"I Don't Want PreK to Turn into School": What PreK Policy Means in Practice

By

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Abstract

In recent years, publically funded prekindergarten (preK) programs have expanded rapidly in the U.S. Amid promises that preK will help close the achievement gap and provide significant economic returns to individuals and society, many states have embraced the preK movement, developing policies to create new publically-funded programs in public schools and community early childhood education (ECE) sites like childcare centers, Head Start classrooms, and preschools (Barnett, Carolan, Squires, & Clarke Brown, 2013). This dissertation examines preK policy implementation the urban school district of Lakeville, Wisconsin. PreK in Wisconsin is called four-year-old kindergarten, or 4K. To understand what 4K policy did in Lakeville, I conducted an ethnographic investigation of the work of three 4K teachers located in three different institutions. I examine how these teachers understood and enacted the policy, and what policy came to mean to them and their institution. I find that the district policy, in positioning 4K as "real school" and distinct from ECE, reshaped relationships and hierarchies within and across institutions and made inequalities between ECE and public school teachers increasingly visible and relevant. This had very real effects on teachers' job satisfaction, school district-community site relations, and the structure of early childhood education in Lakeville, with serious implications for the status of ECE teachers, families' access to ECE programs, and children's early education experiences.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In recent years, publically funded prekindergarten (preK) programs have expanded rapidly in the U.S.[1] Amid promises that preK will help close the achievement gap and provide significant economic returns to individuals and society, many states have embraced the preK movement, developing policies to create new publically-funded programs in public schools and community early childhood education (ECE) sites like childcare centers, Head Start classrooms, and preschools (Barnett, Carolan, Squires, & Clarke Brown, 2013). While positioning ECE as a mechanism to address the achievement gap is not new—the federal government created Head Start in the 1960s in order to do this—the recent expansion of public preK signifies a shift in ECE provision from an equity model to a parity model. Whereas Head Start was conceptualized as compensatory—an intervention for poor and minority children whose home lives were considered to be lacking—preK is framed as something that can help prepare *all* children for school, regardless of race, class, or ability status. While the parity discourse—providing equal opportunities for all children—sounds reasonable and desirable, it obscures the reality that children's experiences in preK, even in universal preK programs, are far from equal. Instead, race, class, gender, and ability intersect with preK policy in ways that lead to vastly different preK experiences for different families, children, and teachers.

Another notable feature of the preK movement is that it brings together ECE centers and public schools in new ways. The dynamics and effects of bringing together these two systems is worthy of investigation because it has considerable impacts for institutions, teachers, and young children. While we know much about child outcomes as a result of preK participation (e.g. Gormley & Phillips, 2005), we know less about what it means to bring two systems with very different traditions and philosophies together for the provision of public preK. Given that there is

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[1] Throughout the text I use the term preK to refer to publically-funded programs for four-year-olds.

now a broad-based international consensus about the importance of ECE, and given the expansion of public preK across the U.S., understanding this phenomenon is important not only for schools and ECE centers, but for the families whose children attend public preK and the teachers who work with these children on a daily basis.

In this dissertation, I explore the dynamics of preK policy implementation the urban school district of Lakeville, Wisconsin.[2] PreK in Wisconsin is called four-year-old kindergarten, or 4K. Wisconsin is an interesting place to study 4K policy implementation because 4K is deeply engrained in the state's history, with public education for four-year-olds included in its constitution. In the most recent nationwide evaluation, Wisconsin's 4K program came in 5th out of 53 state programs for access; 64% of Wisconsin's four-year-olds were enrolled in 4K in 2013. The state program fared worse in comparison to other states when it came to preK funding. With an average expenditure of about $5,300 per pupil, the state was ranked 22nd (Barnett et al., 2013).

