

**STORIES HIGHLIGHTING THE UNIQUE BENEFITS OF  
THE 4K COMMUNITY APPROACH**  
**OR**  
**54 REASONS TO IMPLEMENT THE 4K COMMUNITY  
APPROACH**

**Unique Benefits of the 4K Community Approach for Children**

- 1. With the 4K Community Approach, children who need care for the hours when they are not in the 4K program can remain in one location for both 4K and child care thereby reducing the stress of transitions and of being away from home.**

The 4K Community Approach program makes it possible for children to remain in the same facility for 4K and child care. Transitions, as many parents know, are difficult for young children. Fewer transitions maximize time available for learning, facilitates the children's adjustment to kindergarten and child care, and reduces the stress of being away from home. With care and education in the same facility, children don't have to spend time traveling from one place to another. When they arrive, they can settle in to a single building until it is time for them to go home.

Dana Sommerfeld, Director of State and Federal Programs for the Chippewa Falls School District, said:

“One of the best things we could possibly do for four-year-olds is to keep transitions minimal... With our community approach, the child is already in their setting and allowed to stay there. They have the same rules, the same people they deal with, minimal time of transporting them between places. If a parent works in a factory at 6:00 a.m. the child might have to go to a caregiver, the bus may take them to school, and then in a half-day program, the parent would have to pick the child up and take the child home or get them to another caregiver. That's a lot of transition in a day for a child. This is much easier. It's usually just the parent and the site.”

As Jim Ruder, Principal of West Kindergarten Center and Baraboo Early Learning Cooperative in Baraboo, explains about wraparound services:

“Wraparound services are child care {services}available to families after the hours of the four-year-old kindergarten session, before or after the program...An additional advantage to the children is they don't have to spend time on the bus nor contend with a different facility, with a whole different set of rules, expectations. More continuity between the programs when they're just down the hall from each other compared to taking the bus across town.

For all kids I think it is a great advantage for them to stay in a familiar setting, many of them have already been enrolled in the day care and preschools that we partner with and

they can stay there for their four-year-old kindergarten experience and just receive more specialized instruction in our 4K program.”

## **2. The 4K Community Approach enables young children to attend four-year-old kindergarten in a familiar facility with consistent rules, routines, and expectations.**

When children attend school in one location and receive child care in another location, they have to learn to follow rules, routines, and expectations for behaviors that may be different in each locale. For some young children, (and sometimes older children, too), this lack of continuity is confusing and problematic. The 4K Community Approach program provides the opportunity for 4K and child care to be housed in the same facility, thereby enabling children to have only one set of rules, routines, and expectations to follow.

Additionally, there’s more continuity of care and instruction for the child when the 4K staff and child care staff all know each other and work in the same facility. They can share information and strategies for working with each child.

Dennis Krueger, the Assistant Superintendent of the Howard-Suamico School District, notes,

“...Many of the children were able to stay where they were already attending – a preschool or early learning environment where they were as infants, one, two, and three-year-olds – and were able to continue as four year olds at 4K in the same setting. That means there is consistency for the child, and some of the process and pedagogy for children from the 4K trickles down to three-year-olds.”

The 4K Community Approach program also provides parents with the greatest number of choices to select a program that best meets their child’s and their family’s needs. For a child who is insecure or fragile, this choice enables parents to choose a facility their child has already attended. This can help allay children’s fears about being away from their home and family. In an educational setting, a child who feels secure is more likely to be able to concentrate on learning and will reap the benefits of learning from peers.

Amy, the parent of a child who attended Good Shepherd Church in Green Bay for child care from infancy and later for 4K, describes how her son, “J”, benefited from remaining in the same location for 4K and his preschool experience,

“My son attended Good Shepherd 4K for two years. He was born August 25, and he was always somewhat delayed- like red flagged at the screenings as far as speech types of things. We had him in the 4K first off because he wasn’t speaking at age four. We had him repeat 4K twice because it was absolutely the best place for him because he started talking when he was around his peers. You could tell he was always slightly behind his peers in terms of development. He just really needed time. Right now he’s doing really

well in first grade. He's maybe a little bit ahead of his peers in terms of reading and math. He's a kid who needed time to do his own thing. He loved making necklaces-made about 150 of them. He grew and grew and grew. The 4K structure of learning through play was just what he needed, and we're really grateful that he had that in his life. ...

The Good Shepherd preschool is situated in our church, and so I feel he benefited from being there because here was an insecure little boy, but he knew that he grew up in that church. So he would say, "I'm going to church." If people pointed out that he was going to school, at first he was very nervous about that. But once he realized it {4K} was at church, he just skipped right in like "No big deal." So school was a little bit scary, but because it was at church it was familiar to him."

### **3. The physical environment at the 4K Community Approach sites are usually specifically designed for children younger than six-years-old.**

One strength of the 4K Community Approach program is that it allows parents to choose the most suitable venue for their children to receive 4K instruction. An option that appeals to many parents is to send their children to a community-based program in a facility designed for four-year-olds and younger children because it is more hospitable and comfortable for young children. Not only are the classrooms, the furniture, the toilets, the drinking fountains built for a smaller size but the playgrounds also are built for younger climbers. Therefore, the environment is more conducive to learning and playing.

Kathy Stachura, the owner of Cuddle Care Child in Green Bay, explains,

"{A community-based facility}... is a warmer, better environment than putting the children in a school. We're better set up to make their life easier and make them more comfortable. All of our furniture is small. Everything is age appropriate. When they go to a school, even that playground isn't developmentally appropriate for that child. The outside playground we have - everything is designed for what's developmentally appropriate for 4 year olds. We have spinners for brain development. We have the proper climbing stuff. We have blackboards out there they can draw on. We have water out there. We have sensory play. We have wooden blocks out there. I don't know that any of the schools in the area provide that kind of play for outside.

Everything here is geared for them. Our bathrooms are accessible right here. Four-year-olds- when they go to school- are they going to be able to walk down the hall and use the restroom? Our restroom is right next to the classroom. In school, they'd probably have to be attended; they couldn't walk down hall by themselves to the restroom. We've had four-year-olds who weren't potty trained. We have the diapering provisions here so that we can cover that. We have the shorter toilets so that they're comfortable sitting on the toilets."

#### **4. The 4K Community Approach program has significantly increased the ability of communities to provide inclusive settings for four-year-old children with special needs.**

The greatest source of pride for many educators involved in the 4K Community Approach program has been its impact on educating children with special needs in inclusive settings with their typically developing peers.. Prior to the introduction of 4K Community Approach, many communities clustered children with special needs in segregated early childhood classrooms. Inclusion has benefited children with special needs, their peers without special needs, parents, and ultimately the entire community. Several stories are provided below highlighting the benefits of inclusion resulting from the 4K Community Approach program:

Heather Cramer, the 4K Coordinator for the Stevens Point School District, describes the benefits of inclusion for children and parents:

“{I am most proud of} bringing children with special needs into the community in an integrated setting- not a separate classroom- because of what they can or cannot do. We’re giving them the experience of being in a regular educational setting. We’re including them in 4K programs with their typically developing peers and giving them the start they need. We’ve started programs that operate within the community-based settings instead of having our schools’ special education housed in other buildings where there are no other little four-year-olds. We’ve now moved them out of our schools into places like the YMCA. We’re giving them opportunities that they didn’t have before. We now have a special education teacher who, instead of being at the school, teaches full-time at the YMCA. Giving them {children with special needs} opportunities that they didn’t have before was our biggest accomplishment along with giving their parents a sense that their child can succeed. We now are looking at that child, what’s best for them, which program best fits them, and moving that forward.”

Lori Brandt, a special education teacher for the Manitowoc Public Schools, describes the benefits of inclusion for the peers of children with special needs:

“...Some kids with autistic-type needs often need visual supports in the classroom. One child last year named “K”. was using a number of those, and the others kids in the classroom knew it. It was explained to them and they understood that some children needed to use these supports in order to help them do whatever. So there was a new child who joined the classroom in the middle of the year. Several children who often sat near “K” explained to the new child about the supports. The new student didn’t need a teacher to explain about the supports because “K’s” peers just took it upon themselves to say, ‘K’ uses the timer so that he can stop playing when it’s time to stop playing.’ They didn’t need the teacher to do this. They took it upon themselves to explain, as ‘K’s’ friend, why he needs it. It was perfect, ‘So that he’s ready to quit when it’s time to quit playing – and he can be OK with this.’

... I also think of two four-year-olds, one I had last year and one the year before that I saw in one of our partner sites. If we didn't have a 4K Community Approach, they would have been brought into one of our public school buildings in a self-contained classroom. But in the community settings, they are benefitting from having peers who have social skills they can learn from and they have peers with language skills. Before we had large number of children who didn't have peers to model from. For some reason, children just learn much quicker from their peers than they do from an adult trying to model it. That was a huge benefit for the little guy I was following along with last year who had very limited language skills in particular. It really impacted his social skills as well, and the progress he made in his 4K classroom with his peers was amazing. He spent the first couple of months just watching the other children and really was trying to use his language to get his needs met with them and play with them. By the end of the year, he was feeling pretty confident with his skill, even though they were fairly limited.

His parents were very concerned that he might not be accepted by other four-year-olds who didn't have special needs. I think they were pretty amazed that only one month after when they dropped him off, he would go right into the classroom. He was allowed to bring a toy or two from home so that he could have something familiar to play with and share with his friends. He always had plenty of friends to play with him and who wanted to use the toys he brought. I think the parents really relaxed and realized that he's going to do OK in school. “

Jim Ruder, Principal of West Kindergarten Center and Baraboo Early Learning Cooperative in Baraboo, details the social and academic benefits of inclusion resulting from 4K-CA:

“What jumps out at me about 4K Community Approach is my background being an early childhood special education teacher for the majority of my career. I believe that our biggest accomplishment has been the integration of our special education students who otherwise would have been in self-contained early childhood classrooms where they would traditionally have been in the past. They are now able to advance their learning. It's really rewarding to see those social relationships benefit everybody. Beyond social skills, we've seen our students with special needs take off academically and in many different ways in their development along with their social skills—that pops out.

...I'm convinced that the actual programming itself with having the majority of the students in the class be typically functioning four-year-olds is a great benefit to have our students with special needs make friends and learn along side those folks. ...When there is a more natural proportion of typically developing students and kids with special needs, it makes a world of difference. I think the instruction provided by general education teachers is really strong and our special education students can receive some adaptations and modifications to programming, but on the whole we find out that kids are more alike than different when you look on the grand scheme of things. They are able to participate and benefit from what is often presented in our developmentally appropriate four-year-old kindergarten.”

## **5. The 4K Community Approach program is beneficial to children with special needs in many different ways.**

Four-year-olds with special needs face all of the challenges of other four-year-olds and whatever additional challenges are posed by their special needs. While their disabilities vary, there are a myriad of advantages the 4K Community Approach program provides that increase the likelihood that they will have successful four-year-old kindergarten experiences and build a stronger foundation for their subsequent schooling. These advantages include:

- It enables four-year-olds with special needs to learn from the modeling behaviors of their more typically developing peers
- 4K Community Approach programs housed in facilities which include children younger than four-years-old enable children with disabilities who are developmentally immature to interact and play with children who are sometimes closer to their developmental level.
- Most 4K Community Approach programs are located in community sites that have considerably fewer children than are typically found in a K-5 school setting. Four-year-old children with disabilities (and those without disabilities) who have never attended any program in a group setting before 4K may find it especially difficult to be amidst large numbers of older children. Hence, the intimacy provided by attending a program with small groups of children often better fits the needs of children with disabilities.
- The staff at many of the community sites have particular expertise working with younger children. Their programs often include infants and toddlers, and so they're working in an environment in which they can observe how young children develop. The four-year-old kindergarten child also may have been attending that same community program since infancy. Hence, there may be several staff members who know that child intimately and who can share ideas about how to best meet the child's needs.
- Community sites often offer wraparound care which means the number of transitions can be minimized in the four-year-old's day. This can be particularly important for children with special needs, who may function best in stable environments with predictable routines.

