain whether the current 4K program had a monetary impact on the family income between last year and this year.

Figure 13 illustrates the hours per week the (now) 4-year-old child was in an early education program last year, an average of about 26/hours per week for the two groups. For children in both community approach districts and of children in non-collaborative districts, 4K is, thus, a continuation of early education experiences from last year to this year.
We asked parents to compare their costs for early care and education between last year and this current year. Almost 50% of the community approach districts reported their costs were lower this year than last, compared to 39% in the comparison, non-collaboration districts (see Figure 14).

A small percentage of children received special education or special health care services at the 4K program, also offered at no charge to the parents as reported by these respondents (see Figure 15).

Having free or nearly free pre-kindergarten is definitely a value to the families. The families responding to this questionnaire also had other costs associated with raising children, since these respondents reported having just over two children per family (see Figure 16), including their 4-year-old child.
C. Family Satisfaction with 4K

1. Parent satisfaction with 4K in community approach districts (n = 227)

Many families had not previously been asked about their satisfaction with the 4K programs prior to this survey, and welcomed the opportunity to reflect on:
- what they like best about the program
- what changes they would like to see in the program
- how well the program fits their own family schedules

The analyses which follow are first for the community approach districts only, which may be helpful to districts planning to implement 4K community approaches after receiving mini-grants from the Early Education Matters Project. We received 227 parental responses from 11 out of 16 community approach school districts to several open-ended questions about parent satisfaction, and they are reported on below (see Table 3). Parent responses from the comparison sites follow this section.

Table 3: Community Approach Districts with Parent Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents responding to satisfaction questions (227):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portage-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin Rapids-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaCrosse-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wausau-43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following provides summary information about answers to three open-ended questions by parents in community approach 4K programs:

1. What one thing do you like best about this 4-year-old kindergarten program?

Parents commented on many things that they liked best about their child's 4-year-old kindergarten program. Responses were categorized so that each parent's response was included in only one category. The responses were split up into five categories, after excluding the 10 “no responses.” The five categories included teacher, parent involvement, school readiness, overall quality, and logistics (class size, cost, location, and schedule).

Parents also inserted anecdotal comments about each of these important program features.

Teachers (71%):
- The lead teacher is a very experienced educator of (kindergarten) children; I feel like my child will have an excellent start next year with previously acquired skill and learned expectations.
- Both teachers are great!
- The teachers are great. They inform me constantly of my son's progress.
- Friendliness of teachers and the activities that they do.
- The teachers are so loving and kind.
- High quality teachers and curriculum.
- Teacher's enthusiasm.
- Teacher was highly recommended.
- Teacher is absolutely fantastic and is providing my child with a wonderful pre-school experience.
School readiness (63%):
- My son has learned so much. He learned his name, the alphabet and counting all in 2 months so far.
- He seems to retain everything he learns and loves going.
- My child has learned a lot regarding numbers/letter/math etc. in combination with preschool.
- My son gets to socialize with other students and get ready for kindergarten.
- Prepares child for kindergarten.
- Opportunity for our child to be in an educational situation before entering kindergarten.
- My son has had significant progress with his speech.

Overall quality (46%):
- There isn’t one thing, it is everything.
- He loves going to school and he has fun.
- My child is excited every day for school!
- Exposure to other children the same age in a structured environment.
- Interaction with other kids.
- Social skills they teach.
- Teaches my child social skills and interaction with others.
- My child gets to socialize and play with other kids.
- Developing of social skills in a controlled environment.

Logistics (22%):
- Structure. I think it is evenly structured throughout the day. Time allotted for play, learning, and rest.
- Variety in schedule.
- It is conveniently located in my child’s regular day care setting - allowing her to remain at one location and allowing me not to find transportation to and from the day care.
- It's in our day care.
- The collaboration with the YMCA and use of their facilities.
- Location, at the preschool my child already attends.
- The small class size.
- It is all day for only 2 days versus a couple hours for more days.
- The time it is offered.

Parent involvement (12%):
- Great communication between parent/teacher and teacher/child.
- Open communication between teacher and parents regarding my child.
- Parental involvement with school activities is encouraged, promoted and facilitated.
- Opportunity for parental involvement.

2. What one change would you recommend for improving this 4-year-old kindergarten program?

The parent responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive. Parents appeared to like their child’s 4K program. More than half of the parent respondents (n = 125) chose not to respond to this question, which suggests that they were unable to think of any improvement that could be made to their child’s
4-year-old kindergarten classroom. Therefore, we took into account only the responses where a possible improvement was commented upon.

Figure 18: Community Approach Parents’ Suggested Changes

Again, some anecdotal comments about each of these suggested improvements may be helpful to future planning for 4K in a community approach.

