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**Policy Advocacy Dissertation**

**Policy Advocacy:**

**Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Should Not Be Optional, But a Necessary  
Program for Low Performing School Districts**

Edward Todd Beadle, M.Ed, MSM

National Louis University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

March, 2016

## Document Organization Statement

This document is organized to meet the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement with a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

PROGRAM EVALUATION:

PROGRAM EVALUATION: DOES THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS AS DEFINED BY ATTENDANCE, BEHAVIORAL GROWTH, AND ACADEMIC GROWTH?

CHANGE LEADERSHIP:

DATA DRIVEN INSTRUCTION TO INCREASE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

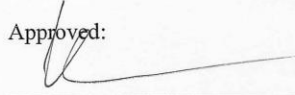
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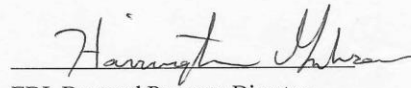
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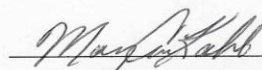
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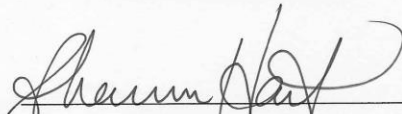
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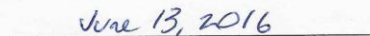
  
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## **Abstract**

The Wisconsin Engaging Early Education (WEEE) Policy outlines a school readiness funding initiative that can help to close the achievement gap in underperforming school districts. Research has shown that students from lower social economic status do not have the same access to high quality early education compared to more affluent communities. The WEEE Policy can help to provide resources and structure to Wisconsin school districts in need of improvement and support Wisconsin's goal of closing the achievement gap. Under Wisconsin State Statute 118, the state gives school districts the power to provide any educational programming they deem necessary to improve student performance. WEEE would include a comprehensive request for proposal process, implementation stage, high quality early education standards, and intense monitoring procedures. Many states are using public funding to provide access for school readiness programs for their neediest student. Research conducted on school readiness programs has provided mixed results on the long term effects on student academic performance. Although WEEE would not be the only publicly funded school readiness program in the State of Wisconsin, I believe that providing 15,000 students access to high quality school readiness in the lowest performing districts could be a necessary first step in closing the achievement gap.

## **Preface**

Closing the achievement gap in Wisconsin's public education system today has become a major issue. In Wisconsin, as an educational community, are we providing our youngest and neediest students access to high quality school readiness programs? Does socio-economics play a role in a student's educational foundation?

This policy advocacy paper will explore how access to high quality school readiness programming, especially in underperforming school districts, can improve student performance and academic success. When all children are afforded the opportunity to have access to early education regardless of social economic status, we can close the achievement gap in Wisconsin.

## Table of Figures

Figure 1 – ACT Average Score by Race and Ethnicity.....	15
Figure 2 – ACT Score by Economic Status.....	16
Figure 3 – WKCE Average Score by Elementary Grade Levels State Reading.....	20
Figure 4 – WKCE Average Score by Elementary Grade Levels MPS Reading.....	21
Figure 5 – WKCE Average Score by Elementary Grade Levels Rhinelander.....	22
Reading	
Figure 6 – WKCE Average Score by Elementary Grade Level and Economic.....	23
Status State	
Figure 7 – WKCE Average Score by Elementary Grade Level and Economic.....	24
Status MPS	
Figure 8 – WKCE Average Score by Elementary Grade Level and Economic.....	25
Status Rhinelander School District	

## **Table of Tables**

Table 1 – Grouped by Economic Status.....	16
Table 2 – Annual MPS District Report Card Grades.....	17
Table 3 – Accountability Ratings for School Districts.....	18



## Contents

<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>TABLE OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>TABLE OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: VISION STATEMENT .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Awareness.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Policy Problem .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Context. ....	3
Academic observations leading to policy recommendation. ....	4
<b>Policy Recommendation.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Policy Effectiveness .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Educational Analysis.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Types of Schools .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Social and Moral Analysis.....</b>	<b>31</b>
High quality preschool. ....	32
HighScope Perry Preschool study .....	34

Inclusion of WEEE K4.....	35
<b>Political Analysis .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Legislative Process .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Goals and Objectives.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Needs, Values, and Preferences.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Pros and Cons to Policy Adoption .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Educational and Monitoring Activities.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Program Implementation.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Needs Assessment and Improvement Plan .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Implementation of the Policy is Consistent with the Vision .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Clear Direction.....</b>	<b>55</b>

**REFERENCES .....56**

**APPENDIX A.....61**

## **Chapter One: Vision Statement**

### **Awareness**

A policy addressing educational reform is needed to close the student achievement gap, especially in low performing school districts. The student achievement gap, according to Wagner:

The first of these well documented, widely discussed, and the focus of education reform efforts for the past decade is the gap between the quality of schooling that most middle class kids get in America and the quality of schooling available for most poor, and minority children and the consequent disparity in results. (Wagner, 2010, p. 8)

Typically, Five-Year-Old Kindergarten (K5) is the start of a student's academic journey. Although that assumption is correct, there is another grade level that is not mandatory, but has the potential to close the achievement gap. Adopting Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (K4) as the potential beginning grade level for low performing districts is a viable option. According to Hart and Risley (2003), "by age three, children from privileged families have heard 30 million more words than children from poor families. By kindergarten the gap is even greater. The consequences are catastrophic" (2003, p. 7). Exposure to early education, regardless of social economics, is a necessary first step to closing the achievement gap. Though there are holes in the argument supporting K4, any opportunity to improve the educational foundation for all children must be explored.

In the United States the majority of 3 and 4-year-old programs are designed as daycare, not addressing school readiness. Although not mandatory for day care centers that offer 3 and 4-year-old care to adhere to quality standards, Wisconsin Department of

Children and Families (DCF) is trying to change that culture. According to the webpage of Young Star, the regulatory body for the state of Wisconsin:

Studies show that children who experience engaging, one-on-one activities and safe, healthy and nurturing learning environments have a better chance at lifelong success. They're more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to engage in criminal activity or participate in special education programs. And they often earn higher wages throughout their lifetime. (About Young Star Program, n.d., para. 2)

Young Star is the State of Wisconsin's Department of Children and Families child care quality rating and improvement system. In Wisconsin, day care centers that have been rated high quality adhere to standards identified by Young Star or other accreditation agencies to ensure school readiness standards are being addressed. Young Star rates child care centers from 5 stars (highest) to 1 star (lowest) based on learning environment, child health and wellbeing, education, and business practices. The State of Wisconsin recognizes the need to change the culture of child care and become culturally proficient in meeting the needs of all children and supporting school readiness.

According to Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2009), cultural proficiency is, "the processes that can be used by both historically dominated and dominant group members to replace old myths and stereotypes with the images, information, and skills that equip them to substantive dialogue that result in equitable actions within schools." (p. 59).

The rating system used by Wisconsin is used to hold licensed child care centers accountable to provide high quality programs. Childcare programs that do not adhere to the quality rating system risk financial and licensing penalties. The inclusion of these

high standards have helped to change the culture and image from merely day care to child development and school readiness programming.

### **Policy Problem**

One of my many roles as President/CEO/Principal at St. Joseph Academy (SJA), a private Catholic School, is to ensure that the institution provides a high-quality education to all students. The process that I have developed is a protocol for higher level learning for all pre-kindergarten and elementary programs. These procedures first involved the procurement of highly educated teachers who hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree as well as a teaching license in 4K. The additional requirement of a teaching license exceeds the minimum standard set by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for Choice Schools (Choice Schools will be explained later in this paper). In addition to highly qualified staff, considerations were also given to age appropriate classroom setup, lesson plans, schedules, assessment tools, research based curriculum, and common core standards. These components will also be explored later in this paper.

**Context.** St. Joseph Academy (SJA) is a faith-based K4 through 5th grade Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) private voucher elementary school sponsored by the Felician Sisters. SJA is located on the Southside of Milwaukee in a predominately low-income area and was established in 2009 to meet the educational needs of the urban families in a faith-based setting.

The Felician Sisters, officially known as the Congregation Of Sisters Of St. Felix Of Cantalice Third Order Regular Of St. Francis Of Assisi (CSSF), is a religious institute of pontifical right whose members profess public vows of chastity,

poverty, and obedience and follow the evangelical way of life in common.

(Congregation of Sisters of St. Felix, n.d., Who We Are, para.1)

According to a 2015 Department of Public Instruction Wisconsin Government News Release titled, “122 schools plan to participate in Milwaukee Parental Choice”:

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) allows students who reside in the city of Milwaukee and meet certain eligibility requirements to attend participating private or religious schools. The private school, on behalf of each student’s parent or guardian, receives a state aid payment for each eligible choice student (para. 3).

SJA has the distinction of operating a 5 star (highest rating by Young Star) child development center that serves children ages six weeks to 12 years old that provides education, social/emotional, and after school programs. SJA’s elementary school student demographics consists of over 75% Hispanic/Latino, 65% considered English Language Learners (ELL), and 98% eligible for free or reduced lunch.

**Academic observations leading to policy recommendation.** In my experience as a school principal and elementary teacher, working in urban schools, children from this demographic have been behind academically. In 2010, I began studying different educational practices, curricula, and educational studies focusing on closing the achievement gap. In reading Early Childhood Studies researchers, such as Willan, Rees, and Savage (2004), have concluded, “Providing free nursery education for all four-year-olds could be interpreted as providing the necessary condition for fair competition for university places in the future.” (p. 99). In my opinion, implementing high-quality full

day K4 education in an urban setting was a necessary initiative to help close the achievement gap and provide school readiness programs to families.

I have witnessed positive academic and social development growth of K4 students at SJA as a result of early education exposure to language. Students who attend our full-day K4 that includes half day four-year-old Head Start program and then participate in the K5 program have performed slightly better compared to students who did not attend a preschool program. The assessment tool used to measure student literacy at SJA is the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), a comprehensive assessment tool used to measure young children in pre-kindergarten to kindergartener's knowledge of literacy fundamentals to determine future reading success.

