



Luther S. Olsen

State Senator

14th District

TO: Joint Committee on Education

FROM: Senator Luther Olsen

DATE: Thursday, October 3, 2019

SUBJECT: Testimony for Senate Bill 407/Assembly Bill 464 & Senate Bill 408/Assembly Bill 465

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

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

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

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

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

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



JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Testimony in Support of AB 464/SB 407 and AB 465/SB 408
Assembly and Senate Committees on Education
October 3, 2019

Chairman Olsen, Chairman Thiesfeldt, and members of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees,

Thank you for holding a joint public hearing on Assembly Bill 464 and 465. As a primary coauthor of AB 464 and AB 465, I am happy to write in support of these great bills and I am glad they are being brought before this joint meeting of the Assembly and Senate Education Committees.

These bills are the result of input gathered by the Blue Ribbon Commission on School Funding, which was tasked with examining how tax dollars are distributed to schools and with making recommendations to better meet the needs of students across the state. While I was not a member of that committee, I am thankful for their hard work and dedication as they looked for solutions to better serve our children, schools, and communities.

Assembly bill 464 is a simple bill that would change the deadline that a child can be enrolled in a four-year-old kindergarten program from September 1 to December 31, while giving school boards until the 2025-26 school year to make their existing programs available to the additional pupils that would become eligible under this bill. Assembly Bill 465 would allow 4K programs that require full day attendance by pupils for five days a week to be able to count these pupils as a whole one pupil rather than as a 0.5 pupil under current law.

Studies consistently show that early childhood education, especially for children between the ages of three and five, is extremely beneficial for developing knowledge and academic success later in life as well as improved social skills and a life-long thirst for learning. I know everyone on this committee wants to do what is best for the children of Wisconsin, and I believe that AB 464 and AB 465 would help prepare our children for a lifetime of learning and academic success by giving more young pupils the opportunity and resources to learn and grow.

Thank you again for allowing me to submit my testimony in support of these bills.

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

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

Assembly Bill 465 and Senate Bill 408:

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

Assembly Bill 464 and Senate Bill 407:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Four and Five-Year-Old Kindergarten in Wisconsin

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

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

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

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

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

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

October 2, 2019

Dear Senator Olsen,

I was recently made aware that there will be hearings on Bill 407 and Bill 408 tomorrow at the capitol. Unfortunately, due to my obligations with the children in my center I am not able to attend but I did want to share my thoughts on these bills.

As an individual that has been a childcare professional for over thirty years, I have seen many changes in the early childhood field. This most recent proposal for extending a full day 4K program to include three-year olds also, greatly concerns me. Below I have listed the reasons why a formal, school based educational setting is not appropriate for a three-year-old child.

1. Developmentally, children at three are not ready for a structured, skills-based program. At three years of age these children are still learning how to share, how to get along with their friends, how to use the bathroom facilities successfully, and basically how to be a three-year-old. They are not ready for a highly structured educational program. These children need to participate in hands-on programs that allow each child to learn at their own pace with the guidance of an early childhood professional. A childcare center with lower staff/child ratios as mandated by childcare licensing regulations allows for more of this one-on-one interaction. I recently spoke with a teacher of an 4K program and they currently have twenty-three students in their classroom daily. This is not something that is appropriate for four-year olds. Is this something we want for our three-year-old children also?
2. In addition to the development of the three-year-old cognitively, the physical development of a three-year-old child is far different than that of an older child. Most three-year olds take at least a two-hour nap daily. This nap is a necessity for the healthy development of the three-year-old bones and muscles. My understanding is that currently in the 4K program children are only allowed a one-hour nap. A teacher's aide in a 4K program shared with me that every day they must wake up four-year olds because they want to sleep past the one-hour limit. I do not believe this would be beneficial to the health of a three-year-old.
3. The last concern I have about extending enrollment in our current 4K program to include three-year olds is that this will close even more childcare programs throughout the state of Wisconsin. Already the shortage of licensed childcare in Wisconsin is at a critical point. In central Wisconsin, in the last eight years we have lost over 55% of our regulated childcare programs. This is evidence of the financial impact the public school 4K programs have had on the childcare. The only way licensed childcare providers can make any money is to have a preschool program for three and four-year olds. Due to the low staff/child ratios, licensed childcare for infants and toddlers is a loss margin venture. If the public schools take the three-year olds by enrolling them into 4K programs, our small profit margin will be gone. The childcare deserts everyone talks about will be even bigger. Who will take care of the infants and toddlers? If we charge the parents the cost of care for their infants/toddlers many would be paying more in childcare than they make per week. The long-term results of this would be devastating for children as parents would be forced into unregulated care or poverty.

I would ask you please to consider my concerns as you evaluate Bill 407 and 408. Studies have shown time and time again that most learning in a person's life takes place from birth to three yet with the passage of these bills, you will be putting those children at extreme risk. Please do not support Bills 407 or 408 because they are not good for families, for children or for small business.