Lori Brandt, a special education teacher in the Manitowoc School District, comments that it can be particularly difficult for children with special needs to have multiple sets of rules and expectations to understand and follow,

“...The transition – they're going from one environment to another. It's difficult for children having one way of dealing with the day and the schedule and then having to leave that site and go into a setting that has another person whose rules and routines and schedule they have to follow. It lends itself to a lot of chaos in a child's mind, especially a child with a disability. When you work so hard in giving them structure and reliability in routine, it can be even harder for them than for children who don't have disabilities.”

## **6. The 4K Community Approach program makes transitions easier for three-year-olds when they enter four-year-old kindergarten.**

The success of the 4K Community Approach program in connecting educational programs to child care facilities results in making transitions smoother for three-year-olds as they enter four-year-old kindergarten. Three-year-olds in community sites often know or at least have seen the teachers of 4K in their facility and hence have some familiarity with the adult who will become their teacher. Conversely, the teacher will perhaps know the child personally and can more easily learn about that child from that child's provider in the facility.

Sometimes the same curriculum is used with three-year-olds and four-year-olds. In the Howard-Suamico School District, for example, the "Creative Curriculum" is used in classrooms for both ages. In the Chippewa Falls School District, the "Pyramid Model for Developing Social and Emotional Intelligence" is used with students from preschool through grade twelve. Consequently, the three-year-olds and four-year-olds have experience and a comforting familiarity with practices and expectations that are present in each classroom they enter and will continue to be a part of their school life until they graduate from high school.

Lori Brandt, a special education teacher who serves all of the 4K community sites in the Manitowoc School District, describes how the 4K Community program make transitions easier for children with special needs by facilitating continuity in the practices between teachers of three-year-olds and four-year-olds,

"...Getting to go out to partner sites and people getting to know me and feel comfortable with me and see me as a resource so that I can help direct them to whatever resources they might need. I also provide services to three-year-olds out in our community sites. At the Y for example, I go out to the four-year-old classroom and I also see a child in the three-year-old classroom. Next year, that child will transition into the four-year-old classroom. In that instance, there have been partnerships built not only with me, but also between the teachers of three-year-olds and four-year-olds. The four-year-old teacher and I can be mentors to the three-year-old teacher, specifically around the need to provide visuals in the classroom for certain children with special needs. We're starting to see more and more supports happening that way to the classrooms for younger children. And, there have been occasions when there has been training for the teachers of four-year-olds that have been opened to the teachers of three-year-olds, too."

## **7. In the 4K Community Approach Program, literacy specialists may be available to work one-on-one with children and assist staff on literacy-related issues.**

The 4K Community Approach program has enabled some community facilities to have sufficient funds to hire a literacy specialist to work with their children and train teachers. The presence of the literary specialist benefits not only the 4K program but the other care and education programs offered at the community site.

In Manitowoc, the Head Start program participated in a national Head Start literacy initiative to get children ready to read. With funds from the 4K Community Approach program, they hired a teacher to serve as a literacy mentor. She tutored four-year-olds on a one-to-one basis and provided teachers with ideas for things they could do in their classrooms to support literacy.

In the Howard-Suamico School District, the collaboration with the school district has resulted in earlier literacy screening for preschoolers than previously had occurred. The literacy specialist from the school district now comes to the community sites and screens the four-year-olds whom the teachers believe are at pre-reading level. If the literacy teacher confirms this assessment, she makes recommendations to the teachers for the books to use and other strategies to promote the growth of these early readers.

## **8. In the 4K Community Approach Program, children who are English Language Learners (ELL) may have access to translators and support teachers in their community-based program.**

The 4K Community Approach program has enabled some community sites to have sufficient funds to provide translators for children who are English Language Learners (ELL). In Manitowoc, for example, during the first few years of their 4K Community program, ELL children rarely were placed in community sites because translation services weren't available. In recent years, however, there has been a concerted effort to provide translators and other ELL support staff into community sites.

Linda Gratz, the former Director of Head Start in Manitowoc, explains,

“During the first year the 4K-CA program was in operation, at the end of the year we had a two week summer school program just for the children that were in Head Start. After the first year we realized we had other needs that we could use those additional funds for throughout the year to enhance services for the 4K, so we put bilingual aids in the classrooms so that our Hmong speaking children and Spanish speaking children actually had someone there in our classroom who could speak their native language. This really helped the educational experiences of those children. We never had had bilingual aids before. We wouldn't have been able to do so without the funds from 4K-CA.”

Deborah Shimanek, the Principal and 4K Community Approach site coordinator for Manitowoc Public School District, gives another example of how the 4K Community Approach program benefited an ELL child,

“One Hispanic family- it was their first experience with schooling in our community.

With the help of our translator going to the site and talking with the child and more importantly helping us communicate with the parents about our program, the little girl learned English fast. By the time she left 4K, she was almost fluent, and her parents went on some of the school forest trips so that they could experience some of the community resources outside of their home. It really did help that family to have faith and trust in the school system as well as get child to school on time, which we had struggled with at times. They saw the value of the education and the girl continues to have success in our system. The community sites would not have access to a translator without the 4K-CA program.”

## **9. In the 4K Community Approach Program, children benefit from information shared between the 4K teachers, the early childhood staff, and the public schools.**

If indeed it “takes a village to raise a child,” the 4K Community Approach program helps create such a village of adults from different arenas in the host 4K Community Approach communities who all work together for the betterment of children. 4K teachers, early childhood staff, and public school personnel share information, collaboratively solve problems, spread good ideas, plan transitions for young children, identify children needing special evaluations, and much more.

The Chippewa Falls School District has implemented a variety of practices designed to facilitate the most efficient sharing of information between the schools and the community sites regarding 4K children. The school district has provided all 4K teachers with computer access to the same management system used to record data for all of the K-12 students in the school district. The 4K teachers enter data on the kids just like other teachers in the system. It’s all one seamless system and as a result there is easy access to information on each child.

The 4K teachers also attend joint training sessions with the K-12 teachers. In addition, all of the special education early childhood teachers in the 4K program are itinerant. When a site has needs for services or they have a referral, the itinerant teacher works right in that classroom alongside of the teacher. This begins a conversation with the school about which kindergarten program or teacher the child will work best for that child when he or she enters five-year-old kindergarten. This sharing of information has both short-term and long-term benefits for the child.

Kristine Cresco, the Child Care Center Director of Kid’s Castle in Kenosha, describes several of the benefits of the sharing of information between the 4K teachers, child care staff, and special education teachers in the public schools in Kenosha,

“Early childhood staff came in to evaluate one child and saw we were struggling with a new child. Now they’re in today to evaluate that second child. Having the special education teacher in that classroom helped the second child get services more quickly. It helps tremendously to have the school district working with us, giving us ideas, and

working with the 4K teacher as well as the other teachers in that classroom. We then pass on ideas about working with this child to our afternoon teachers so that we have the consistency for this little girl. This makes the family happy, it makes us happy, and we're doing what's best for that child."

Lori Brandt, an itinerant special education teacher for the Manitowoc School District, describes how she shares ideas information in different 4K sites,

"I am blessed because I get to go in other people's classrooms and learn from them. Then I might go into another classroom a month down the line and see they're struggling in a particular area. I can either share ideas {to help them solve their problem} from another teacher I observed or worked with whose ideas are relevant or I can put those two teachers together.

The willingness of 4K teachers to brainstorm around issues where they're struggling class-wide or on a particular student I'm observing or working with has been amazing. Teachers are willing to try new ideas and tweak them. I get ideas from them every single day, and I get to take their great ideas and share them with other people. I'm constantly learning things from the teachers and sharing it amongst the sites. I get to take ideas I had and try to figure out how to match them with what teachers are doing in their classrooms."

### **10. In the 4K Community Approach Program, children who need therapy can receive their therapy without having to leave their early childhood facility.**

The 4K Community Approach program provides many benefits for the families of children who require different kinds of therapies (speech and language, physical therapy, occupational therapy). Children receive therapy at the 4K site and therefore don't have to go through the transitions involved in coming to-and-from the 4K and/or wraparound care programs in order to receive therapy. Parents don't have to leave their jobs to transport their children to therapies.

In the case of the Manitowoc YMCA 4K program, all 4K children use the Y's swimming pool and receive gymnastics instruction as part of their 4K program. This provides additional opportunities for children requiring physical therapy to improve their physical skills. Parents sometimes become members of the Y as a result of having their child attend the YMCA 4K program, and this adds even more opportunities for their children to develop desirable physical skills.

Virginia Brydges describes how her desire to provide children with the opportunity to receive therapy in a community-based facility led her to open Every Child's Place Childcare Center in Kenosha,

“I’m a former KUSD (Kenosha Unified School District) employee as a speech therapist. I left KUSD to raise my child and then worked in a clinical setting. I just felt that children really deserve an opportunity to be in a community-based center where they could receive all of their therapies at one time, their educational support in the same setting, and the parents could simultaneously remain at work. I saw many children receiving therapy during the day when it was somewhat difficult for parents to leave their jobs or socialize. So I started Every Child’s Place.

...It’s a nonprofit with a place for every child. Every Child’s Place was built for children with special need, and every other child is welcome. So this collaboration works well for us. ... it’s been a great experience seeing the child gain from that curriculum {creative curriculum}, gaining from that teacher’s expertise, and working collaboration with the therapists that come in and out of there every single day.”

Steve Smith, the CEO of the YMCA in Manitowoc, describes how a girl who required physical therapy benefited from the collaborative strength of the 4K program in the YMCA,

“...I have another {story} from a couple of years ago. The little one had special needs. She was a triplet and the other two sibs died soon after birth. Between the efforts of the school district staff and our staff, and between the child going swimming and going to gymnastics and doing all the balancing things, this child learned to catch a ball as a four-year-old year old with us. She would be in our hallway catching a bouncing ball and bouncing the ball back from a physical therapist from the school district. And that was just one of the positive touches. We just watched her grow over the year. There are still challenges, but her family is now part of the Y and we see them regularly and they’re participating in other family events.”

Deborah Shimanek, Principal and 4K Site Coordinator for the Manitowoc Public School District, describes how having therapy in a community site benefited a child with autistic tendencies,

“There’s a little boy named “L” who had some significant autistic tendencies. The parents approach was to not have him come to school. He had not gone through the Birth to 3 Program. Even though the pediatrician suggested some things, Mom and Dad chose to not follow through on it. They did enroll him in 4K, but he didn’t come for a while. We began to meet with Mom and Dad. This little boy was overwhelmed by the setting. So we started small, and got him there {to the program} before everyone else got there so he could settle in and get used to the environment before it became too much. Then we were fortunate that we could have therapists work with him right in the setting. We had a big overall behavioral plan for when he got overwhelmed- where he could go for a break, how he could utilize resources that were in the room to provide him a break, and some of those self-monitoring things. By December, he was in school full-time and Mom and Dad were confident about him being in school full-time. He does now have an IEP and we now have connected them with some of the autism resources within the autism community. So I believe without that help, he would have been a kid with severe

attendance issues we'd be dealing with as well as not have built that bridge with the parents to say, 'We're going to support you on this journey with us and we have resources available both to help "L" and to help you. ... I don't think they would have enrolled him in the 4K program had it not been a site that had been as close to their home as it was.'"

### **11. The 4K Community Approach program increases the likelihood that an infant, toddler, or preschooler with a delay or disability will be referred for an evaluation and early intervention services.**

One result of the 4K Community Approach program has been increased contact between special education personnel and other support staff (speech and language teachers, physical therapists, etc.) from the public schools with the staff in the community sites. Sometimes, the school personnel visit the community programs specifically to work with four-year-olds. At other times, they observe or work with younger children at the sites. In both instances, there is an increased presence of special services staff in the community sites which has several important benefits for children younger than four-years-old including:

- Staff from the community sites are more willing and able to contact the school district about younger children for whom they have concerns because they get to know and trust the school's special services staff and because they are more easily accessible since they regularly visit the community sites. As a result, there's an increase in referrals and early intervention services for younger children. Previously, the sites often felt like they were entirely on their own figuring out how to best meet the needs of children with special needs.
- There is more outreach to parents as a result of the 4K Community Approach program and this increases the opportunity for early intervention. Whereas the school district previously would typically respond to calls from parents before doing an assessment, now the special services staff from the public schools and the staff from the 4K community venues are working together in identifying younger children warranting assessment.
- Parents learn more about special services through their contact with the community sites, who in turn know more about the resources available and can access them more quickly through their increased contact with the public schools.