**Schedule (34%)**:
- Have in the morning instead of afternoon when child is more alert.
- More time for the kids - not just a few hours a day but a full day.
- Having full days.
- More hours of 4K.
- Making it a 5-day program.
- Make it into more than a 2.5 hour day, maybe 3-3.5 hours.
- Get a ½ day discount on day care.
- After school care.
- Have no class on Wednesday.
- Make the class longer.
- Longer hours, maybe 6.
- One more hour per day.
- Have two full days rather than 5 half days.
- I don't like it that it closes for 1 month for winter break and (is) closed all summer. It makes it difficult to arrange for other care.

**Transportation/location (17%)**:
- Parking/drop-off.
- Have the program at the school rather than a day care center.
- Bigger building, as child care is running out of room.
- Larger room, maybe one more assistant.
- Bus at noon to sitter.
- Bus ride home, someone needs to pick her up at 11:00 which is hard for working parents.
- Two way bus transportation.
I would have a place inside the school for the children to go until school begins instead of having the pre K kids wait outside with the other students.

Children need to take their kids to and from school.

On the way home he is on the bus for 45 minutes, and has to transfer busses.

**Communication (16%)**:

- I haven’t had much feedback back from the 4K teacher-I guess I will during parent-teacher conferences.
- More communication with parent.
- Better communication with the parents
- I wish there were more letters sent home from the teacher telling us what is going on, what they are learning, what they are working on.
- I would like a little more communication about each day.
- I wish that the teachers would be friendlier to the parents and kids that are less fortunate.
- Communication between school system (principal) and offsite 4K centers.
- A weekly report on what the kids did and learned that week.
- Having teacher more accessible. Hours don’t coincide well.
- Tell parents at the beginning of the school year about volunteer opportunities.

**Class size/ ratio (12%)**:

- Smaller class size.
- More teachers.
- Fewer children.
- Smaller class size
- Fewer students! Maybe 12 at most?

**Classroom experiences (11%)**:

- This class needs to have more funding for classroom supplies and trips.
- More experiences outside of school, more parent contact and involvement.
- Learn more kindergarten objectives, less playtime.
- Would like some academics.
- More letter/number writing practice opportunities, not just sight recognition activities.
- Work more on letter recognition.
- Less free choice time.
- I didn’t like the grading system.
- More structured learning.
- Keep the children together (in the same room) all day.
- The current teacher is not under a district contract but associated with our district. I’d like to see her employed by the school district.
- Doesn’t seem like much structured learning and my daughter was ready for kindergarten so I’m afraid other than the social aspect she might be bored.
- More educational visitors and field trips.
- Introduce computers into classroom.
- More lively songs, stories, puppet shows.
3. How does this 4K program meet or not meet your family’s schedule?

Of all responses to questions about parent satisfaction with 4K, 83.2% (134/161) were overwhelmingly positive about 4K. Of all responses to the question, 16.8% (27/161) were coded as “needed improvement” responses.

![Figure 19: Community Approach Parent Satisfaction](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmingly Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Valid: 161
Total No responses: 66

Overwhelmingly positive comments (sample):
- Perfect. I love this program.
- The time scheduled for 4K programming is at a convenient time and at a convenient location.
- Great!
- It meets our schedule because my child is able to ride the bus even though she attends a private school.
- Has childcare before and after the pre-k program.
- Hours fall within child care center hours already attended.
- They work with parents on schedules.
- This 4K program meets our family’s schedule very well. This 4K program is an excellent program for children.
- The 4K program is right at my child’s daycare center every day for 2 hours. He doesn’t have to leave the facility, very nice.
- My job is extremely flexible—I can leave early or come late anytime I need. We were able to reschedule parent-teacher conferences around my schedule.
- Meets the family schedule. Child care provided before and after school hours.
- It has worked perfectly!

“Needs improvement” comments (sample):
- It is very hard to find daycare in this area as I don’t know any sitters in this school district that is on my way to work and it’s hard to have to take time off work every day to make sure my child can go to 4K.
- It would be nice if the class was longer so she could be picked up on a lunch break instead of late morning.
- Need a PM class.
2. Parent satisfaction with 4K in comparison district sites (n = 73)

Parents in the comparison districts (without a community approach for 4K) also had, in general, many positive responses to the “4K Parent Questionnaire.” Their responses were sorted by answers to the open-ended questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Comparison Districts with Parent Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents responding to satisfaction questions (73):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams-Friendship - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algoma - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyceville - 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. What one thing do you like best about this 4-year-old kindergarten program?

Parents commented on several program features that they liked best about their 4-year-old kindergarten program. Responses were split into categories, after excluding the 2 “no responses.” The top three program feature categories were a) learning and socialization the children receive, b) the teachers, and c) the school/schedule/class size.

