

4K: Questions and Answers

1. Why is 4-year-old kindergarten best for children?

The HASD believes that children's early development and school readiness impact their learning success. Research on child development strongly emphasizes the critical importance of early (birth to age five) learning and language experiences on brain development and future success in school and life.

The HASD believes that all families should have equitable access to high quality early learning experiences for their four-year-old children outside of the home. Many excellent private and parochial preschool options currently exist within the district, but some families cannot access these programs due to financial constraints, transportation issues, or other factors. A voluntary four-year-old preschool program supported by available state funding widens accessibility to all families- The collaborative community-based model allows us to partner with the existing expertise, experience, and facilities of private providers to ensure a variety of choices for parents.

2. 4K supports the HASD mission and vision of our district.

HASD Mission Statement: The Hortonville Area School District, in partnership with our community, will provide ALL students with challenging and diverse opportunities to become enthusiastic lifelong learners who will build the future. Strategic Planning Objective – All students, including our youngest learners, will demonstrate the necessary skills to achieve continuous academic and social progress.

3. What is the estimated number of four-year-olds in the district? How many will participate in the program?

For the 2010 school year, we are estimating that there will be 200 resident four-year-olds in HASD. Other districts have reported that their 4K program enrollment is approximately 70% of their kindergarten enrollment for the first years of the program and gradually expands to be very close to their 5K enrollment percent. For planning purposes we anticipate about 180 students will enroll in 4K for the first year (2010-2011). Non-resident students are only eligible for 4K through open enrollment if their resident district has a 4K program. As area districts implement 4K programs open enrollment in 4K will become an option to non-residents.

4. Is "school" appropriate for four-year-olds?

We now know that the vast majority of brain development takes place in the earliest years of a child's life, and that the first five years lay the foundation for all future social, emotional, and cognitive development- Research on early brain development indicates that from age three to five, the part of the child's brain responsible for planning and organizing, motor control, control of emotions, and attention to tasks is growing rapidly. Preschool children who are read to frequently and have a rich variety of opportunities to interact with others and their environment develop the skills that will be needed at school age. The preschool child's brain is not only ready, but "hardwired" to learn at an amazing rate given appropriate, activity-based learning opportunities.

5. How does 4K benefit the community?

A collaborative community-based 4K model provides universal (all children are eligible) accessibility for families plus provide additional financial support for existing preschool programs. While parents and families are the child's first and foremost teacher, every family's resources and preparation for this important role are different.

The community shares a responsibility and a vested interest in ensuring all children's well-being *and* development. As HASD seeks to attract new young families, 4K offers positive early educational opportunities. An investment in 4K is an investment in a community's long term economic health.

FUNDING / BUDGET

6. Where will the funding come from?

Wisconsin's school funding system provides funding for 4K programs based on the number of students enrolled. Each student will generate a set amount of additional state aid for the district. It is anticipated that by year three of operation, 4K will generate revenue limit room to fund the program in its entirety, exceeding the expenditures.

7. What is the financial responsibility for parents?

There is no tuition for district-sponsored 4K programming regardless of where it is offered. While there may be incidental costs for school supplies or field trips, the district will work with families who cannot afford these expenses. No partner site can charge a fee for the 4K portion of their program. Private sites will still charge parents for additional services such as extended childcare, enrichment opportunities, field trips or day care before and after the hours of the 4K program.

FACILITIES / TRANSPORTATION

8. How will the community sites be determined?

All HASD childcare providers and preschools were invited to an informational meeting and were given an application to become a partnering site. Applications were due January 9, 2010. The following criteria must be considered:

- Meet applicable current state license requirements in State of Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) 45 or 46 Day Care Licensing Rules and have no violations that required enforcement action within the last year.
- Meet Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) requirements for four-year-old kindergarten.
- Collaborate with the district to meet DPI teacher certification requirements. Copies of teacher license(s) will be provided to the district.
- Collaborate with the district to provide opportunities for parent involvement. (DPI requires outreach activities of a minimum of 87.5 hours with the primary caregivers of students.)
- Adopt and implement curriculum and assessment materials as determined by the school district.
- Conduct and document parent-teacher conferences and/or home visits.
- Actively participate in 4K meetings and professional development opportunities.
- Participate in site review as part of continuous improvement process.
- Provide adequate classroom space. The Wisconsin Department of Commerce specifies 35 square feet per occupant of open floor space assuming a self-contained classroom. This number is specified for safety reasons only and does not indicate that this is the optimal room size for educational purposes. Classrooms used for 4K need to be large enough to allow for several play/activity areas, individual child work areas, and as an area for large group activities.