Linda Gratz, Former Director of Head Start and a member of the school board in Manitowoc, describes how the 4K Community Approach results in an increase in early interventions,

"One of the big issues for child cares and Head Start was identifying children with special needs and how you work with them. Having the 4K {community approach} made it work so much better because once the school district knew that this was their program, it became so much easier.

The school district allotted time for the people from the district to go into the child cares and Head Start to observe the children who were there. If you had particular problems with a child you were concerned about, you would let them know and they would set up a specific time to come in and observe that one child. Then they would work really closely with the staff members that were working with the child to give them strategies and things that they could do and resources that they could use with the child- whether it was a weighted vest that might be used on a child to make them be able to attend better or things like different sounds they needed to work on as far as speech was concerned or making adaptations in the classroom that would make it easier for them to learn. All of those things became easier because someone was assigned to that location to be the link, and so it became so much easier because there was that consistency. You knew who to go to, you knew that there was somebody there who could help you – it was so natural as opposed to having to figure who you should go to and having to make a formal referral. You were able to start the process without the formality.”

Marcia Flaherty, the Director of Elementary and Secondary Education for the Manitowoc Public School District, explains how the collaborative nature of the 4K Community Approach program results in better meeting the needs of 4K and younger children,

“Our collaboration journey began with a multi-agency exploration of preschool options through several meetings and training sessions. We built our plans around a vision of providing a full continuum of services for children and families, making sure we had a place for every child. For children and families with child care needs, we wanted to include child care in multiple settings, in addition to education and other special services. There are many examples of informal professional development that have occurred because speech/language pathologists, 4K teachers, Birth to 3 service providers, and others dedicated to early childhood education have opportunities to discuss educational and behavioral strategies in support of children.”

## **Unique Benefits of the 4K Community Approach for Families**

### **12. Having 4K and early childhood programs in the same location increases the likelihood that a child of working parents can attend four-year-old kindergarten.**

Dana Sommerfeld, Director of State and Federal Programs for the Chippewa Falls School District, explains,

“Parents are allowed to select their 4K location. They can keep their child in the same program they were in before 4K Community Approach. Parents also have the option of bus transportation making it much easier for the parent in terms of scheduling their work life, their family life, and now a new thing that’s coming in to them, a school life. If the parent is using wraparound care, the parent is probably using the same caregiver the child had since they were an infant and so it’s not a big transition for them.”

### **13. The 4K Community Approach program offers families the opportunity to select the 4K program location and schedule that best meets their family’s needs.**

The 4K Community Approach program provides parents with the widest variety of options of where to send their child for 4 year old kindergarten. For some parents, the program’s proximity to home is the compelling factor guiding that choice. For others, it might be a program that is close to their workplace or offers the hours of care needed by the parents. Some parents choose not to send their four-year-old to their local public school simply because it is too far from their home to meet their needs.

Belinda Grantham, Director of Early Education for the Kenosha Public Schools describes several of the benefits resulting from the choice afforded by the 4K Community Approach,

“It {4K-CA} allows us to have outreach with children that we would not be able to serve in a school setting because of the family’s needs for child care in many cases. It also allows families the opportunity to attend a location that might be actually closer than the school the child would be going to. Bottom line- we’re building stronger foundation pieces- both academic and social and emotional. All of them will be going to kindergarten programs, so we’re just getting them in advance. It’s also increasing awareness of our centers in our school. When the school teachers are reading reports about a student, the report is often from a child care center, so it increases their awareness that the centers are out there.”

Deborah Shimanek, Principal and 4K Collaborative Site Coordinator for the Manitowoc Public School District, shares a story about a particular child who received necessary services because his parents were able to choose a 4K program near their home,

“There’s a little boy named L... who had some significant autistic tendencies. The parents approach was to not have him come to school. He had not gone through the Birth to 3 Program. Even though his pediatrician suggested some things, Mom and Dad chose to not follow through on it. They did enroll him in 4K, but he didn’t come for a while. We began to meet with Mom and Dad. This little boy was overwhelmed by the setting. So we started small, and got him there {to the program} before everyone else got there so he could settle in and get used to the environment before it became too much. Then we were fortunate that we could have therapists work with him right in the setting. We had a big overall behavioral plan for when he got overwhelmed- where he could go for a break, how he could utilize resources that were in the room to provide him a break, and some of those self-monitoring things. By December, he was in school full-time and Mom and Dad were confident about him being in school full-time. He does now have an IEP and we now have connected them with some of the autism resources within the autism community. So I believe without that help, he would have been a kid with severe attendance issues we’d be dealing with as well as not have built that bridge with the parents to say, “We’re going to support you on this journey with us and we have resources available both to help L... and to help you. ... I don’t think they would have enrolled him in the 4K program had it not been a site that had been as close to their home as it was.”

Belinda Grantham, Director of Early Education, Kenosha Public Schools, said,

“In some communities, parents also have the option of choosing to have child care at a location different from where the 4K program is located, but the school district transports the child to that second location.”

#### **14. Having 4K and early childhood programs in the same location reduces the stress for parents who are both working and caring for a young child.**

Parents can choose a 4K program housed in an early childhood facility that offers wraparound care. This option has resulted in many working parents feeling less stress because they no longer have to move their children or arrange to have their children moved between locations during working hours. Parents receive information about how their child is doing from only one source. If they need to provide information to a teacher or administrator, they only need to call one program.

Tammy Zielsdorf, Director of Kenosha’s Just Kid Inn Child Care Center, explains,

“... It helps them {parents} if they’re working and they can just leave a child with us and we take care of them after the class is done. So they don’t have to worry about transportation. It’s consistent for their child. It’s always consistent. They’re not moving from place to place. So that’s huge for the parent and the child.”

Belinda Grantham, Director of Early Education, Kenosha Public Schools, said,

“... It enables parents to stay at work because they’re {the children} in a center where they can have the wraparound care- in the morning, afternoon, or into the evening, if necessary. So the parents can continue to go to work or school. In our case a lot of them are going to school.”

### **15. Parents with more than one child under the age of 5 can have all of their preschool children in the same location.**

The 4K Community Approach has resulted in parents more commonly sending the younger siblings of four-year olds to the same location for child care or other early childhood education programs. This is more convenient for the parents than having their children in different locations. It saves them time, the inconvenience of having multiple drop-off locations, and some transportation costs.

### **16. Parents who were hesitant to send their child to 4K in the public schools are more comfortable sending their child to a community-based program.**

Sometimes parents feel uncomfortable sending their young children into public schools. This may be the result of negative experiences the parents had in schools when they were children, fears of placing their children in a setting with hundreds of other children, apprehensions about mixing their young children with older children, or a variety of other reasons. The choices provided by the 4K Community Approach program enable parents who have reservations about sending their four-year-old into a school setting to instead send their child into a community setting.

Deborah Shimanek, Principal and 4K Site Coordinator for the Manitowoc Public School District, describes the benefit of the community option for the family,

“I can think of a story about one set of parents who did not have a good learning experience in their learning setting and were very hesitant to send their child to 4K. It took a lot of encouragement, support, and meetings. We actually picked up the child at home in our vehicles that were licensed to do that to encourage Mom and Dad to get him into school. I’ve now seen that student in first and second grade, and he is blossoming. I believe that building those bridges with the parents early in the community setting was very important. These parents did not feel confidence in the schools because of the painful memories they had of their own learning experiences in schools. Without the 4K-CA, he wouldn’t have had the success. He’s bright, he’s learning well, and he’s confident in his reading. And this is a little boy we had to sometimes carry to 4K and who had a lot of the anxiety because of his parents’ anxiety. That was a huge step for him and I believe it happened because he was in a community site.”

**17. It is more reassuring for parents who have previously had their child in an early childhood program to now utilize 4K in the same learning environment.**

The 4K Community Approach allows parents to select the location where their child will attend four-year-old kindergarten. Consequently, they may be able to choose the same site for four-year-old kindergarten that had cared for their child prior to entering 4K. Having such familiarity with the program gives the parents confidence and a reassuring sense that their child is being well-taken care of. It also makes the transition to 4K easier for the child.

**18. Families who might not have been able to find a child care program to accept their child with special needs now have access to full-time care at a community child care program.**

In many communities, the 4K Community Approach has been instrumental in providing parents who have children with special needs the opportunity to place their child in fully inclusive 4K programs in community settings. The often unprecedented combination of hosting four-year-old kindergarten in venues where wraparound care also is available for children with special needs is almost miraculous for parents who never had this opportunity for their child before. Parents now have increased flexibility in terms of employment, attending school themselves, or other choices they can make with the freedom resulting from having their child receiving care during the day. The child benefits from receiving instruction from a licensed kindergarten teacher, receiving therapies and child care in the same setting as the 4K program, and interacting with peers on a daily basis.

In Manitowoc, the school district is so committed to making sure the needs of children with special needs are met that they reserve three-to-five slots for children with special needs at their Salvation Army 4K program site. If parents of children with special needs required wraparound care for their child, it is now guaranteed that there will be space available in the Salvation Army program. Moreover, this means that their child will have the opportunity to be in a classroom with peers, most of whom will not have special needs.

Lori Brandt, a special education teacher with the Manitowoc Public Schools, describes the initial trepidation felt by many parents of children with special needs as they considered sending their child into a 4K program and their elation when they found out how well it worked for their child and family,

“In terms of children with special needs, it was surprising to me how many parents wondered if their child would really be able to be a part of a 4K classroom out in the community. I think they figured their kids would only be able to be with other kids with

disabilities or they thought there would be a lot more special education support if they sent their child to Riverview School {the public school}. I think they needed reassurance at first that their child would do fine and that they would make friends. When they saw that happening, they were surprised and in some cases expressed their pleasure at parent-teacher conferences saying, 'Wow, I can also have my child in wraparound childcare and actually work at my job or get a job.'”

Virginia Brydges, Director of Every Child’s Place Child Care Center in Kenosha, explains,

“...Every Child’s Place is a nonprofit with a place for every child...Those children with special needs are in a great setting with a very astute four-year-old kindergarten teacher and working with our own staff to achieve the goals for that child in the very best possible setting. For me, it’s been a great experience, seeing the child gain from that curriculum {Creative Curriculum}, gaining from that teacher’s expertise, and working collaboration with the therapists that come in and out of there every single day.”

### **19. Parents of children with special needs benefit from learning that their child can successfully function in an inclusive 4K program in a community setting.**

Prior to the introduction of the 4K Community Approach program, parents in many communities wondered if their children who have special needs would be able to successfully function in a four-year-old kindergarten classroom in a community setting. Historically, children with special needs were typically segregated in classrooms with other children with special needs. The parents often believed that their children would only be able to function in a classroom with other children with special needs or in an inclusive classroom within a school setting. Instead, many of the 4K Community Approach programs enable children with special needs to thrive in inclusive classrooms in community settings. The often surprised parents find that they can simultaneously get their child care needs met through wraparound care, continue to work at their job or look for a job, and take comfort knowing that their children are members of fully integrated classrooms where they can learn from their peers and their peers can learn from them.

Virginia Brydges, Director of Every Child’s Place Child Care Center in Kenosha, describes how parents of children with special needs get to see their children succeed because wraparound care means that their children can flourish when they can remain in one community setting for a longer period of time than just the three hours daily instruction provided for four-year-old kindergarten,

“We service children of all abilities, so there are several children who have autism in our program. For a parent to see the growth and development of their child, who before coming to our program did nothing but scream and yell and kick and maybe bite other children and now the parent has been able to see their child completely engaged, fully participating, making friends, and being around other children without exhibiting all of

those negative behaviors. ...The transitions the KUSD {Kenosha Unified School District} teachers bring to that group setting, the routine of everything that goes on, and I think having them in that community setting for a longer period of time than just the three hours of 4K really fosters all of that development. Their parents are able to see that their child is able to conform and follow routines and make friends.”

