



FACT SHEET

The State of Early Childhood in Wisconsin

April 10, 2015

Free, voluntary preschool has been promised by Wisconsin's constitution since the state's inception in 1848.¹ The program, known as 4K, has added slots in recent years, but per-student funding has remained stagnant.² 4K lacks quality standards and would improve with substantial investments to improve quality and expand access. Wisconsin is supporting improvement in the 4K program with funds from a Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, which will focus on alignment with its Quality Rating and Improvement System and Longitudinal Data System.³ The program currently serves 64 percent of the age-eligible population in all settings, including public schools, child care centers, and family child care homes.⁴

Wisconsin families need more state investment to improve quality and increase access rates

One of the leading research intuitions on state preschool programs, the National Institute for Early Education Research, or NIEER, has established 10 benchmarks of quality. Wisconsin meets just five of them. The state has the opportunity to improve quality by ensuring that assistant teachers have a C.D.A. degree or equivalent; class sizes are kept to fewer than 20 students; the staff-child ratio is 1-to-10 or better; children receive screening and support services related to vision, hearing, and health; and they receive a meal once per day.⁵ This can be attributed to a substantial underfunding of the program, especially when compared to higher-quality programs around the country.

- In 2013, Wisconsin ranked 29 out of 41 states in per-student funding.⁶
- Wisconsin currently spends \$3,366 per student, less than the spending rates in states with programs that meet almost all of the benchmarks, including Oklahoma and Georgia, and below the national average of \$4,026.⁷

In 2013, Wisconsin ranked

29^{out} of 41

states in preschool per-student funding

Wisconsin currently spends

\$3,366

per preschool student

Early childhood education can support Wisconsin's most vulnerable populations

Many Wisconsin children live in families feeling severe financial strain. Growing up in such an environment affects young children's ability to thrive, putting them behind their wealthier peers on a number of developmental, educational, and social measures. The stress that often comes with living in poverty can also adversely affect brain development in children's early years. High-quality early education has been proven to alleviate these risk factors and help close the school-readiness gap.⁸

- 44 percent of Wisconsin children under age 6 live in low-income families.⁹
- 9 percent of Wisconsin children live in areas of concentrated poverty, putting them at a greater risk of starting kindergarten behind.¹⁰

Child care is out of reach for many Wisconsin families

Wisconsin is one of 31 states where the cost of child care is higher than in-state tuition and fees at a public college.¹¹ In Wisconsin, where 74 percent of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, child care is not a luxury—it is a necessity.¹²

- For a family with children in Wisconsin, the median income is \$63,700 per year.¹³
- The average annual cost of a child care center in Wisconsin is \$11,342 for an infant and \$9,302 for a 4-year-old.¹⁴

Endnotes

1 W. Steven Barnett and others, "The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook" (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), available at <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Jack P. Shonkoff and others, "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129 (1) (2012): e232–e246, available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/1/e232.short>.

9 National Center for Children in Poverty, "Wisconsin: Demographics of Young, Low-Income Children," available at http://www.nccp.org/profiles/WI_profile_8.html (last accessed March 2015).

10 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/>

tables/6795-children-living-in-areas-of-concentrated-poverty#detailed/2/2-52/false/1376,1201,1074,880,11/any/13891,13892.

11 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care" (2013), available at http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf.

12 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Under Age 6 with All Available Parents in the Labor Force" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473>.

13 Kids Count Data Center, "Median Family Income Among Households with Children" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-income-among-households-with-children#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/365>.

14 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

15 Authors' calculations based on Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

74%

of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce

For a typical family with an infant and a 4-year-old in Wisconsin, the average cost of child care at a center amounts to

1/3

of annual income¹⁵