

Wisconsin

Background

Wisconsin Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)

4K is a half-day program for four-year-olds. Districts that opt into offering 4K must enroll all interested four-year-olds in the district, regardless of income.

Wisconsin funds 4K as part of its state school funding formula. All public schools in Wisconsin, including charter schools, can receive per-pupil funding for 4K. Districts, including 2R charter schools (a type of charter school authorized in state law), are the only entities that can directly receive state funding for 4K, but they may choose to subcontract with private child care centers, community-based programs, or Head Start agencies to deliver services. The state also funds four-year-old kindergarten for participating students at private schools through the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program.

Charter schools in Wisconsin

There are three types of charter schools in Wisconsin:

- Instrumentality: Charter schools that are authorized and operated by a school district. All personnel of instrumentality charter schools are considered employees of the district.¹
- Non-instrumentality: Charter schools that are authorized, but not operated, by a school district. Personnel are considered employees of the charter school.²
- 2R or independent: Charter schools that operate completely outside the school district. These charter schools are authorized by UW-Milwaukee, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Common Council of the City of Milwaukee, and UW-Parkside.³

As of 2013–14, Wisconsin has 187 instrumentality charter schools, thirty-one non-instrumentality charter schools, and twenty-three 2R charter schools.⁴

Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Charter schools that are interested in offering 4K must be approved by their authorizer to do so (charter schools are eligible to offer 4K as long as it is part of the grade span outlined in their charter). 2Rs submit their 4K count to the Department of Public Instruction and receive funding directly from the state. Other charter schools that are approved by their authorizer to offer 4K submit their counts to and receive funding from their authorizing school district.



TOTAL SCORE

42/50

Wisconsin's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **hospitable**


- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- Compared to K–12 funding levels, low pre-K program funding makes offering pre-K less attractive to charters.
- + The size of the state pre-K program does not limit charter access to funding.
- + The funding, application, and approval processes do not create barriers to charter access.
- + Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.




Charter schools receive all per-pupil funding based on the average of two annual student counts that take place in September and January. 2R charter schools that enroll 4K students receive between 50 percent and 60 percent of the K–12 per-pupil funding amount.

Barriers


Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

 **No.** Neither the charter law nor the 4K legislation explicitly permits charter schools to offer 4K. In practice, however, all charter schools are eligible for 4K funding if 4K is listed in their charter. More than seventy charter schools in Wisconsin offer 4K. Nineteen of these schools are 2R charter schools. All 2R charter schools that offer elementary grades also offer 4K. The rest are instrumentality or non-instrumentality schools.⁵

Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **Yes.** Low pre-K program funding, compared to K–12 funding levels, makes pre-K less attractive to charters. The state only requires and funds part-day services, but charter school operators generally offer full-day programming to maintain recruitment and enrollment numbers. As a result, charters must absorb the other costs of a full-day program. Charter funding levels for K–12 are lower than district schools, however, which makes it even more financially difficult for charter schools to offer pre-K.


Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **No.** The size of the program is not a barrier to charters accessing state pre-K funds. The program serves about 63 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.

Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

 **No.** The application, approval, and funding processes are not barriers to charter access.

Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

 **No.** Charter schools that offer 4K as part of their charter can automatically enroll students from 4K into their

five-year-old kindergarten program without requiring those students to enter an enrollment lottery.

Recommendations

In general, charter schools in Wisconsin have much greater access to state pre-K funding than their counterparts in many other states. But funding remains a significant barrier. To address this barrier, the state should:

- Revise the charter school legislation to explicitly permit charter schools to offer pre-K.
- Improve funding equity for charter schools in grades K–12.
- Allow charter schools that serve low-income students to access child care subsidies for eligible children—and waive the more burdensome requirements associated with child care licensing for charter schools that offer 4K programs.



	4-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)	Charter schools in Wisconsin
Year created	Launched in 1848 ⁶	Charter law enacted in 1993 ⁷
Children in state	146,516 three- and four-year-olds in Wisconsin ⁸	1,121,878 school-age children in Wisconsin ⁹
Children served	48,590 children served 0 percent of three-year-olds 63 percent of four-year-olds ¹⁰	47,689 students served 4.3 percent of school-age population 245 charter schools ¹¹
Charters offering 4K	Seventy-three charter schools in Wisconsin offer 4K. ¹²	108 charter schools in Wisconsin offer elementary programs. ¹³
Funding	Independent/2R charter schools receive between \$4,037 and \$4,845 per pupil to offer 4K. ¹⁴	Charter schools receive \$8,075 per pupil to serve K–12. ¹⁵

Endnotes

1 Margaret McMurray and Scott Eagleburger, “Statutory Report Series: Legislative Report on Charter Schools, 2012–2013” (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction), http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sms/pdf/legreport_12_13.pdf.

2 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, “Wisconsin Charter Schools Yearbook: 2014–2015,” September 2014, <http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sms/pdf/2014-15yearbook.pdf>.

3 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, “Charter Schools in Wisconsin,” <http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/charter-schools>. UW-Parkside authorizes one school in Racine, WI; all other charter schools exist in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Common Council of the City of Milwaukee, and UW-Parkside can only authorize charter schools in Milwaukee County (see also: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Wisconsin,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/WI/> and the Wisconsin State Legislature, <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/118/40/2r/bm>). The UW-Milwaukee can authorize charter schools in Milwaukee County and the four adjacent counties: Racine, Waukesha, Washington, and Ozaukee Counties.

4 “Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, “Wisconsin Charter Schools Yearbook: 2014–2015.”

5 Ibid.

6 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

7 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Wisconsin.”

8 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” www.census.gov/acs.

9 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

10 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

11 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Wisconsin.”

12 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, “Wisconsin Charter Schools Yearbook: 2014–2015.”

13 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, “Currently Operating Charter Schools: School Management Services,” <http://sms.dpi.wi.gov/charter-schools/current>.

14 Schools other than independent/2R charter schools receive general state aid funding for 4K based on the aggregate costs of operating the program, rather than a flat per-pupil amount.

15 The per-pupil rate for instrumentality and non-instrumentality charter schools is negotiated with the authorizing school district. This number is for 2R charter schools, outlined in legislation (see Wisconsin State Legislature, <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/118/40/2r/e/2n?view=section>).