## **20. The 4K Community Approach program can provide financial benefits to families**

Communities in Wisconsin that offer four-year-old kindergarten have created an opportunity that didn't previously exist for preschool children to have a high quality educational experience that is not dependent on a family's income or ability to transport their child to 4K. All participating school districts are obligated to offer kindergarten free-of-charge and to provide transportation to-and-from four-year-old kindergarten at the same level with which they provide transportation to any other K-12 student.

Since four-year-old kindergarten is typically a 4 day per week program for approximately 12 hours per week, the 4K Community Approach may provide more opportunities for parents who can not afford but would like their child to attend a program for more hours. Some Child Care and Early Childhood Education Programs provide scholarships so that the child can stay at their site when the 4K program is not in session. Programs might reduce the full-day rate for children who are in 4K and need additional care..

Parents can also save on transportation costs by having the school transport their child to-or-from 4K and they can combine this with wraparound care services. For example, a child potentially can be picked up at home by the district school bus in the morning and transported to a 4K program. The child can remain in the same venue for an after-school child care program and the parents can pick up their child at the end of the day. Whereas the parent previously would have had to transport the child both to-and-from the child care venue, they now only have to drive once daily. This is particularly valuable for parents who live in rural areas and have to travel considerable distances to transport their child to-or-from the 4K/child care site.

## **21. The 4K Community Approach increases parents' knowledge of child development and their understanding of their own child.**

Wisconsin's four-year-old kindergarten program allows local communities to determine the ratios between teachers and students. In some community settings, programs decide to have particularly low teacher-student ratios so that they can have more time to attend to each child and to communicate with parents. The latter provides 4K Community Approach program staff with more opportunities to speak with parents about the successes of their child, concerns about the child, insights into child development in general and specifically about their child, and innumerable other opportunities for the

community program staff and parents to work together to understand and appreciate the child they're parenting or working with.

In some of 4K Community Approach programs, teachers send parents daily reports regarding what their child did during the day and any other observations the teacher chooses to share. Sometimes they began this practice because the 4K program is housed in a facility in which the child care and early childhood education programs already were providing parents with a daily report and so the 4K teachers continued this practice. Not only does such communication help parents' better understand what's transpiring with their child, but it provides them with conversation topics to initiate with their child.

In addition, many of the community-based programs have specific requirements to provide parent-based education. In Chippewa Falls, for example, each community site is required to provide at least twenty hours of on-site parent education, and they send home a "continuous stream" of information for parents through their newsletters.

Dana Sommerfeld, Director of State and Federal Programs, Chippewa Falls School District, describes how the 4K Community Approach program helps families understand child development,

"...Another benefit is we're able to help families understand child development in phases. Because we're continually observing those four-year-olds throughout the year and guiding that growth, we're able to give parents much better feedback about what they're doing well and what their children are doing well. We also help parents and children understand that everyone's developing at a different rate. I think that's something often missing, especially among at-home Moms, parents using in-home care, or parents whose children aren't having many experiences with other kids and have little experience with how their child fits into the spectrum...I have a lot of documentation about how that growth occurs over the year and it's remarkable. That's a big benefit and a big story for us just to see the amounts of understanding that's happening with parents about their child's development."

## **22. The 4K Community Approach program increases opportunities for families to participate in community programs and their familiarity with community resources.**

The 4K Community Approach program has expanded the opportunities for families to participate in community programs and their access to community facilities and resources. Families who only use the 4K program housed in a community site are invited to the community program's family fun nights, parent education programs, and other parent/family activities. The community-wide focus of 4K Community Approach program has connected families to community resources in a variety of ways.

In Manitowoc, all families from the participating 4K sites throughout the city have been invited to a family night swim at the Riverview School, the 4K Community Approach

program school site. Children and their parents also have ridden the school buses together to spend a day exploring the Rahr Memorial School Forest. Manitowoc's 4K Community Approach program hosts a Family Activity Night at the YMCA, one of the 4K Community Approach program sites, where families use the facilities and parents learn different ways to play with their children and keep them active and moving. Families in any 4K program in Manitowoc also receive free day-passes to the YMCA as another way of extending this community resource to the families. YMCA CEO Steve Smith said he is seeing parents engaged in more physical activities with their children as a result of 4K Community Approach program. In other words, the 4K-CA program increases opportunities for 4K families to use both the facilities and resources of the schools and those of community venues connected to 4K Community Approach program.

### **23. In some community programs, the 4K Community Approach provides children and families with recreational opportunities they otherwise would not have.**

A unique strength of the 4K Community Approach program is that it provides communities opportunities to connect educational programming with recreational and activities. In Manitowoc, the community took advantage of this opportunity by remodeling the YMCA and placing three four-year-old kindergarten classrooms within the refurbished YMCA building. As a result, children and families involved with those 4K classrooms receive many opportunities to take advantage of recreational activities offered by the YMCA since it's all in the same facility.

All children who attend 4K at the YMCA receive free gymnastics and free swimming as part of their programming. Parents often exercise in the YMCA before or after picking up their children from the YMCA wraparound child care program. This gives the parents an opportunity to get their own health and well-being taken care of when they're not working while simultaneously having the comfort of knowing their child is receiving quality care. All children in any of the 4K Community Approach programs in the city of Manitowoc get invited to family events at the YMCA, such as the Y's Halloween celebration. The YMCA particularly tries to attract four-year-olds and their families for its New Year's Eve celebration because of the bonds it's forged with the 4K community. Hence, the entire city benefits from having a 4K program housed in the YMCA.

Steve Smith, the CEO of the YMCA, also describes how providing physical activities during the day for 4K children has potential benefits for their families,

“...It's also about giving those parents the opportunity to have those {physical fitness activities} covered during the day so the parent can then say, 'The child's already received that during the day. I don't need to come back to the Y to do that again.' So that helps out with the family time at home making sure they're spending quality time with their children instead of worrying about 'where is the next place I have to be.'”

## **24. Teachers and translators from the school district can work with English Language Learner (ELL) children and their parents in the community programs.**

The 4K Community Approach program enables parents whose children are English Language Learners (ELL) to send their children to community programs where translation services are available to help their children. In Manitowoc, for example, during the first few years of their 4K Community Approach program, ELL children were rarely placed in community sites because translation services weren't available. In recent years, however, the school district has made a concerted effort to provide translators and other ELL support staff into community sites so that parents can send their children there. According to Deborah Shimanek, the Principal for the 4K Community Approach program for the Manitowoc Public School District, "These families now usually have the best attendance at our family activity nights, so again I think it's really built some bridges with those families, too."

Deborah also gives another example of how the 4K Community Approach program benefited an ELL child,

"One Hispanic family- it was their first experience with schooling in our community. With the help of our translator going to the site and talking with the child and more importantly helping us communicate with the parents about our program, the little girl learned English fast. By the time she left 4K, she was almost fluent, and her parents went on some of the school forest trips so that they could experience some of the community resources outside of their home. It really did help that family to have faith and trust in the school system as well as get child to school on time, which we had struggled with at times. They saw the value of the education and the girl continues to have success in our system. The community sites would not have access to a translator without the 4K-CA program."

## **25. The 4K Community Approach program allows communities to merge Head Start, Special Education services, and 4K into one program at multiple school sites.**

One of the benefits of the 4K-CA approach is that each participating community can design the program to fit the needs of their specific community. There is no expectation nor mandate that one model will fit all communities. In Kenosha, the community took advantage of this flexibility to design a unique 4K Community Approach program in which the Kenosha Unified School District (KUSD) is uncharacteristically the Head Start program grantee. This has enabled the KUSD to integrate special education services, Head Start, and 4K into the same program at the school sites throughout Kenosha. For parents, this means regardless of where they live in the city, they know that if their child qualifies for Head Start and/or needs special services, they will have the convenience of

having all of those services provided in one location close to home {their neighborhood school}.

Belinda Grantham, the Director of Early Education for the KUSD explains,

“When it was mandated that we do 4K, we had five years to make it universal. We’re currently in our fifth year, and the part that makes it even more unique is that our Head Start grantee is the school district. This means that in our schools, we have integrated all of our programs. It used to be that Head Start was separate from special educations and separate from 4K. If you qualified for Head Start, you had to go wherever those services were provided. If you qualified for special education, you had to go wherever those services were provided, and if you qualified for 4K, you had to go wherever those special services were provided. What we’ve done because we will soon become universal is that you can go to your neighborhood school now and we will provide whatever services you need at that site. So the special education, the Head Start, and the 4K programs have become integrated, and that seems to be a little different from what the rest of the state is doing. The integration of the programs at the school sites is unique to Kenosha.”

## **Unique Benefits of the 4K Community Approach for Child Care and Early Childhood Education Programs**

### **26. The 4K Community Approach program has provided community child care and early childhood education programs with professional development opportunities.**

The 4K Community Approach program has nurtured collaborative partnerships between school districts and the community child care and early childhood education programs. As a result, school districts commonly offer professional development training sessions which include 4K staff from the community sites. In addition, they often invite the rest of the staff from the community sites including the teachers of younger children to attend the training sessions. Both the 4K teachers and staff of the community programs have improved their practices as a result of the training they've received. The community programs, and some early childhood programs which are not even part of the 4K-CA program receive innumerable additional benefits from being able to attend the school district training sessions, including:

- Community-wide staff development presentations for all 4K programs foster better communication and sharing of ideas among staff from different facilities and within the same facilities. These connections improve all of their programs and result in increased collaboration among their sites. 4K staff are also encouraged and sometimes even expected to share what they've learned with the child care teachers in their facilities. One program director said, "It's a fantastic networking opportunity!"
- Specific staff development on curricula such as "Creative Curriculum" or "Conscious Discipline" can build a continuity of instruction and practices within a community site. In Manitowoc, 4K teachers from community sites attended training sessions on Conscious Discipline. They in turn shared what they had learned with staff working with younger children and as a result, the same discipline program was being used within the sites for children in the 4K programs and with younger children, too. Additionally, the teachers of younger children commonly ask the 4K teachers to share what they've learned at professional development sessions when they've been unable to attend the training sessions..
- Community site directors commonly request professional development training on topics most sought after by their staff. They can take advantage of the school district's resources to improve the quality of care in their facilities by requesting training specific to their needs.
- Staff at the community sites are able to attend professional development training sessions hosted by the school district in which the presenters are of national stature with commensurate expertise. The sites never would have been able to afford to sponsor such speakers with their own resources, and often lack the resources to even sponsor local speakers.
- Staff from community child care programs who are *not* part of the 4K Community Approach program sometimes are invited to attend school district staff development

programs, which ultimately means that the benefits from the those staff development sessions improve the quality of child care in the entire community.

- Child care teachers and directors feel more confident, respected, and knowledgeable as a result of attending professional development sessions.

## **27. The 4K Community Approach program implicitly encourages some staff to return to school and/or improve their skills and qualifications.**

As the 4K Community Approach program has grown in Wisconsin, the opportunities to teach four-year-old kindergarten in community settings has increased. In some of the community settings, staff who previously worked as teacher's aides and were described as "natural born teachers" returned to school to obtain the appropriate teacher certification. As a result, they received additional training and improved their teaching skills.

Linda Gratz, the former Director of Head Start and a member of the Manitowoc School Board, describes how her Head Start program worked with a staff member to help her return to school and get additional training,

"We had a few aides who moved up the ranks, but didn't have four-year degrees whom we had moved into teaching positions. When 4K came in, we knew our teachers would have to be four-year college graduates and be certified. These two particular teachers were at risk of losing their jobs. One we were able to make into a home-based teacher. She works with children and their parents just in their homes and she didn't need a four-year degree for that. But we told the other teacher that we wanted to work with her to get a four-year degree. She was a little reluctant to get the degree, but she knew that the 4K was going to begin to expand into different communities and that she was going to need the degree and certification to teach. She eventually went back to UW Oshkosh, got her degree, did her student teaching, and got her license. She is still working with us as our Head Start teacher. If it hadn't been for the 4K, she probably would never have gone back to school.

