

Madison School District Statement on AB 465

Senator Olson, Representative Kitchens and members of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees, thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am Cris Carusi and I am a member (we are members) of the Madison Metropolitan School District Board of Education. Today, I am (we are) representing MMSD but I am (we are) not speaking on behalf of the school board.

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

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

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

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

And, our program is seeing results. A research study from the Madison Education Partnership showed that 4K is one of our most promising equity strategies. Not only do we see an overall increase in literacy skills for students who participate in 4k, but we also see a more significant increase for students coming from low-income households and for students of color.

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

For any person, the most crucial window for brain development is between ages 0 to 5. Through early intervention and trauma-informed care, early childhood education can mitigate the harmful effects of excessive or prolonged stress by helping children learn impulse control, emotional regulation, and pro-social behavior, when the brain is most malleable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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