Head Start is a federal program that was created under President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 as result of the war on poverty. According to Hurley (2015) from the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), Office of Head Start website:

Head Start was designed to help break the cycle of poverty, providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. A key tenet of the program established that it be culturally responsive to the communities served, and that the communities have an investment in its success through the contribution of volunteer hours and other donations as nonfederal share. (para. 2)

In the SJA K4 program I have observed firsthand the increased level of proficiency on assessment, introduction to language and math concepts, identification of special needs or remedial services, development of social skills, and the introduction to a structured educational environment. According to a study conducted by Frede, Jung, and



Barnett (2007), the Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES) as cited in the National Institute for Early Educational Research (NIEER):

The gains children made in language, literacy and math during preschool were largely sustained during their kindergarten year, leading to a narrowing of the achievement gap, say researchers who conducted the just-released NIEER study of New Jersey's Abbott Preschool Program. Kindergarteners who attended the Abbott program serving the states neediest districts closed more than 50 percent of the gap between their literacy scores and the national average. Those who didn't attend the program closed 18 percent of the gap. In math, children who attended Abbott pre-K continued to outperform in kindergarten those who did not.

(para. 1)

### **Policy Recommendation**

I am advocating for a policy to strengthen Wisconsin's school readiness opportunities for school districts in need of improvement called Wisconsin Engaging Early Education or commonly called "WEEE". This policy would provide a grant framework and guidelines to make full day K4 compulsory. The policy has the opportunity to strengthen Wisconsin's school readiness opportunities for school districts in need of improvement and help close the achievement gap. The acronym also seems highly appropriate as The Urban Dictionary defines WEEE as, "Something said when one is really excited and can't wait for something to happen," ("Wee" n.d). WEEE would be a State of Wisconsin funded early education program that would make full day K4 compulsory for school districts that received the grant. This grant would be available to all Wisconsin school districts, with priority given to school districts in need of

improvement. In order for the WEEE school readiness program to be implemented, the state budget will need to increase to \$60,000,000 for the WEEE startup grants. This funding amount would provide school districts in need of improvement \$4,000 per student for 15,000 K4 students from school districts in need of improvement. The \$4,000 would cover the school districts' full time costs of these students attending a K4 program. These students possibly would not receive a high quality K4 school readiness without the WEEE program.

In 2008 the Wisconsin state budget included \$3 million dollars for startup grants for school districts wishing to implement four-year-old kindergarten, under State Statute 115.445. Those startup grants are still available to all school districts for 2016-2017 school years. Currently, the State Statutes required priority to school districts using K4 through partnerships with child care and Head Start. Startup grants are based on enrollment in K4 programs and gives preference to school boards that use community approaches to early education. The funding to the district is for two year cycles.

According to the Wisconsin DPI Early Childhood website (n.d.):

State Statutes designate first-year funding of up to \$3,000 and second year funding of up to \$1,500 for each pupil enrolled in the approved 4-year-old kindergarten program. If the funds are insufficient to pay full funding for all eligible pupils, the law requires the DPI to prorate the payments to school districts. (para. 3)

Wisconsin's current startup funding is for school districts wanting to implement only the Community Approach K4 (CAK4). In my experiences this funding is inadequate. The CAK4 program only serves school districts that partner with Head Start

and childcare providers as a supplement to funding K4. The budget is very small and the guidelines are too narrow to entice larger school districts to apply because of the number of potential K4 students and the cost per student that would need the services. Although the startup grants are helping provide supplemental funds to school districts to provide K4 for a very small number of students, the funds are not enough to cover the total cost per student. The first funding cycle of the startup grant only provided funding for 4,255 students from 31 school districts. Interestingly, not one school district that was funded by the startup grants was a school district identified as, “in need of improvement.” The largest school district that received startup funding was Green Bay Area School District (GBASD). GBASD received funding for 1,085 K4 students totaling \$796,800. The funding only provided a total of \$705.05 per student. The approximately \$800,000 GBASD received also represented 38% of the entire startup budget of \$3,000,000 dollars.

The inclusion of WEEE policy funding as an incentive to increase K4 for school districts in need of improvement could not only help students educationally, but also Wisconsin in the long term, financially. According to the Wisconsin DPI summary as cited in Belfield and Winters economic study:

With expanded K4 programs, fiscal benefits to the K-12 school system would come from: lower grade retention; lower special education placement; higher job satisfaction for teachers; more teachers retained by the public schools; fewer substitute teachers; reduced spending on school safety; and reduced pressure on student aid services. In total, these benefits amount to \$140.96 million. (Belfield & Winters, n.d., p. 2).

The WEEE program could be an option for the State of Wisconsin to address school districts in need of improvement by incorporating compulsory K4 in addition to K5. There is no mention in the State of Wisconsin's statute 118 that K4 cannot become a mandatory grade level, only that school age for public education starts at five years old and that a student must attend a K5 program or have an exception to enter 1<sup>st</sup> grade. According to Wisconsin's 118.01(2)(a) under educational goals and expectations states: **(a) Academic skills and knowledge.** Since the development of academic skills and knowledge is the most important goal for schools, each school board shall provide an instructional program designed to give pupils: 1. Basic skills, including the ability to read, write, spell, perform basic arithmetical calculations, learn by reading and listening and communicate by writing and speaking.

In considering the framework of the policy, an amendment could be written to Wisconsin's Statute 118 regarding the starting age of kindergarten to age 4 and not age 5 for districts in need of improvement receiving WEEE funding. Also, according to Wis. Stat. Sec. 121.02(1)(d), "requires all Wisconsin school districts to offer five-year-old kindergarten (K5), school districts have the option of offering four-year-old kindergarten (K4). If they offer K4, they must make it available to all age-eligible 4-year-olds." So the State Statutes already identify K4 as a preschool level and could support the inclusion of mandatory K4 throughout the state for school districts in need of improvement.

In Wisconsin State Statute 118.01 the state has given the power over education to the individual school districts to administer as needed to meeting the needs of the students in their districts. Statute 118.01 states:

Public education is a fundamental responsibility of the state. The constitution vests in the state superintendent the supervision of public instruction and directs the legislature to provide for the establishment of district schools. The effective operation of the public schools is dependent upon a common understanding of what public schools should be and do. Each school board should provide curriculum, course requirements and instruction consistent with the goals and expectations established under sub. (2). Parents and guardians of pupils enrolled in the school district share with the state and school board the responsibility for pupils meeting the goals and expectations under sub. (2).

As an educational community, it is our right under the Wisconsin State Statute 118 to suggest any changes identified as being necessary to improve the conditions of our educational system and student academic success.

State funded pre-kindergarten is not a new idea to help close the achievement gap and provide high quality education to all. Illinois was one of the first states in the midwest to offer voluntary pre-kindergarten to all three and four-year-olds. Preschool for All was signed into law in July 2006 and over 190,000 children in Illinois have access to high quality preschool. Since then other states have implemented the Universal Preschool system including Georgia, Florida, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and others. “A growing number of states have invested in voluntary, public pre-k programs as a means of school improvement. Over the past decade, enrollment in state-funded pre-kindergarten program has grown over 70 percent” (Hull, 2012, para 5).

## **Policy Effectiveness**

The adoption of the WEEE Policy for school districts in need of improvement will help create a culture of educational success at all levels. Students will be able to achieve educational success, recognition, and exposure to high-quality education at an earlier age. Districts in need of improvement receiving WEEE could utilize K4 to help with their school district's improvement plans. This support is especially critical to working with students from lower social economic backgrounds because typically they do not receive the early educational foundation that their more affluent peers receive.

According to DPI, Wisconsin has 425 public school districts with over 880,000 students from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Of the 425 school districts, there is only one school district that "Fail to Meet Expectations" as indicated on Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Report Card: Milwaukee Public Schools with a score of 51.1 (out of 100). There are also seven districts that "Meet Few Expectations" that includes Racine Unified School District, with a score of 62.1. These districts in need of improvement include two of the five largest public school districts in Wisconsin and nearly 100,000 students. Public school districts are rated by the Wisconsin State Report Card utilizing four priority areas:

- Student achievement
- Student growth
- Closing gap
- On-track post-secondary readiness.

The school report card rates schools under 5 different categories based on the scores from the above mentioned category areas. The scores are then tabulated in all the areas and given a number score. The total score of the school district then fits into one of the expectation categories:

- Significantly exceeds expectations 83-100
- Exceeds expectations 73-82.9
- Meets expectations 63-72.9
- Meets few expectation 53-62.9
- Fails to meet expectations 0-52.9

School districts rated as meeting few expectations and or fails to meet expectation are districts considered in need of improvement.

Research conducted in different Early Childhood Studies have shown that the earlier a child attends a structured educational environment there is a greater chance of educational success in the future. According to Lamy, Barnett, and Jung (2005) in a National Institute on Early Education Research study:

865 preschool and kindergarten children were tested on math, vocabulary, and early literacy skills in the fall of 2004. The NIEER study found that, as a result of attending Michigan's program at age four: 1) children showed gains in vocabulary that were 24 percent higher than the gains of children without the program; 2) preschool increased children's gains in math skills by 64 percent compared to children's growth without the program; and 3) the program produced a 117 percent increase in growth in print awareness among children enrolled

compared to growth of children without the program. (Lamy, Barnett, & Jung, 2005, p. 8)

The results of this study show that K4 can help improve the educational foundation for students and providing them the opportunities they deserve to be success academically.