To help enable her to go back to school, we were flexible about her work schedule and about giving her the time off for her student teaching, and we helped pay for some of the classes she took. She continued working part-time while she was in school except when she did her student teaching, and then we kept her on for a few hours so that she could keep in contact with the parents and children because she was going to be coming back the other part of the year to work with these children."

## **28. Curriculum and resources used by the school district are more easily shared and utilized by the child care and early childhood education programs.**

The 4K Community Approach program has brought the curriculums and resources from the school district to the child centers in an unprecedented fashion. School districts now see the community centers as an extension of the school program and they act accordingly in terms of making their resources available to the centers. One community program, for example, received support from its school district to upgrade their computers so that they could utilize the same electronic observation tool for assessment as was being used in the K-12 program. School district materials are commonly shared with the community programs and staff development programs often include staff from the centers. Dennis Krueger, the Assistant Superintendent for the Howard-Suamico School District, said, “Sites have a formal connection to schools and therefore access to the schools’ resources.”

Deborah Shimanek, a Principal and 4K Site Coordinator for the Manitowoc Public School District, explains how staff development on the “Conscious Discipline” curriculum positively impacted the community sites,

“Cathi Burrish {another 4K principal} and myself and the 4K teachers went through Conscious Discipline training and followed up with a trainer of Conscious Discipline, so not only were our 4K teachers trained in Conscious Discipline, but for 3 months in a row, Cathi and I went into the day care sites and did overviews of Conscious Discipline and what Conscious Discipline was all about. That made a huge impact in all of our sites- about being proactive in our discipline, how we can be proactive in planning for the child to support the behavior we want, and what the behavior says about the child. Seeing how the teachers started their morning routines and greeted those children and made it a warm environment, I definitely saw how that has impacted all of our child care sites.”

Deborah Shimanek describes how sharing the Manitowoc School District’s “Creative Curriculum” with the community centers changed their practices,

“...Their {the community sites} interest areas and their small group exploration and play changed a lot. We had a lot of teachers that were doing extended periods of large group things, which we’ve tried to lessen or eliminate. Instead, there’s now lots of exploration in the classrooms about the interest areas. Within the interest areas, allowing children free choice and also allowing the teachers the opportunity to sit down and have good conversations with the children. Snack time now is used as time for language-driven conversation instead of teachers talking to each other. The children were doing no self-serving or anything like that before. We worked hard to make it a child-centered activity instead of an adult-directed activity. So now they have small pitchers, they’re pouring their own drinks, they’re talking about their day, and teachers are sitting at the tables with them instead of talking amongst themselves. That was a huge difference for us. That was a result of the Creative Curriculum.”

Lori Brandt, a Special Education teacher for the Manitowoc School District, describes the benefits of a series of inservice programs the school district presented to the 4K teachers,

“... We did a series of science-related inservice programs throughout the school year through a grant, and we purposefully partnered our 4K partners throughout the school year so that they could go into each other’s classrooms. We tried to put different mixes of teachers together: Head Start with a community site, school program with community site program, etc. to mix it up, to build camaraderie and friendships so that they would share ideas with each other since they’re all spread out rather than in the same building. We wanted to build some cohesiveness among them. We had teacher-partners. When we brought in a woman to do some science experimenting, they were given some release time so that they could go and teach in other’s classrooms for an afternoon or do experiments together with their students. It worked well. They were sharing a lot of ideas, and are now doing more brainstorming with each other and sharing materials than they did before. ...The school district helped the community site teachers get release-time and they got substitute teachers in those classrooms to free up the 4K teachers so they could go and be with their partners. The other thing that came out of that is we now have science bins that rotate through the classrooms every month at all the 4K sites so that teachers have, for example maybe one month using a bin on magnets and another month on simple machines. So, they have new things going into their science areas throughout the year. ...We took ideas from the teachers to put the bins together during that inservice year. We asked the teachers what resources they were interested in and the teacher who I partnered in this and I found them those resources. It was definitely consumer driven.”

## **29. The 4K Community Approach program improves the quality of the child care and early childhood education programs for all children instead of just benefiting the children in the four-year-old kindergarten programs.**

One of the greatest benefits of the 4K Community Approach program has been the unanticipated ways it has improved the overall quality of care for all children in the child care and early education programs in host communities, including:

- 4K teachers can model best practices for child care teachers within the same facility. Jennifer Trudell, the 4K Coordinator for the Howard-Suamico School District, provides an example of how the practices of the 4K teachers “trickle down” to the teachers of two- and three-year-olds,

“One struggle I have had over last four years other than retention of the 4K teachers, has been educating them {the new 4K teachers} on the developmental differences of four-year-olds. In college they were taught about five-year-olds and up, but there’s a vast difference developmentally ...So I train them to understand four-year-olds – resulting in another benefit trickling. When other staff observes the 4K teacher-lesson planning wit purpose, documenting the observations of the children- they want to do it, too, because they see it working- not just for the child’s benefit, but to their

benefit, too. The staff sees behaviors go away, the kids are getting along and they're learning and it's fun. 4K with a community approach has increased our quality across the board- not just the 4K children, but all ages."

- The 4K Community Approach program has nurtured collaborative partnerships between school districts and the community child care and early childhood education programs. As a result, school districts commonly offer professional development training sessions which include 4K staff from the community sites. They also often invite the child care teachers from the community sites who work with children younger than four-year-olds to attend the training sessions. They sometimes even schedule the trainings during the evening or on Saturdays to better accommodate the scheduling needs of the child care teachers. Both the 4K teachers and the teachers of younger children have improved their practices as a result of the training they've received.
- Specific staff development on curricula such as "Creative Curriculum" or "Conscious Discipline" can build a continuity of instruction and practices within a community site. In Manitowoc, for example, 4K teachers from community sites attended training sessions on Conscious Discipline. They in turn shared what they had learned with staff working with younger children. As a result, the same discipline program was used within the sites for children in the 4K programs and with younger children, too.
- Child care teachers and directors feel more confident, respected, and knowledgeable as a result of attending professional development sessions.
- Special services staff from school districts now have a "presence" in the community 4K programs. This increases the contact they have with 4K children, younger children attending child care programs in the same facilities, and the parents of these children, which makes it easier for parents to consult with the school district staff regarding issues of concern with their children.

Deborah Shimanek, Principal and 4K Site Coordinator for the Manitowoc Public School District, explains how 4K-CA has a trickle down benefit in her school district,

"...Some of our 4K teachers in our community-based sites were more child care-oriented versus 4K-oriented. So we really worked hard with the Creative Curriculum with organizing the rooms. What we saw happen was that it carried over into the 3 year olds room, and then we started having conversations with the directors about the toddlers. So that was a huge success- all of us having a common language about creative curriculums, the planning process about Creative Curriculums, and then with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards. We send out 4K teachers to CESA trainings and the expectation is that they'll go back and share what they've learned with the child care staff, too."

Linda Gratz, Former Head Start Director and current school board member for the Manitowoc School District, describes how staff development improved the quality of child care programs in Manitowoc,

“...It’s been amazing, but not necessarily for Head Start specifically because Head Start has funds for training already and our particular grantee was CESA 7 who already was providing training in early childhood for our Head Start program and for the school district. But after the 4K program got started community-wide, we knew there was a huge need for training for the day care people because the people employed in the child care community have very limited resources and very limited time because they’re always with the children from 6:00 in the morning until 6:00 at night. So there are some real challenges involved to having child care staff trained because of time and money and the resources to follow through. So with the 4K program, it was a fantastic networking opportunity. Not only did the district and CESA and Head Start work together to develop a training program for 4K programs, the school district also was very sensitive to the needs of the day care people. They talked about having trainings at times when school districts weren’t necessarily used to having trainings like in the evenings or on Saturdays.”

Kathy Stachura, the owner of the Cuddle Care Child Care Center in Green Bay, explains how the 4K Community Approach program improved the overall quality of her center,

“I think it’s improved the overall quality of the center. The 4K teachers and my regular teachers communicate very well. My regular teachers ask them for ideas, suggestions- great teamwork has evolved. The district also has provided some awesome trainings that we’d never have been able to afford on our own and some of them we’ve been able to open up to our entire staff. ...It gives the entire staff another way of looking at things. They’ve learned new ways, they’ve seen new ways, new techniques, and they’re trying it and moving forward. “

Dennis Krueger, the Assistant Superintendent of Educational Programs for the Howard-Suamico School District, describes some of the trickle-down benefits of 4K Community Approach program in his school district,

“It has brought our community together and heightened the awareness around the importance of four-year-old year old education. It’s supported our existing preschool daycare child care sites in that we’re not taken business away from them and they’ve embraced the criteria we’ve established to be a 4K partner. And, we see trickle down into some of the three-year-old programs in the sites. Also, many of the children were able to stay where they were already attending – a preschool or early learning environment- where they were as infants, one, two, and three-year-olds and were able to continue as four-year-olds. This provides consistency for the child, and some of the process and pedagogy for child trickles down to the three-year-olds- some of the tenets of the Creative Curriculum, the learning through play and exploration and the staff development obtained by the 4K teachers are shared with other teachers within the sites. The {best}

practices are used in three-year-old room, too. This helps with continuation from the three-year-old rooms to the four-year-old, too.”

**30. The 4K Community Approach program can improve the salary and benefits for all staff at the community sites.**

Many of the 4K Community Approach programs allow community sites fiscal flexibility within certain parameters regarding how they allocate their 4K funds. Typically, teacher salaries are the largest expense in 4K programs. Staff retention is often an issue in community child care programs which cannot afford to pay their staff salaries commensurate with the salaries of public school teachers. Some of the community programs have used their 4K funds to raise salaries and add benefits for all their teachers because they believe their teachers deserve to be paid more and this increases the likelihood that there will be continuity in the programs by retaining the same competent staff over an extended period of time.

**31. The 4K Community Approach program provides community sites easier access to school district services.**

The 4K Community Approach program has markedly increased the presence of public school staff in the community 4K venues. Four-year-old kindergarten teachers sometimes are paid employees from the school district. Special services staff who regularly work with children in the community programs are usually school district employees. 4K staff inservice programs often include teachers from both the public schools and community sites, and there are frequent informal conversations which take place between community programs and school district personnel. The result is that the community programs have easier access to school district services; the site’s staff is more willing and able to contact the school district for assistance and/or to brainstorm ideas to help specific children.

Kristine Cresco, Director of Kid’s Castle Child Care Center in Kenosha, explains how her program has better and quicker access to services from the Kenosha Unified School District as a result of the 4K Community Approach program:

“We’ve had a couple of children who have some severe losses, traumas at their young ages. What we’re finding is that when a child is in a 4K environment, we can get services that are needed quicker than before. Yes, we used to get those services from Kenosha Unified, but it took much longer. We can now more easily pull in services to help the teacher to work with that child better and I think parents have really seen the benefits of when we use those services through Kenosha Unified. What a difference those services can make for that child. And how much easier is the transition when that child goes into kindergarten. And, we’re not dealing with those issues later on down the road. In reality, we don’t have all of the services that are available in Kenosha Unified.”

Jennifer Trudell, the 4K Coordinator for the Howard-Suamico School District, describes the benefits for the community sites of having easier access to the public school staff:

“Because of 4K, all of the special education people, speech and language people, physical therapists- all of those interventions are more easily accessible. Sites also have been more willing or able to contact the school district with kids at a younger age, even to just throw around ideas. In the past you’d go to Birth to 3 or you waited until the children got to school. The sites felt like they were on their own. Now we’re able to step in a little earlier. Perhaps by the time they get to 5K, they won’t need any early intervention whatsoever because they’ve had all that early help and assistance.”