I thank you for taking the time to read my concerns. If I may be of assistance to you in anyway concerning this matter, feel free to reach me at 715-623-3231 or dawn.justman@aspirus.org.

Sincerely,

Dawn M. Justman
Manager, LeRoy Child Care Program
1003 McMillan Ave
Antigo, WI 54409
715-623-3231

Repercussions of Full-Day 3K and 4K

The following are considerations for school districts to work through in order to facilitate full-day 3K and 4K in district buildings versus at community centers.

(The bullets are dependent upon the size of the district and resources on hand.)

Increase funding for more buses and transportation costs – Please be aware that many parents of young children are uncomfortable with the lack of supervision and seatbelts on the buses. The height of the bus steps alone, often require having an adult lift them up on to the bus. Additionally, bus rides, especially long ones are difficult for young children. Additional supervision will be necessary to keep everyone safe, making Bus Aides a necessity.

Increase administrative/ clerical office work hours for additional students

Hire Early Childhood qualified 3K & 4K teachers

Additional classrooms and classroom equipment will be needed- Appropriately sized equipment

Hire extra art, music, and gym teachers

Lower class time in “Specials” due to sudden increase in students and limited school scheduled time.

Increase each “specials” budget, as more supplies will be needed, as well as age appropriate equipment (smaller sized equipment)

Increase ELL staff to serve ELL students

Increase Early Childhood (Special Ed) staff to serve students- unless already in place for community sites.

Increase IT Department services to include technology for 3K/4K classrooms

Increase lunchroom staff, hours, and equipment to serve influx of new students

Install lower toilets and sinks for smaller children

Install diaper changing stations, as many 3 and 4 year-olds are still struggling with toilet training.

Purchase and install new playground equipment that is age appropriate. Wisconsin Department of Children and Families has required Head Start programs held in public schools to use alternative equipment, as the installed playground equipment is unsafe for this age.

Additional developmental needs of 3 and 4 year-olds that must be taken into consideration.

Most require a nap, not a 20 minute rest time, but a two hour nap, to function well.

Toilet training is still being worked on

Extra meals (snack time) may be needed

Their brain is still growing and their formal literacy skills are developing at different rates and levels.

Vocabulary is still being learned in order to put context with words

3 and 4 year-olds are very ego-centric. They begin to learn empathy at age four and five. Social/emotional support and curriculum, must be a priority.

Transitions are very difficult for most three and four year-olds. With the typical structure of a full school day, you may see more negative behaviors.

Expect increased behavioral issues, as the mental pressure is too much and the expectation will be to sit still and listen for long periods of time.

Play is vital at this developmental level. It is the way the brain learns and processes information. Having a teacher tell you how to play an academic game or tell you what you can play with, is not true play. True play is child-centered and child-initiated.

Family time is also important at this age for bonding purposes. This initiative may lead to a further breakdown of the family system.

Currently, approximately 50% of three and four year-olds are in full-time care, which includes nap time, extra meals and extensive play time both indoors and outdoors. However, with this new initiative, most three and four year-olds will be in full-time school, which is highly structured, includes excessive transitions, and is spent inside for the majority of the day.

Several studies have proven there is very little long term benefit to full-day schooling for three and four year-olds. In fact, many studies are proving that it's backfiring and potentially causing an uptick of mental health issues in young children. Conversely, there are dozens of studies that prove providing high quality care and education in a child care environment will have lasting positive impact on the child, well into adulthood.

As an important side note, childcare centers that lose their three and four year-olds to the public schools, will be forced to double or, more likely, triple their current infant and toddler rates, to try to stay open. Most centers will be forced to close, which will mean limited or no childcare for infants and toddlers in many areas. School district's that already have a before and after school program for their school-aged children will need to expand services to include the new three's and four's.



Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

October 3, 2019

Dear Members of the Joint Senate and Assembly Committees on Education:

I am here today on behalf of the Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, or WECA.

WECA opposes SB407. There is at this time not enough evidence to support the idea that 3-year-olds will be guaranteed a developmentally appropriate program in a Wisconsin public school setting.

WECA neither opposes nor supports SB408. However, we do recognize critical considerations pertaining to this bill and recommend that the State of Wisconsin:

1. Mandates that a portion of 4K slots (at least 35% - 50%) be operated by a non-public-school-based early education provider like Head Start, early care and education centers (or group child care) and home-based early care and education programs (or family child care) to maintain a mixed delivery system of early care and education,
2. Ensures 4K funding covers the cost of high-quality services regardless of program setting; that it's equitable in all settings and includes funding to create teacher pay parity between public and private settings,
3. Requires that full per-pupil funding follows the child so that in the end, the child wins wherever he or she gets an early education. If the child is in a community based 4K program, said program would receive the full per pupil funding.
4. Considers children aged 0-3 in making decisions because all children that are in care outside the home will be impacted by these 4K decisions. The State must also consider the impact on the fragile and under-resourced system of care that currently exists..