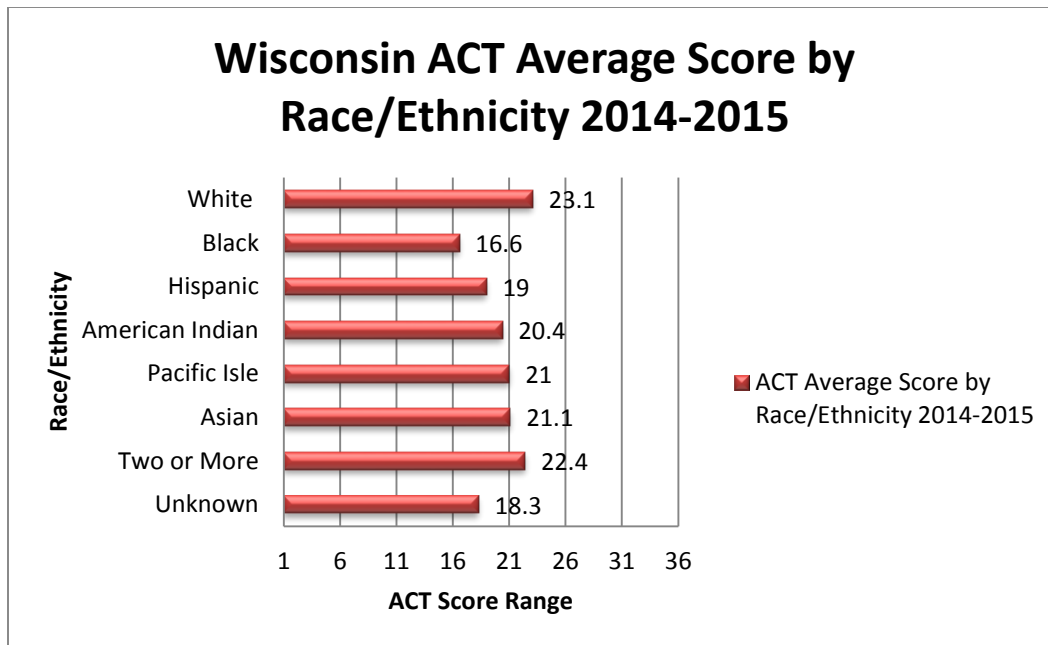


## **Chapter Two: Analysis of Need**

### **Educational Analysis**

Wisconsin has for many years been regarded as a leader in student performance on college readiness assessments. This holds true for the majority of the school districts in Wisconsin. The standard college readiness assessment used to measure college academic readiness is the American College Testing (ACT). The ACT consists of 4 different assessments to measure student aptitude in English, Mathematics, Natural Science, and Reading. The assessment scores range from low of 1 to a high score of 36. All four assessment scores are added to provide a composite score which is used to measure a student's aptitude and college readiness.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction page, "Wisconsin's 2015 graduates had steady overall results on the ACT with an average composite score of 22.2, which tied with Iowa for second place behind Minnesota (22.7) among states where 50 percent or more of students take the assessment" (2015, para. 1).



*Figure 1. Wisconsin ACT Average Score by Race and Ethnicity.*

Figure 1 represents Wisconsin’s 46,738 high school seniors who participated in the ACT test in 2015. The scores for minority students were not as high as those of their white counterparts. White students’ average score on the ACT assessment was 23.1. African-American students posted a composite score of 16.6. Hispanic students’ average composite score was 19.0 and American Indian student composite average was 20.4. The statistics for tables and figures were reported from Wisconsin Information System for Education Data Dashboard (WISEdash), a data warehouse that collects all assessment scores for DPI from the school years 2014-2015.

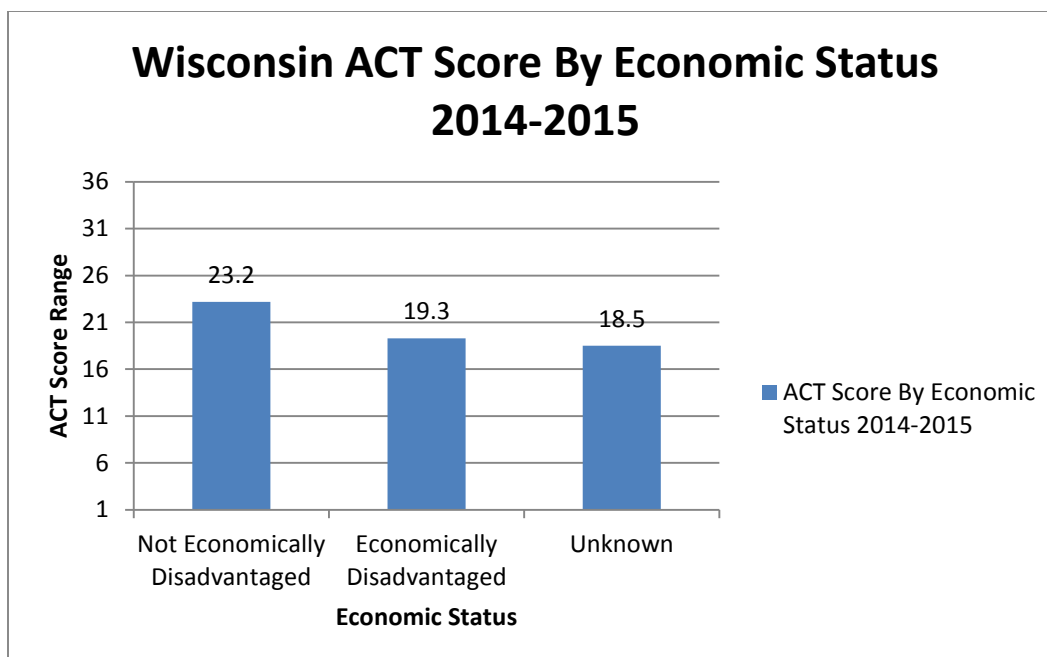


Figure 2. Wisconsin Act Scores by Economic Status.

The data in Figure 2 clearly shows a major difference in the assessment scores of students identified as non-economically disadvantaged and economically disadvantaged Wisconsin High School students.

Table 1 Students Grouped by Economic Status

Economic Status	Student Count	Average Score
<b>Not Economically Disadvantaged</b>	30,528	23.2
<b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>	9,051	19.3
<b>Unknown</b>	914	18.5

The data in Table 1 suggests that there is a direct correlation between social economic status of students and the assessment scores. Students identified as “Not Economically Disadvantaged” scored approximately 4 points higher than “Economically Disadvantaged” students across the State of Wisconsin.

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) is the largest school district in Wisconsin with 77,391 students and is also the most racially, socially, and economically diverse district. MPS's student demographics consist of 86% students of color and 83% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Based on the results of the Annual District Report Card from DPI for 2014, MPS was a district that "Failed to Meet Expectations." This designation was given based on student achievement, student attendance, and graduation rates. MPS also was identified as a district in need of improvement according to the federal guidelines of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Under the NCLB Act school districts had to meet or exceed benchmarks for graduation rates for high school students, proficiency on standardized assessments for students 3<sup>rd</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades, and minimum of 90% attendance for elementary and middle schools. The following table compares MPS to the rest of the state's performance on the accountability report card.

Table 2 Annual MPS District Report Card Grades, 2013-2014

Category	District Score	State Score
Student Achievement	37.1	66.4
Student Growth	55.7	62.4
Closing Gaps	63	66.3
On-Track and Post-Secondary Readiness	68.7	85.3

Table 3 Accountability Ratings for Schools in the MPS District, 2013-2014

Category	Number of Schools	Percentage of Schools
Significantly exceeds expectations	0	0.0%
Exceeds expectations	8	5.0%
Meets expectations	22	13.7%
Meets few expectations	49	30.4%
Fails to meet expectations	55	34.2%
Alternate Accountability - Satisfactory Progress	12	7.5%
Alternate Accountability - Needs Improvement	15	9.3%

Comparing the data from Tables Two and Three illustrates that students in MPS are far behind their counterparts across the state in all categories identified. For the purpose of this policy proposal, I will focus on the large gap in the assessment scores under student achievement and on-track and postsecondary readiness. MPS scored 44% lower than the rest of the state on student achievement and 20% lower for on-track and postsecondary readiness. This corroborates the information we identified previously that large gap in ACT scores of minorities compared to white students across the state.

Earlier I focused on college readiness of students and now we assess the state standardized test results for elementary school students' grades 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade on the Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination (WKCE) for 2013-2014. There will be a comparison between the State of Wisconsin, MPS and the School District of Rhinelander. MPS (Wisconsin's largest school district) an urban southeastern Wisconsin area school district with 77,316 students, 86% minority, and 83% of students considered economically disadvantaged. The School District of Rhinelander (SDR) a northern Wisconsin 2,454 student rural area school district which student demographics consist of 94% being white and only 48% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. The data suggests that there is a direct correlation in assessment scores when comparing social economics of a district and student achievement based on proficiency. All data was retrieved from the WISEdash Public Portal on September 10, 2015.

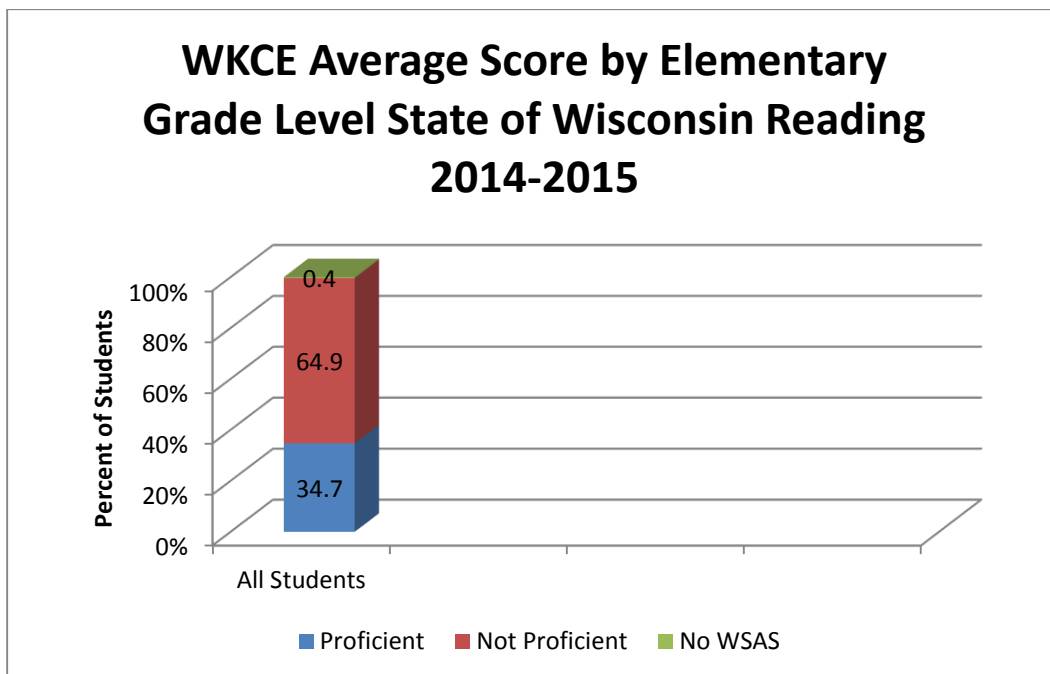


Figure 3. WKCE Average Reading Score by Elementary Grade Level for the State of Wisconsin.