### **32.The 4K Community Approach helps child care and early childhood education programs maintain or increase their enrollment.**

In a community where the 4K program is only in the public schools, the local child care and early childhood programs are at risk of not only losing the four year old population, but also of becoming financially insolvent. Many programs need to balance expensive infant and toddler care that has small child/teacher ratios with the less expensive higher ratio of caring for three and four-year-olds. Without 4 year olds in attendance the programs might not be able to remain open. With the 4K Community Approach parents are more likely to keep their child in the same location for care outside of 4K hours.

Enrollments for community programs might increase with the 4K Community Approach as parents commonly enroll the younger siblings of their four-year-olds in child care programs in the same location that their child is attending 4K. This is more convenient for the parents than having care for their children in different locations and it saves them time and money transporting children to different locations. This also occurs because parents develop more confidence in the capabilities of the child center staff as they become more familiar with the child care program associated with the 4K program. Additionally, after they’ve completed 4K and “graduated” to 5K or became even older, many of these same children continue to attend the same child center for before-and after-school care and summer programs. Some of the teachers for the summer school programs are the same teachers who taught these now older children when they attended 4K, which means they continue to work with children they know well and hence can better attend to their needs, provide guidance and informal instruction, and maintain those strong relationships.

### **33.The 4K Community Approach program provides many financial benefits for child care programs, which typically face considerable fiscal challenges.**

The 4K Community Approach program has provided much-needed financial assistance to child care programs in host communities. While the financial benefits vary from community-to-community, the relative wealth of resources possessed by the school districts have been shared with the child care and early childhood education programs in new collaborative partnerships in which school districts intentionally employ their resources to ensure the financial stability of their community partners. These financial benefits for the community sites include:

- 4K Community Approach programs provide the community sites with financial stability because there is a guaranteed cash flow in the reimbursements for children and rental of teaching rooms. The community sites also know there will be strength in their enrollments because there will be a reliable influx of 4K children in attendance.
- School districts sometimes provide financial assistance to community sites well beyond what might be required for those programs to function, including:
  - refurbishing facilities for the community sites
  - providing funds to help community sites retain staff when the discrepancy between salaries for the public school teachers and the community sites makes this an issue
  - purchasing new materials and equipment for the community sites
  - providing community sites funds to replace old equipment or for breakage
  - sharing materials and resources from the school district with the community sites
  - providing the expertise of special services staff free-of-charge for the community sites
  - paying some of the costs for community sites to maintain their facilities
  - sharing many transportation costs with the community sites
  - providing free advertising for the community sites
- Several community sites have expanded their facilities because the 4K Community Approach has been such a financial boon for their programs.

### **34. The 4K Community Approach program can increase the diversity of children enrolled in community programs.**

Communities in Wisconsin that have four-year-old kindergarten offer their programs and transportation free-of-charge to four-year-olds at the same level with which they provide transportation to any other K-12 student. As one parent stated, “It’s leveled the playing field. Everyone can attend, not just those who can afford it.”

For many participating community programs, this has meant that the population of children attending their facilities has become more diversified because attendance at the site is no longer dependent on financial resources alone. In addition, Head Start programs which previously enrolled children from low-income families now can provide services and instruction for a more heterogeneous population in terms of family income.

Steve Smith, the CEO of the YMCA in Manitowoc, explains how 4K-CA has increased the diversity of the population at the Y {a 4K host site} and some of the resulting benefits,

“{4K Community Approach} has opened up a great opportunity for us to affect kids in our community that are under the federal poverty line. 17% of children in Manitowoc County are living under the federal poverty guidelines. ...And so we're able to step in and say to the families 'We want you to be members of the Y' or 'There's an opportunity here for you to participate in the Y beyond the 4K program.' So it gives us an avenue to speak to that group because not all kids are well off. Our staff knows who they are and are able to help them more.

We have a family in town- illegal immigrants. The father was deported. They went to Mexico. The six-year-old had touched our 4K program before they left. They had four children under the age of 5. After the deportation, the mother and younger children returned to Manitowoc. They're a scholarship family with us based on the situation of the father leaving town. The community has really stepped up. Their kids are now sleeping on the bunk beds of our kids {Steve Smith's children's beds}, two of the kids are in the 4K program, and there's a child about three-years-old, too. We've worked out a scholarship to give that child the opportunity to be in our child care so Mom can work.

Mom is one of our scholarship stories that we've told to the community with the impact we've made with them and that we're continuing to try to make. They're integrated into the life of the organization. Last year, they were a family that our staff took care of for Christmas. We care deeply about this family, and it's just one of the families that we care deeply about. We're out there fighting with them- not saying, 'Good luck. Hope it works out.' That's who we are as an organization, and the school district obviously feels the same way. We're able to make that effect because the kids are in 4K here.

...We often face challenges at the Y of our non-English speaking families. To go back to the story I told you earlier about the family that was deported. That Mom- well here's the giving back part of that story. Well we're helping out, we're giving to them. She's come back in help us out with translation when we're struggling. Helping her community out. They're a Y family for life, and we will reap the rewards of our good work tenfold out in the community by her work and that she believes in the community.”

### **35. The 4K Community Approach program has prompted more interaction, collaboration, and cost sharing among community child care and early childhood education programs.**

The 4K Community Approach program has forged cohesive early childhood communities. Whereas child care and early childhood education programs often viewed each other as competitors, there's now a spirit of “what can we do to help each other provide the best possible care for children in our community?” There are many benefits resulting from this new spirit of collaboration, including:

- Increases the frequency of contact and improves the quality of communications among community programs. Community-wide staff development sessions in particular nurture such contact and communication.
- Creates a cohesive community among programs who now share a common goal of helping the entire community provide the best care possible. The effect is as “pulling together” of the entire early childhood community
- Instead of the previous feeling of competition amongst community sites, program directors and staff now commonly refer parents to other facilities.
- Community sites commonly share expenses on joint ventures, such as the costs to charter buses for field trips or staff trainings.
- Community sites share materials.
- Community sites can “share children,” such as merging children from two sites into one 4K classroom, while having the children remain in child care in each separate facility.
- Builds friendships among staff from different facilities, which helps them feel less isolated within the early childhood community.
- Outstanding teachers sometimes serve as mentors or “experts-to-be consulted” for staff at facilities throughout a community.

Garret Bresina, the owner of Kids USA Learning Center in Chippewa Falls, describes how the 4K Community Approach program has increased communication among child care centers,

“Before the 4K Community Approach program, owners and administrators knew each other, but never met or talked to share ideas. Now all the sites meet monthly and we’re involved in a common goal of wanted this to be a great program, not just my program, but for the whole community. We share great ideas with other teachers and other sites... ten years ago I never would have contacted another center to see how they were doing or to ask questions and get ideas. It strengthens the community. Obviously we’re separate businesses and competing, but also being able to help each other and plan with each other and even refer to other sites if ours doesn’t fit a parents need.”

Becky Wright, another Director of Monkey Business Child Center in Chippewa Falls, describes how one outstanding teacher has been a resource for the entire early childhood community,

“We’ve had a teacher who has been here for four years who’s really grown, not only with her classroom, but as a mentor to other teachers that have come on board and other teachers from the school district. She did that because her confidence was built and she could really see what a difference she was making with her children, especially in classroom management skills. That teacher has grown, and it’s more the mentoring portion of it. She’s mentoring the other teachers at Monkey Business and the teachers at other 4K collaborative centers. She would get calls from other centers and they would meet and share ideas. She actually went to one center and helped the teacher with her environment. So it’s not a competition between the centers- it’s more what can we do to

help you, what's working, and what can you do to help me to make it work for my classroom?

Dana Sommerfeld, the Director of State and Federal Programs for the Chippewa Falls School District, describes collaboration between a Head Start program and a program in a Catholic School,

“We have a Head Start program and another site is a Catholic school. We've been able to work through all the things that need to be worked through to make it happen. It's hard to put my finger on it, but it's the level of collaboration and concern for our children that's made this work very well.

They follow all guidelines for 4K program that we follow. It's part of a public school in a private school, but we haven't had the issues they've had in a lot of places about where religion starts and where it ends. They understand the importance of the program and parents whose children are there understand that it's not a religious program.

### **36. Child care programs can improve their image and increase their visibility in their communities as a result of being participants in the 4K Community Approach program.**

The 4K Community Approach program can improve the public image of participating child care and early childhood education programs. Simply being associated with the public school district gives the community programs an added stamp of credibility. Being part of a successful community-wide collaboration also improves the public image of the early childhood programs. Additionally, free publicity from the school district increases the visibility of the community programs

In Manitowoc, there are three 4K programs housed in the YMCA. The success of the 4K-Community Approach program collaboration with the Y has improved the public image of the YMCA, the programs housed within the Y including its child care center and 4K programs, and the school district's image for successfully working with community partners. Steve Smith, the CEO of the YMCA explains, “...Every dollar we receive from the school district pays back tenfold because people feel connected to us and the community that we're trying to effect in Manitowoc.”

Kathy Stachura, the owner of Cuddle Care Child Care Center in Green Bay, describes how the 4K Community Approach program increases the exposure of her center,

“...We get a lot of advertising free from the district because the district website lists all the community sites. And, for any advertising they do for 4K, they list all the sites. So it puts your name out in the public so much. And once a year, the district has a get-together and lets parents know what 4K is about. All of the sites are mentioned. It just makes your site much more visible to the public.”

Amy, a parent and board member for the Good Shepherd Preschool in Green Bay, said,

“It’s {4K Community Approach program} connected the Good Shepherd Church to even more of the community. We’ve always had a good reputation in the community, but working with the district helps our reputation, too.”

## **Unique Benefits of the 4K Community Approach for School Districts**

### **37. The 4K Community Approach strengthens the school districts ability to plan for the entrance of young children into the public schools.**

The 4K Community Approach program has opened new lines of communication between school district staff and staff in the community 4K settings. Experienced and knowledgeable child care teachers now share information about children they've sometimes known since birth with teachers of five-year-old kindergarten who will subsequently be teaching these same children. There are innumerable benefits resulting from such communications, including:

- The kindergarten teachers can learn from the child care teachers which practices and strategies previously worked and did not work with a particular child. This information can include both the child's academic and social strengths and challenges.
- For children with special needs or those requiring some kind of therapy, the kindergarten teacher can better understand the types of supports they can provide to help the child best function and succeed.
- The kindergarten teachers can acquire valuable information from the child care teachers and providers about the new kindergartener's family because they have unique perspectives to share as a result of often having so much contact with the families connected to their programs. Wraparound care often results in preschool children spending considerable time in a facility and hence provides child care staff innumerable opportunities to interact with both the children and their families.

### **38. The 4K Community Approach improves the preparation of young children for entrance into the public schools.**

Some of the 4K Community Approach programs use the same curriculum that is used with older children in the public schools in their communities. The result is that when 4K children subsequently attend the public schools, they will already have experience and familiarity with the curricula that will continue to be part of their education in the future.

Garret Bresina, the owner of Kids USA Learning Center in Chippewa Falls, describes such a curriculum,

“The Pyramid Model for Developing Social and Emotional Intelligence is a social and emotional program. The school district uses it in all of their elementary, middle, and high schools. The curriculum is geared down for infant to age 5- the expectations, teaching “quiet hands,” and the tools we use for helping children help themselves with social problems. By the time they get to elementary school, it's second hand to them. When younger children feel sad or when they are a little older and can understand what being

frustrated means, they learn it's OK to feel those emotions and have those feelings. All thirty-three members of our staff have had the twenty-four hours of training on the Pyramid Model. We're now three years into it and we love it! We were doing things well before, but now we're doing things even better."

