



State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

January 2008

Dear School District Administrator:

I am writing to you regarding the continued growth of four-year-old kindergarten (4K) programs among our state's school districts. Since taking office in 2001, we have seen over 100 school districts adding 4K programs. In addition, the number of students enrolling in 4K programs in Wisconsin has increased from roughly 14,500 students in 2001-02 to over 27,700 students in 2007-08.

As you know, I have always been a strong advocate of 4K programs as our New Wisconsin Promise recognizes 4K as one of the best first steps educators can take to raise achievement for all students and close the achievement gap. I opposed legislative attempts in both 2001 and 2003 to reduce the amount of state aid and revenue limit authority for 4K programs and forwarded proposals to provide additional revenue limit authority for districts implementing community approaches in their 4K programs in both of my last two biennial budget proposals.

As the number of school districts with 4K continue to increase and especially in light of the 4K options available to districts such as the community approach, it is timely and appropriate that we revisit the program requirements for four-year-old kindergarten. Meeting these requirements permit a district to count 4K students for revenue limit and equalization aid purposes. They are:

- The 4K program is under the supervision of the school district;
- The district's 4K program is providing a minimum of 437 hours of instruction;
- The district is providing transportation to and from the 4K program;
- The district has appropriately DPI-licensed teaching staff for its 4K program;
- The district, not some other entity, is incurring the cost of the 4K program; and
- The 4K program is open to all eligible resident students.

On this last point, our state's constitution provides that "...schools shall be free and without charge for tuition to all children between the ages of 4 and 20 years." As more districts consider adding 4K programs, we have received inquiries regarding the need for districts to ensure that such programs provide universal access to all children residing in the district and meet other statutory requirements. While our state constitution does not require school districts to have 4K programs, it does require that such programs, where available, be available to all children at no cost to the child or parent.

Our department has heard from some school officials who have noted they could not feasibly initiate a 4K program immediately in their move toward universal access. Accordingly, we have provided some flexibility related to this issue; however, we want to be clear that school districts

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that do not make their 4K program available to all four-year-old students will not be able to count 4K pupils for state general equalization aid and revenue limit membership purposes effective with the 2008-09 school year.

We recognize that some districts are working through implementation issues and will need to contact the department. Should you have any questions regarding 4K programmatic issues, I would ask that you contact Jill Haglund, our 4K/Early Childhood Consultant at (608) 267-9625. If you have school funding issues regarding 4K, please contact David Carlson, our School Financial Services Team Director, at (608) 266-6968.

I hope this information is helpful to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Burmaster".

Elizabeth Burmaster
State Superintendent

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