Figure 3 shows the average score of elementary students on the WKCE assessment in reading in the state of Wisconsin. According to the data, 34.7% of students statewide scored in the proficient range.

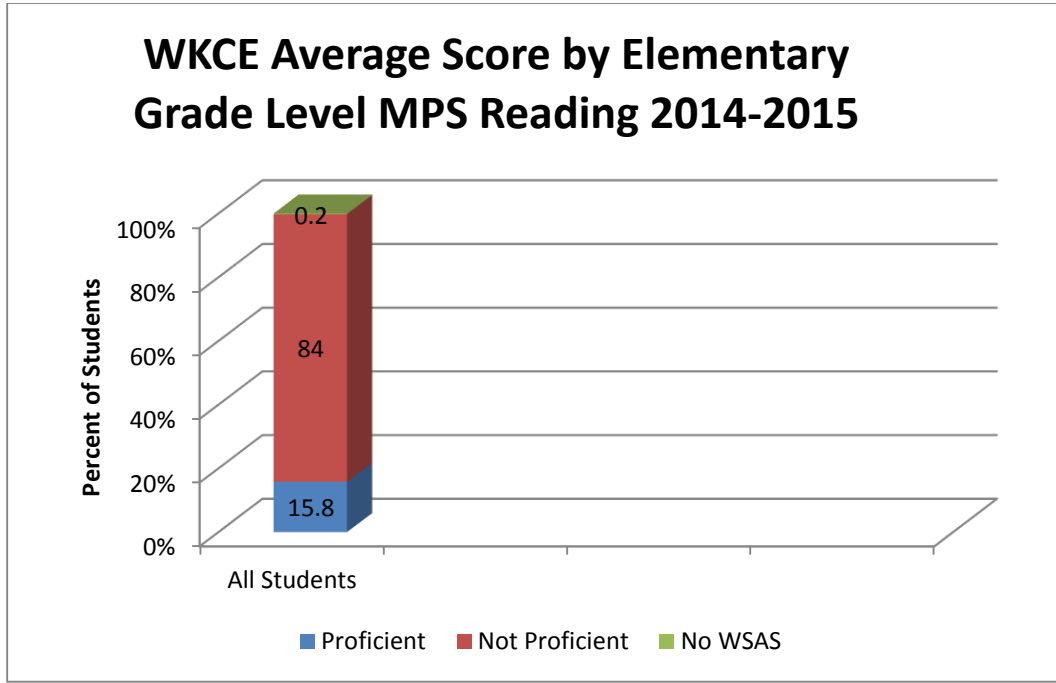
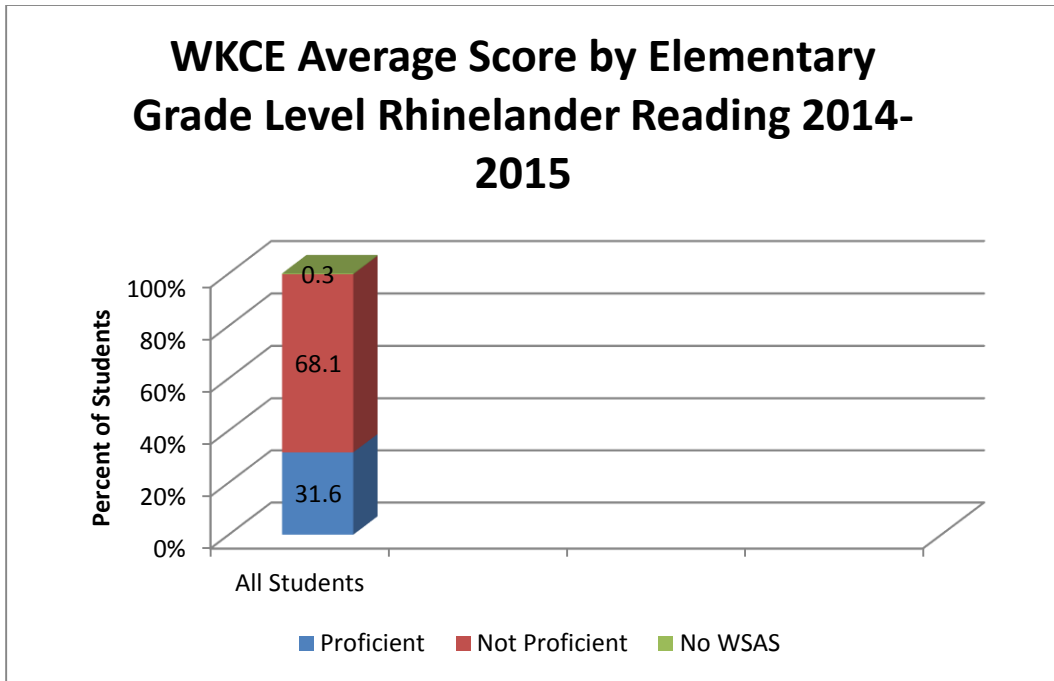


Figure 4. WKCE Average Reading Score by Elementary Grade Level for Milwaukee Public Schools.

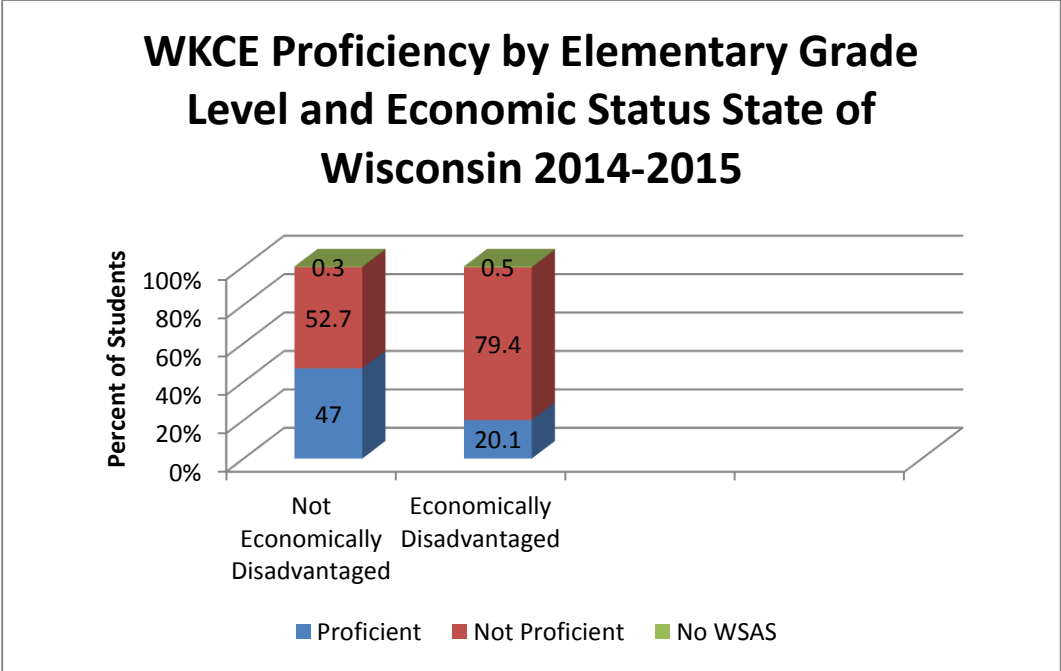
Figure 4 data shows that only 15.8% of students in MPS scored in the proficient range. This shows the states average score for proficiency for elementary school students is more than double than the proficiency rates of students from MPS.



*Figure 5.* WKCE Average Reading Score by Elementary Grade Level for Rhinelander School District.

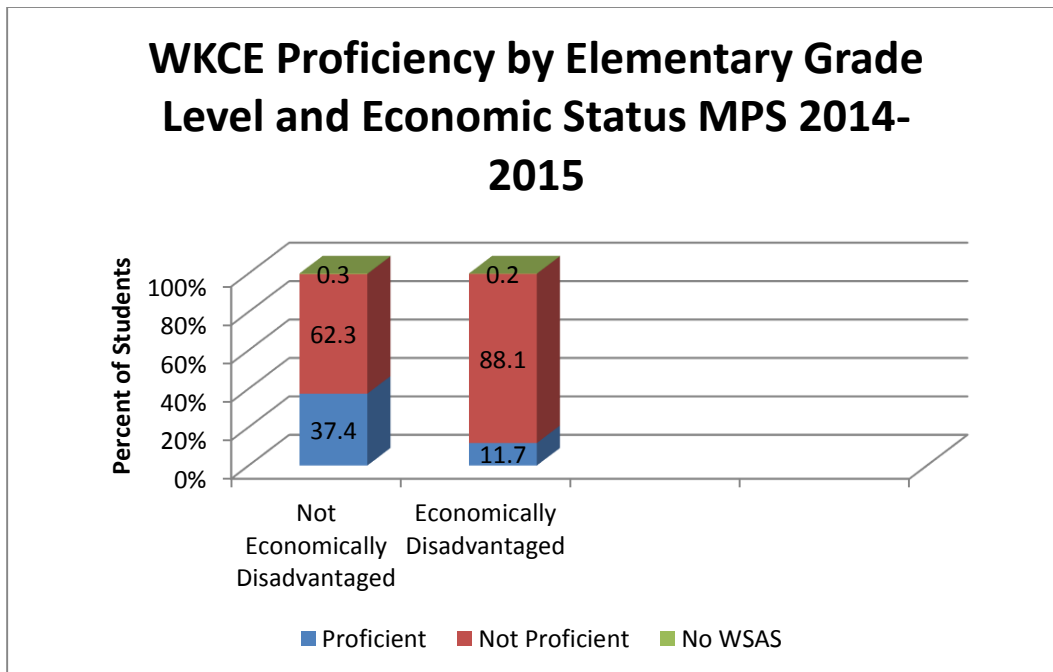
Figure 5 data shows that 31.6 % of students in SDR scored in the proficient range. This shows that the state’s average score for proficiency for elementary school students in RSD is lower than the state average, but more than double than the proficiency rates of students from MPS.