Parents inserted anecdotal comments about each of these important features. The following are samples under each category:

**Learning and socialization (59% of responses)**
- It has helped my daughter not be so shy, and her development has greatly improved.
- It’s a great opportunity for my child to prepare for kindergarten, socialize with other kids his age, and get out to a structured program.
- It gives my child the opportunity to play and learn with kids his age, and prepares him for kindergarten.
- My child likes it, so I am glad to see he will go!

**Teachers (26% of responses)**
- The teachers – the program itself.
- The teachers are great!
- Its reputation of having caring and loving staff and excellent quality programming every week.
- The teacher, and how much he learns and listens to his teacher and the things she teaches him.

**School, schedule, and class size (15% of responses)**
- The convenience of sending my son to school with his sister, and no cost.
- It’s 4 days a week and ½ days, many activities are planned, and a weekly plan is sent home with each child.
- It is in the school they will attend; it helps to familiarize them with the school experience.
2. What one change would you recommend for improving this 4-year-old kindergarten program?

Parent responses to this open-ended question showed few areas of improvement needed, from a parent perspective. Nineteen had “no response” to this question, compared with 2 “no response” to question one.

Some specific suggestions were made for improvement:
- I would like to see the day go longer for the students. My daughter never feels she was there long enough; she always wants to stay.
- The teachers need to treat the children with more respect – I never hear the teachers say please or thank you...it is always “get your coats on” or “sit down” (never with a “please”).
- Having graduated classes for different levels of learning, not just shapes and colors.
- Not offering chocolate milk every day.
- Having the teacher make sure the kids are bundled up before going home (e.g. coats zipped, hats and gloves on).

3. How does this 4K program meet or not meet your family’s schedule?

Since each family’s schedule of parent employment, number of children and their activities, and outside commitments is unique to that family, it is difficult to interpret desired changes in the 4K schedule. However, 70% of these respondents (minus the 27 with “no response”) had very good things to say about the schedule:

- Having the program in the morning coordinates best with my work schedule and sitter schedule. It also correlates well with the older sibling’s school schedule.
- I go to the school system myself, so it helps to know that I have a place for my child to go 4 days a week that he loves, and I can count on.
- The morning bus ride is the same as my older children (have), and the classroom is in the same building.

Those who had negative comments were very pointed about what might help their families the most. The last comment (below) displays the ambivalence some parents feel about scheduling children’s educational activities:

- We both work all day; our child attends in-home day care and this program is during those times.
- It’s only for a little over 2 hours, and it gets hard to plan other things sometimes.
- The program is not very long per day, which is hard to plan work hours – but on the other hand, I would prefer it this way. My 4-year-old has never been to public school or day care, so a small amount daily is perfect to get him to adjust to the separation and new people.

Overall, parents in comparison sites, were very satisfied with their 4K experiences, and provided ample commentary about the programs’ positive attributes and value to their families (see Figure 20).
In conclusion, the total group of parents responding to this questionnaire were very satisfied with their 4K experiences, and the programs their children attended. Figure 21 provides a clear picture of parental support for 4K, whether offered in collaboration or at the school site.

### Summary

Parents of 4-year-olds responded to our survey with thoughtful comments, suggestions, and demographic information, including income, employment schedules, and ethnicity. There was an obviously positive response to having a pre-kindergarten program sponsored by local public schools. The community approach districts yielded more parent questionnaires than the comparison districts, but only as a proportion of the number of sites (143 in community approach vs. 32 in non-community approach comparison sites). There were no major differences between these groups of parents in terms of satisfaction with 4K, and positive comments, as well as areas for improvement.
More in-depth interviews with families at some point in the future might perhaps provide additional data about the exact ways in which the community approach 4K programs mesh with family schedules and the value of having about 13 hours/week of educational experiences, on average, at no cost to the family. But, in general, we would conclude that the value of 4K to families is not inconsequential.

The expectation of many of these parents is that the schools their children will attend are an “ideal place” for 4K, so that children become used to the school environment, the bus, and school routines. A caution arises, however. Currently, there is a race to expand public school options: charter schools, the voucher or “parent choice” schools in Milwaukee, and – in some parts of the state – contracts with religious based schools. The fact that 60% of public districts experienced falling enrollments in the past few years (DPI, 2006) may present a challenge for maintaining 4K in public school settings, unless additional revenues are secured.

Where child care and Head Start sites are used in partnership with public schools to offer 4K, there may be greater overall community support for public school leadership on into the future. We would have a different report, perhaps, if many more low-income families had had the opportunity to respond to the questions about value of 4K to their families, but these data present a fairly optimistic picture of parent satisfaction with pre-kindergarten in Wisconsin.
References