### **39. The 4K Community Approach program increases the contact school districts have with parents of young children.**

The 4K Community Approach programs have a strong parental outreach component. Parents are invited to attend educational programs, family activity events, and field trips. They receive informational emails and take-home literature from 4K teachers and meet with them periodically at parent-teacher conferences. The increased contact between 4K-CA program staff and parents has several benefits:

- School personnel often provide training sessions for parents. This provides parents with useful ideas for activities they can do with their children and provides school personnel additional contact with the parents, which enables them to better understand and work with the 4K children.
- Parents sometimes feel better about the way they're parenting when they learn that there is educational value in many of the routines and chores they do daily with their children.
- 4K Community Approach programs commonly host Family Nights and events using community-based facilities, such as a Literacy Night at the public library, activity night at the YMCA, or a field trip to the school forest. These events increase contact between school staff and parents, which increases parents' level of comfort and familiarity with the school staff and ultimately the school district.
- Special services staff from school districts now have a "presence" in the community 4K programs. This increases the contact they have with 4K children, younger children attending child care programs in the same facilities, and the parents of these children, which makes it easier for parents to consult with the school district staff regarding issues of concern with their children.
- Parents feel more trust in the schools because they have increased contact with school personnel in the community. This familiarity makes parents more comfortable when their children enter 5K in the schools because they've already communicated with staff from the school district.

### **40. The 4K Community Approach program helps school districts gain a better understanding of the needs and challenges of the early childhood programs in their community.**

The 4K Community Approach program facilitates close collaboration between school districts and community partners. The school district benefits in a variety of ways, including gaining a better understanding of the needs and strengths of the early childhood

programs in their communities. With this knowledge, school districts are more committed and better able to work cooperatively with their community partners to provide quality early learning for children.

Jennifer Trudell, 4K Coordinator for the Howard-Suamico School District, describes how the community partners gained a voice with the school district as a result of the 4K Community Approach program,

“{4K-CA} also helped the community sites have a voice back to the school district, and I mean that in a good way. Typically when a school district deals with child care sites, the district is looked to as the authority. It doesn't mean that the district understands the day to day activities at the child care level, but they've got higher education and funding. With 4K, suddenly there were eleven of us saying 'Hey, this is reality. This is what's going on. This is what's working well.' Now the education was going both ways. It seemed like community sites had to unite to get that across well.”

Jennifer Trudell also explains how the schools are learning about funding issues that challenge the community sites,

“Funding is vastly different from the two perspectives. From the school's perspective, funding comes from the state and federal authorities. Certainly there are budgets to be met, but generally it goes into one pot and you disperse as needed into different accounts within a school system. If one account gets low, additional resources can be moved from a different account to help compensate. In the child care centers, it's on the backs of the parents directly. The tuition they pay is the only source of funding by which all bills are accounted for. There is no additional funding, with the exception being W-2 children, but often there are few of them involved and are reimbursed at the same rate as the other children. It's a lot tighter and we're responsible for much of the costs.”

Belinda Grantham, Director of Early Education for the Kenosha Public Schools, describes different ways the school district benefits from collaborating with the community sites,

“It allows us to have outreach with children that we would not be able to serve in a school setting because of the family's needs for child care in many cases. It also allows families the opportunity to attend a location that might be actually closer than the school the child would be going to. Bottom line- we're building stronger foundation pieces- both academic and social and emotional. All of them will be going to kindergarten programs, so we're just getting them in advance. It's also increasing awareness of our centers in our school. When the school teachers are reading about a student, the report is often from a center, so it increases their awareness that the centers are out there. ... Personally, I've learned a lot more about child care than I knew before because of my conversations with the directors we work with. It's building common understand acceptance for what's happened.”

#### **41. The 4K Community Approach program improves the image of school districts in their communities**

School districts have consistently improved their images in their communities when they've developed 4K Community Approach programs in a collaborative fashion. While many child care centers feared that the school districts would take a "top-down" approach to 4K Community Approach programs and tell them what to do, instead many school districts asked the community partners to describe their needs and the school districts then tried to meet those needs. By improving their overall image in the community as a result of the 4K Community Approach program, school districts' increase the "buy-in" from their communities and hence are more likely to receive support when they are trying to raise funds through referendums.

Linda Gratz, Former Director of Head Start in Manitowoc explains,

"One of the biggest benefits in the community {of 4K-CA} is showing that the school district is willing to collaborate. It's not just the school district telling them what to do all the time. That they're actually working with the day cares, with the Head Start. There's a feeling that we're all in this together, and I think that's done a lot as far as the school district image in the community of being one that's for the common good. The initial wariness of child care and Head Start that the schools would eventually squeeze them out has passed and there's more a sense of togetherness about the whole thing."

#### **42. With 4K Community Approach, by using the space and resources available in the community programs, the school district can more efficiently use public funds.**

Although the impetus behind the development of the 4K Community Approach program was educational, there have been many financial benefits reaped by the schools districts related to savings on facilities and staff salaries, including:

- School districts that lack sufficient space to house their 4K programs can offer the programs at community sites and thereby avoid the expense of building new facilities to accommodate four-year-old kindergarten.
- School districts can remodel community facilities to create needed space for four-year-old-kindergarten at a cost considerably less than building new school facilities. The Manitowoc School District paid approximately \$50,000 to refurbish 2,000 square feet at the YMCA in order to create two 4K classrooms, whereas they paid \$1,000,000 for a 10,000 square foot addition to their elementary school.
- School districts may not have to reimburse community partners for certain custodial costs in their facilities. This saves the school district expenses they would incur for those same services in school facilities.

- School districts In 4K programs where the community site hires the teacher, the teaching costs for the school district are considerably less than it would be to pay for 4K teachers working for the school district.

### **43. Transportation costs for the school district can be reduced by having four-year-old kindergarten located in community sites.**

School districts in Wisconsin are obligated to provide transportation for four-year-old kindergarten at the same level they provide transportation for any other K-12 student. However, sometimes the school districts' transportation expenses are reduced as a result of the 4K-Community Approach program. The community approach reduces the number of families that seek transportation from the school district if, for example, parents are unable to wait until 8:00 a.m. when the 4K session begins to place their child in child care or if they need to have their child receive after-school child care, they often transport their children themselves to and/or from the 4K site to take advantage of the wraparound care provided. Also, sometimes programs like Head Start transport children instead of having the schools provide the transportation thereby providing the school district with additional savings. Having parents and/or Head Start assume some of the responsibilities for transporting children saves the school district money.

### **44. As a result of 4K Community Approach programs, special services are more accessible and provided earlier.**

One result of the 4K-CA program has been increased contact between staff in the community sites and special education and other support staff (speech and language teachers, physical therapists, etc.) from the public schools. Sometimes, the school personnel visit the community programs specifically to work with four-year-olds. At other times, they work with younger children at the sites. In both instances, there is an increased presence of special services staff in the community sites, which results in several important benefits for school districts, including:

- Staff from the community sites are more willing and able to contact the school district about younger children for whom they have concerns because they get to know and trust the school's special services staff and because they are more easily accessible (since they regularly visit the community sites). As a result, there's an increase in referrals and early intervention services for younger children, whereas previously the sites often felt like they were entirely on their own figuring out how to best meet the needs of children with special needs.
- There is more outreach to parents as a result of the 4K-CA program and this results in an increase in the number of early interventions. Whereas previously the school district would primarily respond to calls from parents before doing an assessment, now the special services staff from the public schools and the staff from the 4K

community venues are working together in identifying younger children warranting assessment.

- Parents learn more about special services through their contact with the community sites, and the community program staff in turn know more about the resources available and can access them more quickly through their increased contact with the public schools.
- Early intervention can reduce or even eliminate the need to provide special services for children when they get older, thereby providing significant financial benefits for school districts.

#### **45. The flexibility in program design provided by 4K Community Approach enables school districts to design unique programs to best meet the needs of their community.**

Within certain guidelines, the 4K Community Approach program allows school districts to flexibly design their four-year-old kindergarten programs to best meet the needs of their community. This understandably results in benefits which are unique to different communities.

Belinda Grantham, the Director of Early Education for the Kenosha Unified School District (KUSD), tells the unique story of the 4K Community Approach program in Kenosha,

“Background information:

Prior to the 2011-2012 school year, we had four options for children who were 3 and 4 years old in KUSD:

- Head Start
- Early Childhood – this is what we call our special education services
- P5-4K – P5 was a grant (preschool thru 5<sup>th</sup> grade) that low income schools received to provide additional services to increase student achievement. Having a 4K classroom in the school was required with the grant.
- 4K in childcare centers

Each of these programs were siloed. That version of programming resulted in minimal interaction between teachers who were teaching the same age level but in different programs. Because the program was the focus, there was not a common set of learning expectations or curriculum that was implemented---each program had their own. In addition, each program was only offered at certain locations limiting family options of where their child could attend for 4K, and, potentially, a child could attend 2-3 schools before they reached their kindergarten year at their neighborhood school.

Advantages of blending/braiding programming for KUSD:

- Children attend their neighborhood school from PreK – 5<sup>th</sup> grade. They attend where they live and the programming comes to them. As a result, in a single classroom you

may have children and their families receiving special education services, Head Start services, and building services.

- Parents become integrated into their school's culture one to two years sooner.
- Increased parent involvement in PreK classroom and school building (volunteering, attending school events, PTA/PTO, attending conferences, etc.)
- Braided funding saved seven 4K teaching positions that would have been cut with the end of the P-5 Grant.
- Integrating the programs also allowed a minimum of one Early Education classroom in every elementary school (there are 24 elementary schools)---when we stopped focusing on separate programs and integrated into one larger program, we were able to move teachers to buildings that previously did not offer Early Education.
- A common set of standards (WMELS) and a common curriculum and assessment tool are now used in all KUSD Early Ed classrooms. This includes the classrooms in the school buildings and in the childcare centers.
- Professional development is now able to be provided based on analysis of district wide assessment data.
- Standards for classrooms are based on the highest standard available, whether it be Head Start, IDEA, or DPI.
- To date, the purchase of additional materials has been minimal because special education classrooms had oodles of materials. With integration of special education and regular education, these oodles of materials have benefitted all.”

## **Unique Benefits of the 4K Community Approach for the General Public**

### **46. Everyone benefits when different programs meet to discuss what works best in their community. By collaborating, communities avoid one size fits all solutions and instead develop programs that fit the unique needs of their individual communities.**

The flexibility for each community to develop a unique 4K Community Approach program has enabled participants to offer a diverse and varied palette of services for children and to provide creative solutions to community-wide problems and concerns.

For example,

- In Chippewa Falls, the school district contracts with an external agency to provide bus service for children. Because of their interest in providing the highest quality experiences for four-year-olds, the bus company designated buses specifically for four-year-olds. When they transport four-year-olds, no younger or older children ride in the same bus. They purchased smaller buses so that it's a safer and more comfortable ride for the children. They assigned dedicated drivers who receive training in child development, child management, and the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program. The drivers get to know the children personally, and this is a result of a commitment and belief on the part of the bus company that those kids "need great things."
- In Manitowoc, the continued existence of the community's Head Start program was in jeopardy around the time when planning for the introduction of the 4K Community Approach program was taking place. Head Start needed more space and nothing workable was seemingly available. The school district asked Head Start if they would like to participate in the 4K Community Approach collaboration and invited Head Start to move into the new wing of the Riverview Learning Center. According to Linda Gratz, the former director of Head Start in Manitowoc, this saved Head Start in Manitowoc. She said, "It was great how they worked with us to make sure we were benefiting, they were benefiting, and the children and families were benefitting.... The thing impressed me most was how open and honest and fair the school district was."
- In Stevens Point, county nurses conduct hearing and visions screenings for all children in the 4K Community Approach programs. This service did not exist before the introduction of 4K Community Approach program. If families are unable to follow-up the screenings with physicians on their own, the 4K Community Approach program provides resources to help them make sure they're now able to do it.
- Also in Chippewa Falls, there had been no four-year-old kindergarten offered until the introduction of the 4K Community Approach program. Before the 4K Community Approach, most of the child care programs in the community offered some kind of

preschool program, but it wasn't accessible to all of the children in the community because of the limited financial resources of many families. Recognizing the inequities this created, members of the community began to meet to identify the needs of preschool age children in Chippewa Falls. A broad cross-section of community members participated in these discussions included representatives from the fire department, county services, hospitals, and other agencies who worked with young children in some capacity. Although the "gathering of minds" was not formed with the intent to create a four-year-old kindergarten program, what came to the forefront was the need to create a four-year-old kindergarten program that would be available and accessible to all of the children in the community. The 4K Community Approach program resulted from those discussions. The community saw the need and the school district seemed like the logical partner for community programs and so the collaboration "was born."