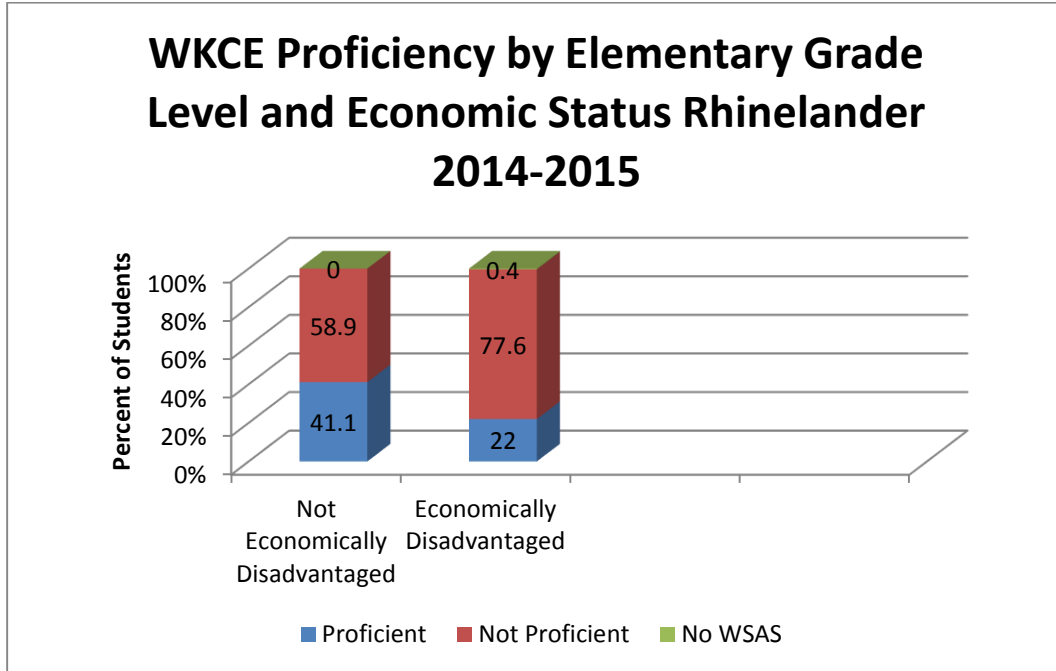
*Figure 6.* WKCE Proficiency by Elementary Grade Level and Economic Status for the State of Wisconsin.

The data in Figure 6 we see the WKCE proficiency rates of MPS and the state of Wisconsin elementary school students based on economic status. Economic status is measured by families that meet the federal guidelines of poverty and are eligible for free or reduced lunch.



*Figure 7.* WKCE Proficiency by Elementary Grade Level and Economic Status for Milwaukee Public Schools.

The data in Figure 7 shows WKCE scores based on economic status for elementary school students in MPS. The data show that MPS is a very diverse school district and that students identified as not “economically disadvantaged” scored at a higher proficiency rate, 37.4% compared to 11.7%, of students identified as “economically disadvantaged.” These data show that MPS students identified as “not economically disadvantaged” were 69% more likely to score in the proficient range than their counterparts identified as “economically disadvantaged.”



*Figure 8.* WKCE Proficiency by Elementary Grade Level and Economic Status for School District of Rhinelanders.

The data in Figure 8 shows WKCE scores based on economic status for elementary school students in RSD. The data show that SDR students identified as “not economically disadvantaged” scored at a higher proficiency rate, 41.1% compared to 22%, of students identified as “economically disadvantaged.” This data shows that SDR students identified as “not economically disadvantaged” were approximately 48% more likely to score in the proficient range than their counterparts identified as “economically disadvantaged.”

Interestingly the data for the state of Wisconsin also show the same trend of students identified as “not economically disadvantaged,” 47% compared to 20.1%, for students identified as “economically disadvantaged.” This data show that the state of Wisconsin students identified as “not economically disadvantaged” were 57% more likely to score in the proficient range than their counterparts identified as “economically disadvantaged.” Data continue to suggest a pattern that the social economic demographics of a school district, regardless of location (urban or rural), have a strong relationship to student performance on standardized assessments and high school graduation rates.

The data have shown consistently that socio-economic status has a direct correlation on student achievement regardless of the school district. Students from more affluent districts and families not meeting free and reduced federal guidelines suggest student performance on standardized tests are higher than students identified and disadvantaged economically. Data also showed that students in elementary school from disadvantaged situations scored lower than their more affluent peers regardless of school district location (urban or rural). Socio-economics status should not predetermine a student’s achievement especially in an underperforming school district, but mandatory K4 for WEEE recipients could be a resource to help close the gap. Data also show that once a student has not scored in the proficiency range in elementary school that they are more likely to continue that trend in high school, and ultimately, we see lower high school graduation rates.

The implementation of the WEEE school readiness policy in underperforming school districts in Wisconsin could provide an opportunity to combat this negative trend

of low student achievement for certain students. Students from lower social economic backgrounds and underperforming school districts would have access to school readiness opportunities to help provide an earlier educational foundation and close the education gap. As mentioned earlier in this proposal, state of Wisconsin guidelines mandate all school districts provide students five years and older public education. Head Start and K-4 programs in public schools are at the discretion of the individual school districts and generally only consist of half day programs which present a different set of problems for working class and disadvantaged families.

Higher-level reading skills are crucial for a student's future success in and outside of school. The probability data shows that children overall improve their chances at reaching higher reading levels when they attend pre-k and half-day kindergarten. Black and Hispanic students, English language learners and students from low-income families see their chances improve considerably when they attend a combination of pre-k and half-day kindergarten as opposed to full-day kindergarten alone (Hull, 2012, para. 1).

Based upon the research and data presented in this proposal, one may conclude that all students do not start their education on the same level. More affluent families have resources and opportunities available to them to help jump start their student's early education development. Generally, those students are enrolled in high quality childcare programs that have curricula and lesson plans geared toward the education of early learners. The education the students are receiving at the childcare centers are later reinforced by parents in the home. According to Hart and Risley (2003):

By age three, children from privileged families have heard 30 million more words than children from poor families. By kindergarten the gap is even greater. The consequences are catastrophic. The problem of skill differences among children at the time of school entry is bigger, more intractable, and more important than the authors had thought. So much is happening to children during their first three years at home, at a time when they are especially malleable and uniquely dependent on the family for virtually all their experience, that by age 3, an intervention must address not just a lack of knowledge or skill, but an entire general approach to experience. (Hart & Risley, 2003, p. 7)

This statement reinforces the need for mandatory school readiness programs for students in underperforming school districts regardless of socio-economics to help provide opportunities for all students.

### **Economic Analysis**

Inequities in funding may result in some schools having more financial resources than others. Funding for individual school districts is based on student enrollment, local property taxes, and school type (such as public, private, charter) the student attends. Not all school systems receive the same dollar amount per pupil. (Funding will be explained later in this paper). The larger urban school districts that have been identified as “in need of improvement,” have lower income students with special needs, learning and social disabilities, and or little access to quality early education prior to entering grade school. The school districts in need of improvement spend a greater percentage of their budgets for school security, special education, and other student services than the more affluent school districts. Districts in need of improvement generally spend more per pupil than the

more affluent school districts. The total cost per pupil state average was \$12,842 and the SDR cost per pupil was \$12,741. However, two districts with high levels of poverty and listed as “in need of improvement,” had much higher per pupil costs. Racine Unified School District’s 2015 per pupil cost was \$13,410 and MPS per student cost was \$14,528 according to WISEdash. Despite spending a lower per pupil cost, the more affluent school districts generally have smaller class sizes, more educational resources and the students are provided more opportunities to receive formal early education prior to entering grade school because of economics of the school districts community. According to Roza:

Educators and policymakers know that some students arrive at school without basic command of English, with disabilities, or from backgrounds of intense poverty, each of which poses unique challenges in helping those students meet performance standards. Educators and policymakers also know that these circumstances call for increased resources to enable all students to learn. (Roza, 2010, p. 56)

According to Novak (2015) in the MacIver Institute, Wisconsin’s budget for education for 2015-2017 will be \$11.35 billion dollars (Fiscal policy, GPR budget graph). This represents public funding for public, charter, and private (voucher) schools.

### **Types of Schools**

Wisconsin has a number of schooling options: Public, Charter, and vouchers. Each is defined in the State Statute. Public school is defined by Wisconsin State Statue 118.01 as:

Public education is a fundamental responsibility of the state. The constitution vests in the state superintendent the supervision of public instruction and directs

the legislature to provide for the establishment of district schools. The effective operation of the public schools is dependent upon a common understanding of what public schools should be and do. Establishing such goals and expectations is a necessary and proper complement to the state's financial contribution to education. Each school board should provide curriculum, course requirements and instruction consistent with the goals and expectations established under sub.

Wisconsin DPI defines charter schools as:

public, nonsectarian schools created through a businesslike contract or "charter" between the charter governance board and the sponsoring school board or other chartering authority. The Wisconsin charter school law gives charter schools freedom from most state rules and regulations in exchange for greater accountability for results. (n.d, charter school section, para. 1)

Lastly, private school education or the state's parental choice program (voucher) allows low to moderate income families to attend a private school of their choice using publicly funded tuition vouchers.

