**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Sept. XX, 2017

Contact: Janet Kelly, [janet.kelly@wisc.edu](mailto:janet.kelly@wisc.edu) or

Rachel Strauch Nelson, [rnstrauchnel@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:rnstrauchnel@madison.k12.wi.us)

**Study Finds MMSD Four-Year-Old Kindergarten Expands Educational Equity**

Since the [Madison Metropolitan School District](https://www.madison.k12.wi.us/) (MMSD) began four-year-old kindergarten (4K) in 2011, more than two-thirds of its kindergarten students have started in its 4K programs. The district offers three-hour, play-based 4K sessions in the morning and afternoon. Now, with six full years of operational data on 4K, a new research-practice partnership between MMSD and UW–Madison’s [Wisconsin Center for Education Research](https://wcer.wisc.edu/) (WCER) is taking a close look at the district’s 4K enrollments.

In the first [research brief](http://mep.wceruw.org/documents/MEP-4k-enrollment-report.pdf) released by the [Madison Education Partnership](http://mep.wceruw.org/) (MEP), researchers compare 4K enrollments by year, race and ethnicity, income, English language proficiency and disability. The authors also look at who enrolls in the district’s school and community-based sites, who attends morning or afternoon sessions and how MMSD 4K enrollment patterns compare to those of 4K programs in similar Wisconsin districts.

MMSD’s 4K program appears to be broadening educational equity in the district,” states Jaymes Pyne, a researcher at MEP and a UW–Madison doctoral candidate in sociology.  “We know the 4K program is enrolling a greater share of minority children, children from low-income households and children with special needs we see entering kindergarten. In the absence of other affordable or practical options to area families, this means the district is providing more learning opportunities for more children at an earlier age.”

Over its six years of operation, participation in MMSD’s 4K has risen from 67 to 72 percent of the district’s entering kindergarteners, with participation rates five to ten percent higher among African American and Latino students, low- income students and English language learners.

The researchers found that in comparing the 24 4K sites based in MMSD schools to the 29 community-based sites that are part of the district’s program, the school-based sites serve a slightly more diverse student population. Parents with higher incomes and levels of education more often enroll their children in afternoon sessions, though this trend is more noticeable in community sites than school-based sites.

Not all students in MMSD’s 4K program continue in the district for kindergarten. Over its six years of 4K classes, MEP found that about one in five students do not continue in district schools but enroll elsewhere for kindergarten. White and Asian students were slightly less likely to continue their education in the district than English language learners, students with a disability or low-income students.

The researchers used data from the [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](https://dpi.wi.gov/wise) to compare 4K enrollments in Madison with eight other urban districts in the state. They found that rates of African American and Latino enrollment in Madison are similar to those in the other districts. However, white children were more likely to enroll in MMSD by five percentage points over Asian students, whereas Asian students were more likely to enroll than white students in the comparison districts.

Students from low-income families across all nine districts were seven to eight percentage points more likely to enroll in 4K than their more economically advantaged peers. Finally, while English language learners were less likely to enroll in 4K elsewhere, these students were more likely to enroll in MMSD’s 4K program. “The district believes 4K can be a strategy to accelerate equity in MMSD, and this brief confirms that the program reaches students who need it most.” said Beth Vaade, MEP Co-Director and Qualitative Research Supervisor for the Madison Metropolitan School District. “It’s fantastic to see the partnership in action, and MEP will be a key partner in helping the district understand and innovate moving forward.”

**ABOUT MEP**

The [Madison Education Partnership](http://mep.wceruw.org/) is a research-practice partnership between UW–Madison School of Education’s Wisconsin Center for Education Research and the Madison Metropolitan School District. Its collaborative mission is to engage in and support high-quality, problem-based research, contribute to policy discussions based on its research and regularly share new knowledge to improve the experiences and individual outcomes for all MMSD students.

The MEP partnership engages UW–Madison researchers and faculty; MMSD administration, teachers and staff; as well as stakeholders from the broader Madison community to support the development and use of high-quality, relevant and timely research.

##