Continued incentives for school districts to offer collaborative public-private approaches to offering 4k is a win-win for children, parents, early care and education providers and public schools. In fact, 30 out of 38 states that invest in pre-K do so with a mix of public and private partnerships to provide the service. Research shows that states that only provide pre-K in public school settings experienced the unintended consequence of "crowd-out" (Brown, 2018). Crowd out has been found to produce steep declines in availability and quality of care for children ages 0-3 due to the intertwined funding mechanisms within early care and education programs and as dictated by the overall market. Care rates typically increase for children ages 0-3 and subsequently, workforce participation decreases among parents with younger children, especially mothers.

Very low regulatory ratios for infant and toddler care gradually increase as children get older, allowing early care and education programs to even out costs across a program as a whole. Meaning, it's much cheaper to operate a 4-year-old classroom as opposed to a one-year old classroom. If the older children are drawn into the public-school system younger, an already fragile early care and education market breaks.



Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

Private early care and education programs that offer 4k are held to licensing and regulatory standards that protect the health, safety and liveliness of children. While early care and education programs are held to these standards in Wisconsin, public schools offering the same programming for the same aged children do not (other state like Michigan do require public schools offering pre-k to be licensed and QRIS rated as high-quality).

Since the funding streams and regulatory standards between privately run sites and public-school sites are so different, the wage and benefit scale between a private early care and education and public-school site are also very different. Both sites in Wisconsin must require the same credentials but public schools can offer a higher pay and benefits, and so private early care and education sites routinely loose staff to public school sites creating additional financial hardship to the early care and education site as the cost of turnover can be upwards of \$2,000 per employee.

Considering the requirements, costs and staffing challenges presented here, it's easy to see how crowd-out occurs. early care and education sites no longer able to make ends meet as well as maintain qualified staff, close their doors for good, meaning less overall care for children of all ages.

Offering opportunity for care and education earlier and at no cost is a good thing for children and families. It can also be a good thing for the private early care and education market, allowing the state to infuse an additional revenue stream into a system of care that so many Wisconsin families depend upon. States that employ a mixed delivery system of pre-K have seen an *expansion* in availability and quality of early care and education settings across the board (Keany &Leventon, 2014).

Sincerely,

Peggy Haack

WECA Outreach Coordinator



School Administrators Alliance

Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children

TO: Senate Committee on Education
FROM: John Forester, Executive Director
DATE: October 3, 2019
RE: AB 464/SB 407 – The Age a Child May Attend 4K
AB 465/SB 408 – Counting Pupils Enrolled in 4K

The School Administrators Alliance (SAA) supports Assembly Bill 464 and Senate Bill 407, relating to the age a child may attend a four-year-old kindergarten program; and Assembly Bill 465 and Senate Bill 408, relating to counting pupils enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten.

Numerous studies have shown that improving early learning opportunities, especially for those in poverty, will help prepare children for their PK-12 experience, help reduce achievement gaps and improve student achievement. A substantial body of research also indicates that investments in early learning yield an extraordinarily high public return on investment. Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman, for example, estimates that every dollar invested in high-quality early learning education generates a 7 to 10 percent annual rate of return through higher worker productivity, lower education costs, reduced crime and less government assistance.

In Wisconsin, the good news is families now have access to quality 4K programming in over 98 percent of our school districts. In our continued advocacy toward a comprehensive early learning policy in Wisconsin, the SAA supports increased state funding for the Wisconsin Shares program. We also support additional funding for quality improvement under YoungStar to increase the number of Wisconsin children in high quality child care and preschool programs. We believe that both of the four-year-old kindergarten bills before us today provide us with another step toward that larger policy objective.

Under current law, a child is eligible to attend four-year-old kindergarten if the child is four years old on September 1st in the year the child proposes to enter school. **AB 464/SB 407** provides that a child may attend four-year-old kindergarten if the child turns four years old on or before December 31st. What's more, the bill also provides that a child may be admitted to the second semester of the school year in which the child turns four years old on or before June 30th. The bill also allows school districts currently operating a four-year-old kindergarten program a transition period until the 2025-26 school year to make its 4K program available to the additional students eligible under the bill.

AB 465/SB 408 changes how a pupil enrolled in a four-year-old kindergarten program is counted by a school district for purposes of state aid and revenue limits. Under current law, a pupil enrolled

in a 4K program is counted as 0.5 pupil unless the program provides at least 87.5 additional hours of outreach activities, in which case the pupil is counted as one pupil.

The SAA supports the intent of both of these bills: to extend greater early learning opportunities to children in Wisconsin. We thank the authors for bringing them forward. We urge your support of these bills.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you should have any questions regarding our thoughts on AB 464/SB 407 and AB 465/SB 408, please call me at 608-242-1370.