



**Promoting Early Childhood Conference (PEC) 2022  
Dr. Underly Welcome & Conversation  
Zoom Chat Question and Answer**

During the welcome for PEC 2022, Dr. Underly, State Superintendent, provided a space for participants to ask questions. Below are the questions and responses that Dr. Underly did not have the time to address during her welcome.

Question/s:

1. As we hear of the potential for 3K, I'd like to hear thoughts about how the state plans to hear from early childhood educators in this process and the importance of keeping the environments genuinely play-based for 3K and 4K classrooms.
2. How do you plan to help emphasize the importance of early childhood education/4K to school districts? Currently I don't feel the resources are put there.

Response:

*I would like to combine questions one and two, as the answer to them weaves together. The importance of early childhood - with play and exploration as a focused component - is a consistent theme that DPI has heard for several years. We value stakeholder input and are interested in building new ways to reach those who do not have access to the department and our staff. That includes putting resources there.*

*Additional ideas (from past meetings with stakeholders and the 4K Advisory Council) that we are committed to revisiting include the following:*

- *Create a 4K and 4KCA Statewide and Regional Infrastructure/System. This system would provide an ongoing structure to support and promote developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and the importance of the birth to third grade continuum of learning and communication. It could provide ongoing coordination, networking, support, technical assistance, and grant opportunities to 4K and potential 3K sites and cross-sector partners.*
- *Increase communication with District Superintendents. At least quarterly, communicate to district superintendents, through existing or new channels, the importance of 4K and 4KCA to districts, child care and Head Start professionals, families, and community members. It could highlight the significance of implementing DAP, high-quality 4K and that early education is foundational for future success in education (social and emotional,*

*and academic) and the need for ongoing strategic communication among 4K/3K, community partners, and the early elementary grades.*

- *Exploring potential uses of Title II funding to support professional learning for early childhood, the birth to grade 3 (age 8) continuum, and DAP for school leadership and administrators.*
- *Increase internal agency communication related to the importance of early childhood and help agency colleagues learn more about the roles that all DPI teams play in supporting early learning. An easy way to approach this could be to share my engagement in the early care and education field, when relevant, during my weekly emails to DPI staff. For example, during the weeks I engage in the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) meetings, I can highlight a few points about the council's work, or when I participate in statewide early learning summits or conferences (such as the Statewide DAP summit this past October, or the recent Promoting Early Childhood Conference), I can share about the events. This messaging will reinforce my commitment to early education, as well as keeping early childhood on the radar for all DPI teams.*

### Question

Can Dr Underly please address her thoughts on nature-based early childhood education? Will look for answer in follow-up PEC materials. Thank you.

### Response:

*Nature-based early childhood provides contextualized learning and supports school readiness. Wisconsin is a leader in nature-based early childhood and nominated the first early learning center to be recognized by U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools. According to research from the [Children & Nature Network](#), "Regular time in nature during the early years of life enhances:*

- *School readiness, including learning, language and cognitive development, and enhanced play that helps prepare children for school.*
- *Social-emotional learning, including self-regulation and knowledge of oneself and others.*
- *Health and wellness, including physical and mental health.*
- *Connection to nature and community, including emotional connection to nature, pro-environmental attitudes and stewardship."*

*In addition, research also shows that "young children can experience the benefits of nature in a variety of ways:*

- *Nature play offers unstructured, hands-on interaction and exploration with natural elements such as boulders, logs, streams, and paths.*
- *Nature-based learning incorporates nature as an approach to teach content across the curriculum.*
- *Environmental education helps kids learn about and enjoy nature and instills care for the natural world.*
- *Family engagement offers ways for families to spend time together in nature.”*

[https://www.childrenandnature.org/wp-content/uploads/CCCN\\_earlychildnatureconn\\_22-1-18.pdf](https://www.childrenandnature.org/wp-content/uploads/CCCN_earlychildnatureconn_22-1-18.pdf)

Question:

Hi from the public libraries! In my district we are in close partnership with our school district, supporting early literacy. Do you have any ideas on promoting the partnership between schools and public libraries?

Response:

*One of the things I am constantly trying to do is to be intentional in our communications that ALL libraries within Wisconsin are part of the DPI and our education landscape. Your story of supporting early literacy is a great example that deserves to be lifted and shared with others. Frankly, I am concerned that not enough people understand how impactful their local libraries (school and public) are.*

*Another idea we are exploring is how we can strengthen partnerships between school districts and public libraries within the context of the department's biennial budget ask- specifically around early literacy. As we engage in internal and external input, I will keep your question centered in those conversations.*

Question:

Not sure if this is applicable but curious if Dr Underly can address how [The WI Registry](#) can work to achieve sustainable funding for their work to support EC and afterschool work force? Or in other words, is there any way that WI Registry can work with Dr Underly to advocate for this?

Response:

*This would have to be a collaborative conversation with DCF and the other Registry partners. My understanding of the Registry is that it supports Wisconsin's Early Childhood Care and After-School Education workforce to be recognized as a profession, providing high quality early learning, and engaging in continuous professional growth. Although connected to the vision of*

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*the DPI, these entities are guided by rules and regulations from DCF. Since we know that early care and education involves cross-sector partners, this would be an excellent opportunity to collaboratively explore sustainable funding ideas with our DCF partners.*

Question:

Will DPI ever financially support full day 4K?

*Response:*

*We will continue to evaluate this policy proposal and understand the impact it can have for our schools and learners. I want to be up front and acknowledge that making this change will require legislative approval - the department does not have the authority to implement full-day funding. The issue is also complicated by the fact that our child care partners see school districts serving 4K learners as competition that may cause a decline in access and affordability of infant and toddler care. That resistance, in past iterations of the proposal, has caused it to fail. We need to figure out a way to restructure this ask to bring child care providers along with us in our efforts to use school districts as a structural and funding vehicle to increase high-quality care across the state.*