The MPS district budget will be \$1.2 billion dollars for fiscal year 2016. In contrast a more affluent school district with the highest ACT scores in the state and in close proximity of MPS, the Mequon-Thiensville School District (MTSD) budget for fiscal year 2016 will be \$44,545,328. This budget is based on approximately 3,500 students and a per pupil cost of approximately \$12,727. The MacIver Institute reported that for fiscal year 2016 the per pupil allocation for private voucher school students will be \$7,330 for a K-8 student and \$7,976 for a high school student by 2017. By comparison, the average state support for a child attending a public school in the 2013-14



academic years was \$12,546. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2015) reported that, “non-district-authorized public charter schools will receive \$7,925 per pupil in 2013-14 and \$8,075 per pupil in 2014-15. Beginning in 2015-16, the law provides that these schools’ per-pupil payment be set equal to the payment amount in the prior year plus the revenue limit per-pupil adjustments.

Regardless of the social economics of a school district, or type of school the student attends, the money comes from the state budget to the school district. The school district then has the autonomy to spend the resources where they feel they are needed the most. The education budgets for most school districts are getting tighter, especially for underperforming school districts. The lower performing school districts need to become more strategic to meet the educational needs of all students and improve student performance. A possible option could be to allocate more of resources from the district budget to early education. There could be economic benefits by funding early education in large urban school districts in need of improvement that include reduced costs with grade retention, special education placements, lower welfare, unemployment spending, lower arrest rates, lower pregnancy rates, and higher earnings in the future for students. “A strategic approach to using the education dollar means aligning the use of resources to a solid, powerful, and comprehensive education-improvement strategy. For low performing schools this could be a turnaround strategy” (Odden, 2007, p. 4).

One of the economic barriers to implementing full-day K4 for school districts is that the state only reimburses districts for half-day, regardless of whether the district offers a full-day program. If the district chooses to offer full-day kindergarten, the district

has to calculate the financial difference to implement the early education program full day and make up the difference. This is a significant barrier to most school districts.

At SJA, full day K4 is available to all students even though SJA only receives a half per pupil payment from DPI. To supplement the cost to offer the program, SJA has partnered with Head Start that pays for the other half of the school day for students that meet the financial guidelines. For the students who do not meet the Head Start guidelines, SJA also is a childcare provider and is reimbursed by the county for childcare, and privately from parents who can afford childcare. If a family does not qualify for any of the supplemental services, SJA continues to offer the program full day because of the importance of students receiving quality early education. But, without these community partnerships and charity, SJA would not likely be able to offer full day K4 to all students.

### **Social and Moral Analysis**

The adoption of the WEEE K4 program in Wisconsin could improve the quality of life for students who attend school districts rated “in need of improvement.” Most students who attend these school districts come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. All students regardless of their school districts, social economic status, and backgrounds deserve the opportunity to receiving high quality early elementary education. Long term studies, such as the High Scope-Perry Preschool study, have concluded that students from lower social economic situations who received pre-kindergarten education actually scored higher on standardized reading and math assessments, have lower rates of repeating grade levels, higher graduation rates, and lower rate of criminal activity as adults.

**High quality preschool.** It is not enough just to implement early elementary education to children; it must be high quality education. There are certain criteria that high quality early education programs must include:

- Researched based curriculum that is based on early brain development, age appropriate, child centered activities and assessments based on early learning standards
- Staff and Administrator should be highly educated with a minimum of a Bachelor's degree and/or hold certification in early childhood education.
- The student-teacher ratio and class size should, at a minimum, meet the state child care licensing criteria. Small teacher to student ratio and the learning environment that has room to play, has learning areas, and safe and child friendly.
- Quality rating systems that the state uses to rate child care and early education centers. The quality rating system Wisconsin uses is the Young Star rating system. Quality is based on the above mentioned standards. The higher the rating the higher quality the center is rated. Young Star rates centers from 1(lowest) to 5 (highest) stars. High quality centers are rated 4 or higher.
- Accreditation has more comprehensive standards and guidelines than the state regulations and increases the standards in all of the areas mentioned. Staff, ratios, educational philosophy, curriculum, and quality rating is all part of the accreditation process. Accreditation is the highest standard that an early education program can obtain and in Wisconsin any center that

obtains this accreditation automatically receives a 5-star rating from Young Star.

There are a number of accreditation bodies that early education recognizes, but for the purpose of this study we will focus on the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Since 1985 NAEYC has been one of the most highly recognized and highly respected accreditation bodies in the United States. According to the NAEYC website:

Several decades of research clearly demonstrate that high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs produce short- and long-term positive effects on children's cognitive and social development. Specifically, children who experience high-quality, stable child care engage in more complex play, demonstrate more secure attachments to adults and other children, and score higher on measures of thinking ability and language development. High-quality child care can predict academic success, adjustment to school, and reduced behavioral problems for children in first grade. Studies demonstrate that children's success or failure during the first years of school often predicts the course of later schooling. A growing body of research indicates that more developmentally appropriate teaching in preschool and kindergarten predicts greater success in the early grades (NAEYC, n.d., *A Call for Excellence in Early Childhood*, Sec. 2).

Although there is no guarantee that students who receive a high quality early educational foundation will graduate high school and go onto college, but the chances are greatly enhanced.

**HighScope Perry Preschool study.** The HighScope Perry Preschool study is an educational and social scientific experiment that studied both the short and long-term results of offering high quality preschool education to children from lower social economic backgrounds. David Weikart and his colleagues in the Ypsilanti, Michigan, school district conducted the study from 1962 through 1967 and operated the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program for young children aimed at avoiding school failure and related social problems. High/Scope Perry identified 123 low-income African-American children in the school district that were assessed to be at high risk of school failure. The team randomly assigned 58 of them to a program group that received a high-quality preschool program at ages 3 and 4 and 65 to another group that received no preschool program. Over the course of 40 years the team analyzed data on the two groups at different ages in the areas of education, economic performance, crime prevention, family relationships, and health. According to the High Scope Perry study found in the Center for Public Education:

Approximately two-thirds of pre-k youngsters, or 65 percent, eventually graduated from high school, compared with 45 percent from the control group (Schweinhart, 2004). This trend was particularly true among females, as 84 percent of pre-k girls and only 32 percent of comparison group females completed high school. Preschool participants had higher scores on achievement tests between ages nine and fourteen and on literacy tests at ages nineteen and twenty-seven. In adulthood, Perry pre-k participants were less likely to be arrested for violent or drug crimes and had significantly fewer arrests than the comparison group. At age twenty-seven, participants were less likely to drink and smoke than

those in the comparison group (Schulman, 2005). In addition, 76 percent were employed at age forty—compared with 62 percent of non-participants—and averaged \$5,000 a year more in income. Pre-k participants also were more likely to own their own homes and much more likely to have a savings account.

(O'Brien & Dervarics, 2007, Sec. 3)

The major conclusion of the Perry Preschool research study found that high-quality preschool programs for young children from lower social economic status helped contribute to their intellectual and social development, school success, economic performance, and reduced crime in adulthood.

#### **Inclusion of WEEE K4**

The inclusion of WEEE K4 Policy in Wisconsin for school districts in need of improvement potentially could benefit the working families of young children. The expense of childcare on Wisconsin families has been an issue with average cost of a high quality pre-kindergarten program costing approximately \$1,000 or more per month. For a working class family living at or just above the poverty level the cost for childcare is unaffordable. The young children of these families are often limited to low quality childcare or staying with babysitters while the parents work. Those young children are not receiving early education and school readiness skills. Research has consistently shown that quality pre-kindergarten programs benefit not only individual students, but school districts and communities. According to the Center for Public Education:

A national study of children who attended a center-based pre-k program scored significantly higher on reading and math tests than children who were in the care of their parents (Magnuson, et al. 2004). The benefits were even more pronounced

for minority and low-income children who typically start kindergarten 12 to 14 months behind their peers, highlighting the value high-quality pre-k has for efforts to close achievement gaps (Stark, 2009).(Hull, 2012, Sec.2).

The young children from lower social economic families and communities should receive the same early educational opportunities as children and families living in more affluent areas.

Research has consistently shown that quality pre-kindergarten programs benefit not only individual students but school districts and communities. Society benefits, too.

Nobel-Prize-winning economist James Heckman estimates that every dollar spent on early childhood education returns 10 cents annually over the life of a child (Heckman 2011). For example, if \$8,000 is invested in early childhood education at birth for a child who goes on to live until 65, the return on the investment would be over \$650,000, which is nearly 80 times the amount of the original investment of \$8,000 dollars (Hull, 2012, sec. 2).

Ethically, it should be the goal of our society to ensure that every child regardless of social economics, race or religion have the opportunity and a fair chance to achieve their potential and contribute meaningfully to their families and society.

### **Political Analysis**

Wisconsin is a hotbed when it comes to education reform under Republican Governor Scott Walker who supports private voucher schools and opposition from the Democrats that support K-12 public education. In May 2015, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker signed SB 67, known as “the pause bill,” the Wisconsin accountability system for all public schools. The “pause bill,” focuses on school district accountability and

Educator Effectiveness. The accountability report card has four areas that are a priority: student achievement; student growth; on-track graduation and post-secondary readiness; and closing the achievement gap. All of the priority areas in the “pause bill” support the need for the WEEE K4 Policy for school districts in need of improvement. Many states have adopted universal K4 to help combat the achievement gap for their neediest students and school districts with mixed results depending on different research studies and limited data on the long-term effects of the program on participants. The major issue facing publicly funded WEEE K4 in Wisconsin is the 12.7% reduced budget for K-12 public education, while private voucher school funding has increased. According to Leachman, Albares, Materson and Wallace (2016):

Not only did many states avoid raising new revenue after the recession hit, but recently some have enacted large tax *cuts*, further reducing revenues. Four of the five states with the biggest cuts in general school funding since 2008 — Arizona, Idaho, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin — have also cut income tax rates in recent years. (Leachman, Albares, Materson & Wallace, 2016, para. 7)

As mentioned earlier in this policy proposal, the WEEE funding would cost the state approximately \$60,000,000 and replace or encompass the \$3,000,000 startup funding initiative that is currently in place for CAK4. Politically, this change could be an issue because of the polarizing difference in philosophies toward funding the public education of the Republican and Democratic parties and a tight state budget. The focus should be more about helping the young children in Wisconsin receive a better educational foundation regardless of political agendas and social economics.