#### **47. The overall quality of early childhood programs has improved in communities implementing the 4K Community Approach.**

One of the most powerful and perhaps unintended consequences of introducing the 4K Community Approach program into many communities has been to improve the quality of child care throughout those communities, sometimes even improving the quality of programs which aren't even 4K Community Approach program host venues. Staff development opportunities have increased, child care programs beyond the 4K sites have received assistance from staff who work with the 4K Community Approach program, standards for child care have been raised, required licensure of 4K staff has improved instruction, and common programmatic philosophy's and practices have produced a more effective delivery of services. The 4K Community Approach coordinators and other program leaders describe such benefits in their communities as follows,

- Belinda Grantham, Director of Early Education, Kenosha Public Schools:

"The quality professional development for child care staff in Kenosha would not have existed without 4K Community Approach. Because of the connections we've made, the KUSD {Kenosha Unified School District} instructional coach is now working with multiple centers through WECA (Wisconsin Early Childhood Association) to be able to provide some professional development in the evening. The training sessions are scheduled during the evening to enable early childhood staff to be able to attend....

I also wouldn't have gotten a call that I got last week from a center that said they had just adopted Teaching Strategies' "Creative Curriculum" [a commercial curriculum for early childhood educators] and they didn't know what to do with it. They had heard we used it and asked if we would be willing to help them implement it, which of course, we will. They were not part of the 4K-CA collaboration. Without this collaboration {4K-CA} previously, there's no way as a school person like myself would have thought of doing professional development with anybody in the

community. It simply would not have occurred to me that there would be a need there.”

- Heather Cramer, 4K Coordinator, Stevens Point Area School District:

“4K-CA has improved the quality child care throughout the community. We’re offering special trainings throughout the school district that centers wouldn’t be able to afford and provide on their own, and we provide professional assistance for teachers, assistants, and directors. ...4K-CA has also helped us in developing a community vision and keeping that alive, which is so important...We’re also proud of partnering within the community and even in-home child care. Even though they don’t do 4K, we’re partnering with them to make sure they’re getting their needs met and we provide other opportunities for them, too.”

- Marcia C. Flaherty, Director of Elementary and Secondary Education, Manitowoc Public School District:

“4K-CA sets a high standard for what early childhood education can and should look like. We used to be in silos where day care teachers were providing education for children in an isolated community setting and the school district had whole different model and mind-set. So by having people come together and talk with each other and share what’s great about their particular world has enabled us to expand the opportunities for what’s good for young child as well as opportunities for the parents.”

- Dana Sommerfeld, Director of State and Federal Programs, Chippewa Falls Unified School District:

“I think we had high quality programs to start with, but simply by having to hire more qualified staff- the teachers in 4K Community Approach of course are DPI licensed teachers- that has brought a different level to the programs. And since we’re offering professional development for their teachers, it’s benefitting their sites. I think it’s raising the bar {of the programs}.

- Deborah Shimanek, Principal and 4K-CA Collaborative Site Coordinator, Manitowoc Public School District:

What are the benefits to the community sites having access to curriculums the public schools provide?

“It is huge that we’re all on the same page. No matter where the child goes to 4K, there is a common curriculum, common philosophy, and a common way of giving progress reports to communicate progress to parents. ...And that’s broadened everyone’s horizons.”

Libby Doggett from the Pew Charitable Trust, that just completed a 10 year campaign to advance high-quality pre kindergarten throughout the country, said

“What I like about the community based approach is that it uses what is there and it actually improves the quality for every child. Every child who attends the {child care} center whether they are two or three and they are not getting the benefits of the added funding, that center is going to be stronger because the director and some of the staff are going to be getting more support and special training, and that makes us all better.”

**48. The 4K Community Approach program provides a level of services which would be impossible for any one agency to provide in isolation.**

One of the greatest benefits of the 4K Community Approach program is that it provides parents with the greatest variety of choices to meet their family’s needs in terms of the educational and child care needs for their children. Each community provides options based on the resources and assessed needs of their particular community. 4K Community Approach programs are offered in child care centers, Head Start programs, preschools, parochial school programs, university-based programs, and public schools. Within this palette of possibilities, different programs offer different services for children. One program in any community simply could not provide the diversity of educational and child care options that the “sum of the parts” provides. Hence, the 4K Community Approach enriches each community by providing parents with the greatest number of programs from which to choose the program that best meets the needs of their family.

**49. Through the 4K Community Approach collaboration, businesses and other community organizations have partnered with programs serving young children to provide products and services to families. This helps to build more cohesive communities.**

Many of the 4K Community Approach programs partner with community organizations to provide services to children and their families, which ultimately benefits the entire community. In Stevens Point, for example, the 4K Community Approach programs partner with a variety of community organizations, including:

- The city of Stevens Point, to use some of their facilities in order to offer fitness activities to families
- Lowes, a home improvement product store, to offer family nights where families can build things out of clay and other materials
- The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where a new 4K community-based program opened with an emphasis of providing education for children with special needs
- The Children’s Museum of Central Wisconsin for different educational activities
- The Portage County Public Library for various literacy-related activities

Several community businesses note that the “Family Nights” at their facilities are one of their most financially profitable days of the year. Connecting families to libraries makes the libraries become more of a resource for families who didn’t previously avail themselves of the many services offered by the library. Planning events and activities where children go into the community and/or community members come into the 4K Community Approach sites also means that children get to know their communities better and are more connected to their communities, which is a foundation for building good citizenship.

By cementing relationships with community organizations and soliciting their input about 4K Community Approach issues that impact the entire community, the community in turn develops a greater appreciation for the importance of early education and a willingness to support four-year-old kindergarten.

Heather Cramer, the 4K Coordinator for Stevens Point explains, “By asking for their input {the community}, they feel better about decisions down-the-line. We’ve had tough decisions to make on things like budgets, but because we’ve had these open dialogues all along, those topics don’t seem so untouchable.”

Steve Smith, the CEO of Manitowoc-Two Rivers YMCA, describes how the 4K collaboration with his organization builds community:

“There is a great collaboration effort between the school district and ourselves. I think one of the things that’s important is the strength of community. And, what better way to tell that story than by having your school district and your community and your Y and in this case our Salvation Army and the other 4K community programs going out there and doing this together, working together for the betterment of Manitowoc. This is just a positive way of doing it. This builds community.”

## **50. Parents may pay less for child care and therefore have more money available to spend in their communities**

The 4K Community Approach program may financially benefit parents if they are paying a lower full-day rate while their child is in 4K. In addition, transportation to and from the 4K community site is paid for by the school district.. Prior to the introduction of four-year-old kindergarten in Wisconsin, if parents needed full-time child care for their children, they had to pay for it themselves. Ultimately, this means that families who participate in the 4K-CA program may have more money available, some of which goes back into the local community, thereby benefiting the local economy.

## **51. Employers benefit from working parents having their children receive care and education in one location.**

The 4K Community Approach program provides parents with the choice of where to send their children to attend four-year-old kindergarten. In terms of the work place, the 4K Community Approach program enables parents to remain at their jobs throughout the day without having to transport their children to separate care facilities because they can place their children in a program where they can have the wraparound care in the morning, afternoon, or even into the evening. This also means that parents are perhaps better employees because they can concentrate on the requirements of their jobs without having the distraction of having to attend to the care needs of their children. In addition, the 4K Community Approach program options enable parents who are attending school to have the same flexibility and certainty of care for their children as do working parents.

**52. The 4K Community Approach program helps the general public to develop more respect and appreciation for the importance of early childhood education.**

Many of the 4K Community Approach programs partner with community organizations to provide services to children and their families. A byproduct of the strong bonds that are forged through these collaborations is the development of a greater appreciation for the importance of early education and a willingness to support 4K Community programs in the community. Familiarity breeds understanding, respect, and appreciation for the 4K-Community programs and for early childhood education from the general public. And, the 4K Community Approach program nurtures a reciprocal appreciation and gratitude for the support of the 4K programs provided by the community.

**53. Having care and education programs in one setting provides parents, educators, care providers, and community social service agencies the opportunity to communicate more easily with each other to support the needs of children and families.**

Having child care and 4K in one setting, and sometimes siblings of a four-year-old enrolled in a program at the same location, facilitates more and better communication among parents, classroom teachers and resource personnel, care providers, administrators, and community social service agencies who work with children and families. Ongoing communications among these interested parties occur more frequently and fluidly because the 4K Community Approach programs are spread throughout communities and thereby touch upon the lives of so many different strata of each community. The collaborations among these interested parties results in better sharing of resources, quicker solutions to problems, and providing more efficient access to necessary social services for families.

Dana Sommerfeld, the Director of State and Federal Programs Chippewa Falls School District, explains why increased and better communication resulting from the 4K Community Approach program is particularly valuable in an emergency:

“If the child in 4K has a sibling, there’s always that connection with the parent. The sharing of information occurs because it becomes part of that family of service. It becomes easier to bring siblings together when a family is having a problem. For example, we had an instance where parent was injured, and it was easier to gather children and send them to a volunteer. It was easier because one system was working together to do that. If a family becomes homeless, we’re able to centralize services through the whole system so that the parent doesn’t have to figure out how to get their child to the program because it’s all part of our system. So, if part of the problem is a different transportation alternative, we can make that happen because we’re already dealing with that family.”

Becky Wright, a director at Monkey Business Early Education Community in Chippewa Falls, believes critical social services are provided more quickly because of the open lines of communication which have been established between different agencies connected to children and families:

“We had a new family enrolled to the program and they came to Monkey Business. They were from out-of-state. They were at the time homeless-‘came on the wind’- and as soon as we found that out, we were able to contact the director of the 4K program to let them know they were homeless. We were able to hook them up with services in the community as far as getting them housing, getting them school supplies, getting rolling faster on some special needs evaluations that were indicated. We ending up having three of their children at Monkey Business, and they are doing amazing in the school system now from what we hear. I think giving them that great start and giving them those resources are really big. I think the education benefits are great, but for this family because we were able to react quickly and give them all those benefits, I think that really made a difference in their education down the road.”

Becky Wright also believes the 4K Community Approach program promotes collaboration between all of the interested parties that makes everyone more effective. In response to an inquiry about what she likes best about 4K-CA, she said,

“All of the collaboration. Being able to work with outside sources and really work as a team. You’re not as successful with one organization doing it {providing for the needs of children and their families} as you are as a team.”

Increased communication in communities among different child care center directors and staffs facilitated by the 4K-CA program also provides more and better opportunities to meet the needs of children and families. Becky Wright explains,

“...If a family needs some resources or some educational services, we have those resources. We meet quarterly as directors and we meet every other month as teachers. We are able to brainstorm together to find the needed resources or if they {the child or

family} need an evaluation, we have that connection that they can come in and do that versus our or their having to try to find out who we should call or what we should do. So services are happening a lot faster.”

**54. The partnership between the school district, 4K sites, and other community programs who work with children and families builds strong and important links among these entities that benefit the entire community.**

The 4K Community Approach program forges partnerships between educators, child care providers, and community agencies in promoting early childhood education. It is a proactive strategy for providing quality early learning for children of all abilities and making it accessible to all families, regardless of their economic circumstances. The initial fears that the school systems would “steal” four-year-olds from the community programs and negatively impact their enrollments have largely been allayed. Instead, the schools and community partners typically work together in a collaborative, trusting fashion for the betterment of children and families. Similarly, the competition among child care centers in participating 4K Community Approach communities often has been replaced by a sharing of resources and ideas among the centers. It is even increasingly common for one center director to recommend another center to a parent if that center might better meet the parent’s needs. The result is that all of the partners increasingly develop a shared vision and goal of working together to improve their communities.