9. Does a site have to meet ADA requirements?

Partner sites will comply with DHFS licensing regulations in regard to ADA requirements. The school district will ensure that there are sites available in the district to meet the special needs of all children including those with physical limitations. For example, while every site may not be wheelchair accessible, an accessible 4K classroom will be available somewhere in the district.

10. What class size is being planned for?

At this time, our school board is requiring 17 students as a minimum to run a site.

11. Are community sites still able to be used for other programs?

Yes, partner sites can continue their other programs, however, during the hours of their 4K program, partner sites will comply with 4K guidelines.

12. Will the district provide transportation?

Every resident student will have the opportunity to be transported to one of the 4K *sites*. When working with partner sites, transportation will be limited to just before and after 4K *program* hours.

13. Where will the district sites be located?

One site in Mackville and several sites in Hortonville and Greenville have expressed an interest in having 4K programming. Registration numbers will determine how many sites will be offered. Site assignments will take into account established bus routes, class size, and a child's daycare placement. If parents prefer an alternate site and space is available, parents will be responsible for transportation.

PROGRAM/CURRICULUM

14. What does 4K mean? Is it the same as five-year-old kindergarten?

No, four-year-olds as a group are very different developmentally than five-year-olds and using "watered down" five-year-old kindergarten program for four-year-olds is inappropriate and ineffective. As an early learning program, instruction for four-year-olds will include early literacy (reading and language) and number skills. Instruction will be provided in an activity-based manner emphasizing discovery, exploring, and experimenting. Social and emotional skills physical skills, health, science, art, and music will also be part of the curriculum. Each day will offer varied opportunities for the child, including, but not limited to, large group circle time, story time, center time, small and large motor play, art, music, recess, and field trips.

15. What are teacher qualifications for 4K?

Teachers in four-year-old kindergarten must hold a DPI kindergarten license (e.g., #090, PK-K; #083, PK-3; #106, K-6. etc.), preferably the early childhood, pre-kindergarten-grade 3 (#083). With the current emphasis on inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education programs, many districts will be interested in teachers who hold dual certification in early childhood regular education and early childhood special education (#808 or #809). Persons completing early childhood level programs after 8/31/2004 will be issued a license as Early Childhood Level (birth through age 8) teachers under new rules in Chapter PI 34.

16. What is the age cut off to participate in 4K? Is early entrance possible? Can a child attend 4K twice?

Children must be four on or before September 1st to enroll. Early entrance will not be allowed in 4K. 4K is not a two year program.

17. What curriculum will be used?

As an early education program, instruction in four-year-old kindergarten must address reading and language arts first and foremost but also must include mathematics, social studies, science, health, social skills, physical education, art and music. Obviously, the use of an integrated curriculum, thematic approaches, and learning centers makes tremendous sense, because young children learn by doing, exploring, and experimenting. The required areas (language, math, music, etc.) should be built into the integrated approaches.

Curriculum and assessments are locally determined and should be based on best practice. Best practice for children four and five years of age suggest curriculum be developmentally appropriate with children actively engaged in a variety of learning approaches. Again, the required subjects do not need to be taught as separate subjects using a teacher-driven curriculum. The general breakdown of the day should include some direct instruction, a large number of experiential "hands-on" activities, and an opportunity for child-initiated play (DPI).

Any curriculum and assessment that is developed will be aligned with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMEELS). HASD is very interested in the "Creative Curriculum."

18. How will children with special needs be addressed?

4K is open to all age-eligible children regardless of ability level. Special needs will be addressed on an individual basis to determine the most appropriate placement for the child.

19. How will student progress be assessed?

4K will identify student progress indicators based on WMELS. Assessment will be ongoing; however, student growth will be monitored against benchmarks throughout the year. This will allow for more effective differentiation, individualization, and parent support.

20. Can religious instruction take place at some sites?

According to DHFS, four-year-old partnerships can occur with religious-based schools and child care centers with certain assurances. A district must ensure that no religious programming is going on during the "4K" part of the day. If partner sites choose to offer religious instruction before or after the hours of the 4K program, they may do so in a separate location from the 4K classroom. Staff and parents must understand that this instruction is separate from and not affiliated in any way with the 4K program.

21. How many days per week will the program be run? How much time per day?

A 4K program must have 437 instructional hours and 87.5 hours of parent involvement opportunities per year to meet DPI requirements. The district is planning for a 4 day program that would run 3 hours a day. The 5th day of the week, Friday will be set aside for parent workshops, home visits, etc.

22. How will program quality be defined and assessed?

4K will be assessed annually with formal (Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale) and informal (parent surveys) measurements.

27. Can a child be removed from 4K because of behavior or special education needs?

Behavior and related policies are currently being developed by the Leadership sub-committee.