Students are more likely to graduate with a high school diploma than similar students who didn't attend pre-k (Gayl, 2008). Higher graduation rates result in savings for districts and taxpayers, and in citizens who vote more often and even have better health, as outlined in the Center's paper "Better Late Than Never". (Hull, 2012, sec. 2).

Wisconsinites needs to pull together to support early education as the young children of today will be our future voters, workforce, and leaders of tomorrow. According to Nobel Prize Economist James Heckman:

It is important to look at the data and invest wisely. This is an imperative among economists. Society has finite resources. Taxpayers can and should expect value for their investments in government programs and in their fellow citizens. Taking a hard look at the economic value of efforts to create human capital helps us see where best to invest in education to achieve its ideal—equalizing opportunity to build greater and enduring value for all (Heckman, 2011, p. 5).

The adoption of WEEE Policy to fund K4 for school districts in need of improvement could be a viable solution.

### **Legislative Process**

In order for the WEEE Policy to become a reality, there is a legislative process that has to happen in order for the policy to become a law. Anyone can draft a state-level bill, but it must be introduced in one of the two houses by a State Assembly or State Senate member. Once it has been introduced by either house, it is assigned a number (Assembly AB# or Senate S#). Here are the next steps in the process for the bill to

become a law, assuming it is approved at each juncture, if not approved by each house then the bill will die.

- First Read to a Committee.
- Proposed bill is forwarded for public hearing.
- Forwarded to Committee Executive session to be passed, defeated, or recommended with amendments to the bill.
- If approved, the bill goes to a Second Reading on Senate floor for discussion.
- If approved there, it is forwarded for a Third Reading and bill is composed in final form.
- If approved, the bill goes to Concurrence of the Senate for review.
- If approved, then bill goes to both houses for a vote and forwarded to the Governor for consideration.
- Governor has six days to vote for or against the bill, and, if approved, the bill becomes a law.
- If Governor vetoes the bill it can still be passed by 2/3 vote of both houses.

### **Chapter Three: Advocated Policy Statement**

The WEEE Policy advocates for increased funding opportunities for high quality K4 education for students from lower social economic status and public school districts that are rated “in need of improvement.” As mentioned earlier in this policy proposal, access to high quality early education for all students is paramount in closing the achievement gap in Wisconsin. Research has shown students who receive school readiness education have performed higher on standardized tests, have lower retention rates, and higher graduation rates. This policy change could be instrumental in helping Wisconsin’s most challenged school districts students begin their academic futures with a strong foundation. This change could lead to academic proficiency and success.

According to Michael Spector, Chair of the Governor’s Task Force on Exceptional Education (2004):

Early childhood education is one of the best, most cost effective investments the state can make. Research convincingly demonstrates the many long-term benefits of high quality early childhood education. Children who participate in early education programs demonstrate higher academic outcomes and are more likely to graduate from high school (Spector, 2011, p. 13).

#### **Goals and Objectives**

The goal of WEEE is to provide \$60,000,000 of state funding with priority given to lower performing public school districts. Access to the WEEE funding will provide full-day 4 K education to more than 15,000 students who may not otherwise have the opportunity to receive school readiness education. Closing the achievement gap is one of

the priority areas of Governor Scott Walker's education accountability improvement plan, SB 67, "pause bill." According a review of research conducted by NIEER:

A study of high-quality pre-kindergarten programs in five states reveals significant improvement in children's early language, literacy, and mathematical development. The study finds that children attending state-funded pre-k programs in the five states (Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and West Virginia) gained significantly regardless of ethnic background or economic circumstances (NIEER, 2011, p. 2).

Providing access to school readiness for all students regardless of social economic status will help Wisconsin meet this educational goal and begin to close the education gap.

The major objective of the WEEE Early Education Policy will be to increase school readiness activities for a smooth transition to K-12. The increased school readiness skills will help improve future student performance on standardized assessments and increase student high school graduation rates. The learning objectives will include the eight domains that are also utilized by Head Start and other early child development organizations. Those domain targets include: literacy, creative arts, physical health and development, social-emotional development, language development, mathematics, and approaches to learning. Student learning would be introduced under each domain and monitored for progress. The WEEE Policy would also ensure that all students would be assessed in each of the domain areas to monitor child outcomes. The child outcomes will be monitored by the school district as part of their school improvement plan. Another objective of the WEEE Policy is to engage parents into the learning process for their children. It is critical that parents play a role in the education of

their children. The WEEE Policy would provide parents with educational resources and other supports to help in the child's development.

### **Needs, Values, and Preferences**

The WEEE Policy purpose is to help close the achievement gap for students attending school districts in need of improvement by providing high-quality school readiness. As mentioned earlier in this policy proposal, most school districts in need of improvement have students who do not have access to school readiness and are academically behind students who attended school readiness programs. The addition of WEEE would provide 15,000 students from the lowest performing districts access to school readiness regardless of the economic challenges of the district. According to Belfield and Winters (2004):

With expanded 4K programs, fiscal benefits to the K-12 school system would come from: lower grade retention; lower special education placement; higher job satisfaction for teachers; more teachers retained by the public schools; fewer substitute teachers; reduced spending on school safety; and reduced pressure on student aid services. In total, these benefits amount to \$140.96 million (n.d., p. 2).

School readiness accessibility for all Wisconsin students adds value to the educational system and the return on investment will save Wisconsin money in the long term.

According to Heckman:

Every dollar invested in high quality early childhood education produces a 7% to 10% per annum return on investment. Policies that provide early childhood educational resources to the most disadvantaged children produce greater social and economic equality (2011, p.5).

The WEEE Policy will give preference to school districts in need of improvement, but all school districts will have the opportunity to write for the grant funding.

Families value education for their children, regardless of their social economic status. As a society there needs to be point where economics does not dictate what is morally right and ethically right. Providing a solid educational foundation for any student in the state should be a priority regardless of social economics, race, creed, color or religion. WEEE values a parent's choice to decide what educational setting their child is educated. Parents that have the resources to provide high quality school readiness education for their children still have the option to choose public or private school readiness in lower performing districts. WEEE provides all students in the districts in need of improvement the opportunity for publicly funded school readiness education.

## **Chapter Four: Policy Argument**

Providing for accessible high quality school readiness public education for all children in Wisconsin is what the WEEE Policy hopes to accomplish. The WEEE Policy is not the only option to help combat the achievement gap in Wisconsin. Although the WEEE Policy seems like a viable option to help education reform in Wisconsin there will always be arguments for and against this policy. Whether the arguments are educational, economic, social, political, or ethical, it will be impossible for everyone to agree.

### **Pros and Cons to Policy Adoption**

Increasing funding for public school readiness education in Wisconsin has implications to the state budget. Adding \$60,000,000 to the budget for education will help to close the achievement gap in Wisconsin's lowest performing districts. The increased funding will help bring much needed resources to help this population of students. In time the districts that receive the extra resources will increase their test scores, graduation rates, and quality of life for those students. The \$60,000,000 is an investment in the future of Wisconsin. According to Belfield and Winters (2005):

The net economic impact of comprehensive state-wide pre-schooling is calculated as a benefit-cost ratio. For each cohort of four-year olds, the benefits of investment in comprehensive 4K offset 68 percent of the costs. For every dollar committed to 4K, 68 cents would be returned in savings (p. 2).

The initial cost of \$60,000,000 will actually only cost the state approximately \$19,200,000 long term. This is based off of Belfield and Winters (2005) estimation of \$.68 per dollar spent to implement the expanded K4 program. Some would argue that the sixty million is a real cost to tax payers and what occurs in the future has no bearing on it.

With the Wisconsin state budget cuts currently being made to public education the assumption is that sixty million dollars is simply not in the budget. To raise the sixty million dollars, taxes on property owners would have to be increased to pay for funding the WEEE Policy.

There is potential for opposition of the WEEE Policy. Not all Wisconsinites have school age children and do not want to assume the financial obligation. Individuals who do have school age children or those who may have the resources to pay for private school readiness education may not see the benefits of the WEEE Policy personally. Those who live in districts that meet the school accountability report card standards may object to higher taxes to fund a program that does not personally benefit their children or community.

Ethically all students should be afforded the opportunity to have access to school readiness. Some would say we have a moral obligation to all students regardless of social economic status, race, creed or color. It is our responsibility to ensure everyone is afforded quality school readiness education. All students should have equal access when starting out on their educational journey. A four-year-old student born into a family whose circumstances do not afford them the resources to obtain a high quality school readiness program will miss out on the educational foundation needed for future success without a program like WEEE. According to Heckman:

America is using antiquated models of human skill formation in devising policies to educate children for success in the 21st century. My colleagues and I have analyzed many long-term studies of early human development and the impact of early investment on schooling and adult outcomes. We reached the following



conclusions: 1. Inequality in early childhood experiences and learning produces inequality in ability, achievement, health, and adult success (Heckman, 2011, p. 5).

Circumstances such as this are not fair to the child and a program like WEEE can help to ensure that all children begin their academic journey on a level playing field.

On the opposite side of the ethical argument, is the parent's responsibility to ensure that their child receives quality education. High quality education is a privilege that has to be paid for and if you don't have the resources to pay for it you won't receive it.

However, there are repercussions to that argument. People who do not receive a quality education have a lower quality of life, higher high school dropout rates, more interaction with the criminal justice system, and higher pregnancy and poverty rates. The cost that this population of individuals has on society is higher taxes to pay for social services, correctional facilities and other government assistance. Investing in high quality school readiness programs could counteract future costs to the community.

Politically, the Republican Party in Wisconsin favors increased funding for private school and decreased funding for public education, as evidenced by Governor Scott Walker's education accountability improvement plan, SB 67 "pause bill." The Wisconsin Democratic Party supports more funding for public education and less funding for private education. There are compelling arguments for or against the WEEE Policy as demonstrated by the arguments presented. We all must make our own decision on which side of the argument we fall based on our own feelings on social, political, ethical, educational and economic issues.

## **Chapter Five: Policy Implementation Plan**

Assuming that legislative support has been obtained and the \$60-million-dollar budget for the WEEE Policy has been approved, there would be Request for Proposals (RFP) for all public school districts in Wisconsin. Preference would be given to school districts rated, “in need for improvement” according to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. School districts would be required to demonstrate how the WEEE Policy would benefit the district improvement plan. To meet the RFP criteria, the following areas would be scored:

1. Performance on the school accountability report card (25 points-Fails to meet expectations, 20 points-Meets few expectations, 10 points-Meets expectations, and 5 points-Exceed expectations and higher rating)
2. Percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch (25 points-80% or higher, 20 points-79%-70%, 15 points-69%-60%, 10 points-59%-50%, and 5 points-under 50%)
3. The school district’s improvement plan (25 points- plan shows districts need for preschool program, data that supports the need, clearly identified goals and objectives, clearly stated time line for program, identifying research based strategies to support the program, professional development plans for preschool teachers, bench marks to monitor progress, and parental involvement to build capacity; 15 points-if all areas are included, but do not adequately show implementation or need of all areas; 5 points-if plan does not address all areas and support improvement)

4. The program budget (25 points-budget shows effective allocation of resources and additional funding from other sources, 15 points-budget shows effective allocation of resources to implement the program, 0 points-budget does not meet the criteria)

RFP's would be rated based upon scoring criteria of 25 maximum points in each of the four sections, totaling 100 points. Funding would be awarded to the school districts with the highest scores until the WEEE funding or number of students has reached the program limits. Completed RFP's would be submitted to DPI for review. The RFP window would be December 1<sup>st</sup>-January 31<sup>st</sup>.

Decisions would be made by April 1<sup>st</sup> and the implementation plan for selected school districts would be due by May 1<sup>st</sup> and allows chosen school districts preparation for the upcoming school year. All proposal scores would be published for public knowledge. Once the DPI scores the RFP's, they would be forwarded to the Governor's Office for approval. After the review process is complete, the DPI would inform all districts that have been selected for WEEE and have them submit their implementation plan that would include the formation of a parental involvement component. Districts that were not selected would have the opportunity to submit an appeal to DPI.

Selected districts would have 60 days to submit their implementation plan to DPI. DPI will then review the implementation plan consisting of the required components; curriculum, start dates, budget, training and assessments. After the review, DPI would then fully approve the implementation plan or inform the school districts that changes are necessary to the plan before full approval. Once the implementation plan is approved, the school district would receive \$4,000 per pupil to fund the program. School districts

would also have the opportunity to wrap childcare, Head Start or any other funding options to the full day program, if the district is eligible.

### **Educational and Monitoring Activities**

Recipients of the WEEE funding would have to submit a copy of their educational curriculum. The researched and comprehensive based curricula would have to be approved by DPI and align with Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS). According to Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners (n.d.):

The WI Model Early Learning Standards specify development expectations for children from birth through entrance to 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The standards reflect the domains of a child's learning and development. The domains include: Health & Physical Development; Social and Emotional Development; Language Development & Communication; Approaches to Learning; Cognitive & General Knowledge. Each domain is divided into sub-domains which include development expectations, program standards, performance standards & development continuum. (para. 1)

All districts would have the option to use any curriculum that fit the WMELS guiding framework and have established child assessment tools that monitor child performance under the five domains. There are curricula that are specifically aligned to WMELS and already being utilized by preschool programs that have shown promise. For example, school districts would be encouraged to utilize programs such as Creative Curriculum by Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood. Creative Curriculum is being used in Wisconsin by Head Start, Young Star and other Early Childhood organizations as

the curriculum of choice because of the outcomes, assessment tools, and activities for student engagement. According to the Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood (n.d):

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool is an award-winning curriculum for preschool success. Comprising The Foundation, five research-based volumes that provide the knowledge base of the curriculum, and the Daily Resources, which offer step-by-step guidance in the form of Teaching Guides and additional daily teaching tools, The Creative Curriculum for Preschool is fully aligned with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework and state early learning standards. (Product Overview section, para. 1)

All school districts receiving WEEE funding would have to submit progress toward reaching school improvement plan goals, assessment scores of students in the program, and financial reports on January 30<sup>th</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup> of the grant year. School districts not showing improvement and continued low student performance would receive intense monitoring and be subject to quarterly reviews to continue funding from DPI.

## **Chapter Six: Policy Assessment Plan**

To determine the effectiveness of the WEEE Policy, school districts would continue to report their results using the accountability report card standards. The four areas that would be actively monitored are student achievement, student growth, on track graduation and post-secondary readiness, and closing the achievement gap. The individual school districts would have the autonomy to create their own District Improvement Teams (DIT) consisting of personnel that meet the district and school board approval. The school districts would be responsible internally on how the DIT operates, reports, and receive approval from their respective superintendents and school boards. The DIT would be responsible for developing, training, reporting and monitoring the districts performance goals.

The DIT representatives would be responsible for reporting the results to DPI's Department of Educational Accountability and Student Assessment. This department is under the supervision of the Division for Student and School Success. All of the results would be forwarded to the Office of the State Superintendent, who would have oversight of the entire program and report to the Governor. The results of the WEEE Policy would be posted on WISEdash Public Portal. The school district results are mandated to be posted because of the use of public funds.

### **Program Implementation**

The DIT would be responsible for ensuring that students in the WEEE Policy are being offered high quality K4 instruction that follows the WMELS researched based standards. The DIT would work with teachers and administrators in their WEEE funded districts to track student progress, utilizing WMELS assessment tools and the districts

own approved (by Department of Educational Accountability) monitoring tools. Students would be assessed formally and informally by teachers, administrators, and the DIT on the WMELS domain targets to report student growth and achievement data. Assessments would be ongoing throughout the academic school year. The DIT would report results on a semi-annual basis to DPI for review (November and March). The school districts anticipated achievement goals would have already been submitted and approved by DPI prior to receiving the WEEE funding. The school district's data would provide the indication of the success of the WEEE Policy.

### **Needs Assessment and Improvement Plan**

The WEEE school districts would receive the funding for two years initially. The DIT would continue to track and monitor the achievement of the students that completed the preschool program, into Kindergarten and potentially through high school. The monitoring of student performance in the WEEE school districts should potentially show student growth and achievement in their primary grade levels. The growth shown should translate improvement on the state standardized assessments in reading and math. Student performance would ultimately change the school districts improvement plans and action steps. Each school district in the WEEE program may have the same issues with student performance, but the implementation of the educational program has to be tailored to meet the needs of the students.

Initially, all WEEE school districts would report semi-annually, but if the district does not meet the agreed upon benchmarks, the DIT would have to submit modified plan for improvement. Districts having to submit a modified plan would have to report results on a quarterly basis, until the improvement plans benchmarks are met. This intense

monitoring and program implementation should improve the WEEE school districts annual accountability report card results. The WEEE Policy results over time should provide a baseline of data that clearly shows the closing of the achievement gap for Wisconsin's neediest school districts.



## **Chapter Seven: Summary Impact Statement**

All students deserve the right to a quality education, regardless of their social economic status, race, creed, religion, or color. The public school system is setup to be equal for all students. The public school system in Wisconsin enforces federal mandates that public education can begin full day school for children in five-year-old kindergarten. The difference between the highest performing students and lowest performing students usually begins with a high quality preschool education. That early foundation in education is critical to the student's ultimate success and attitude toward education.

### **Implementation of the Policy is Consistent with the Vision**

Communities and families that have the resources can provide their children access to high quality preschool, thus building their educational foundation. Students who come from lower social economic status generally do not have access to that same high quality preschool foundation. Wisconsin has the opportunity to ensure that 15,000 more students receive access to a quality school readiness education by adopting the WEEE Policy for school districts in need of improvement. Access to the WEEE funding would provide full day 4 K education to more than 15,000 students who may not have that opportunity. Closing the achievement gap is one of the priority areas of the Governor Scott Walkers education accountability improvement plan, SB 67 "pause bill." So the WEEE Policy is consistent with the vision of the Governor's educational reform plan to improve the education for all of Wisconsin's students. The WEEE Policy can be an option for all school districts, but the priority is for school districts that have been identified as in need of improvement.

## **Clear Direction**

The WEEE Policy can help close the achievement gap in Wisconsin by allowing access to the lowest performing school districts in the State of Wisconsin funds to implement school readiness programs. As mentioned earlier, school districts are not just randomly selected, but meet the criteria to receive the WEEE funds. The students in those districts would receive a much needed boost to their educational foundation and ultimately improving the school districts standardized test scores. This would impact high school graduation rates and improving the future of children. Without WEEE funding, the future of these children may not be as bright. The WEEE grant is only one piece of a larger educational system change in Wisconsin. The WEEE Policy would be successful because its roots are centered on helping the neediest school districts and the students that they serve.

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## Appendix A

### Acronyms

<u>Name</u>	<u>Abbreviation</u>
American College Testing	ACT
Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effect Study	APPLES
Community Approach Kindergarten Four Year Old	CAK4
District Improvement Team	DIT
Department of Public Instruction	DPI
English Language Learners	ELL
Green Bay Area School District	GBASD
Kindergarten Four Year Old	K4
Kindergarten Five Year Old	K5
Milwaukee Parental Choice Program	MPCP
Milwaukee Public Schools	MPS
Mequon-Thiensville School District	MTSD
No Child Left Behind	NCLB
National Institute for Early Education Research	NIEER
Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening	PALS
Request for Proposal	RFP
School District of Rhinelander	SDR
St. Joseph Academy	SJA
Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination	WKCE
Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards	WMELS
Wisconsin Engaging Early Education	WEEE