Unlike many other state preK programs, Wisconsin's state 4K policy is low-regulation, with very few requirements for districts to meet. As a result of this open framework, districts can tailor their 4K program to reflect the needs of the community. In Wisconsin, there are examples of places, like LaCrosse, where this has occurred. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4, LaCrosse's 4K policy was the result of the early childhood community, the school district, and community stakeholders coming together to determine what children and families in the community needed. The story of 4K in Lakeville is far less straightforward, and the new relationship forged between the school district and the early childhood community as a result of 4K is fraught with tension. It was, in part, this tension that attracted me to Lakeville as a site for my research. I wanted to understand what it meant for teachers and children when the groups responsible for crafting policy did not always play well together. Lakeville was also an ideal site

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[2] All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

for my research because the policy was new; by studying the policy in its second year of implementation, I was able to understand key stakeholders' emerging understandings of the policy in its initial years of implementation.

In Lakeville Public School district (LPS), 4K was overseen by the school district but implemented in a mix of community ECE sites and public elementary schools. To understand what 4K policy did in Lakeville, I focus my analysis on the work of three 4K teachers located in three different institutions. I examine how these teachers understood and enacted the policy, and what policy came to mean to them and their institution. I find that the district policy, in positioning 4K as "real school" and distinct from ECE, reshaped relationships and hierarchies within and across institutions and made inequalities between ECE and public school teachers increasingly visible and relevant. This had very real effects on teachers' job satisfaction, school district-community site relations, and the structure of early childhood education in Lakeville, with serious implications for the status of ECE teachers, families' access to ECE programs, and children's early education experiences.

Conceptual Framework

I draw on sociocultural approaches to policy analysis and Bakhtin's notions of centrifugal and centripetal forces to frame this study. These ideas, taken together, provide an analytic tool and theoretical perspective to understand what, as a "productive social practice," educational policy does (Koyama, 2009, p. 21). For Sutton and Levinson (2001) policy is "an ongoing process of normative cultural production constituted by diverse actors across diverse social and institutional contexts" (p. 1). Rather than a linear process consisting of policy formulation, implementation, evaluation, and feedback, conceiving of policy as a social practice means that

policy is understood to be "a complex set of interdependent sociocultural practices" (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009, p. 768). Thus, a sociocultural approach is focused not on questions of policy effectiveness or fidelity of implementation. Instead, this approach asks: "What *is* policy? and What does policy *do*?" (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 769).

The ideas of early 20th century Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Bakthin complement this conceptualization of policy, providing a way to theorize how policy takes on different meanings in different contexts, how elements of policy are resisted and reshaped, and how policy creation and implementation is infused with struggles for power. In the sections that follow I describe the notion of "policy as practice" and discuss how Bakhtin's theories complement this critical approach to policy analysis.

Policy as Practice

The field of critical policy studies emerged in response to traditional policy research's lack of a social theory of policy and its failure to "openly address the assumptions and interests that go into policy formation itself, or question the nature of policy as a social practice of power" (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 769). Traditional policy research focused on determining whether policies produced intended outcomes; if a policy failed, the question was how the policy or local structures should be changed to create more favorable conditions for implementation (Honig, 2006). Levinson and his colleagues (2009) refer to this first generation of policy studies as a "managerial science" (p. 768) that rarely questioned the assumptions and ideologies woven into the fabric of a policy.

A critical approach to policy analysis requires understanding policy as a political phenomenon and a technology of power (Ball, 1994). Shore and Wright (1997b) explain:

…it is a feature of policies that their political nature is disguised by the objective, neutral, legal-rational idioms in which they are portrayed. In this guise, policies appear to be mere instruments for promoting efficiency and effectiveness. This masking of political power under the cloak of neutrality is a key feature of modern power" (p. 8).

By foregrounding the fact that policy and policy-making are infused with power, critical approaches seek to expose "the way that policy typically serves to reproduce existing structures of domination and inequality" (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 769).

Importantly, such studies attribute agency to the full range of actors who come into contact and engage with policies in different ways. This is a shift from the traditional view where actors like teachers and administrators were envisioned simply as recipients and implementers of policy mandates (Odden, 1991). Levinson and his colleagues (2009) employ the term *appropriation* instead of implementation as a way to make sense of local actors' engagement with policy as a "creative interpretive practice" (p. 768). Like others (e.g.,Coburn, 2001; Lipsky, 1980), they assert that when "nonauthorized policy actors—typically teachers and students, but possibly, too, building administrators—appropriate policy, they are in effect making new policy in situated locales and communities of practice" (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 768).

A sociocultural approach to policy analysis requires conceptualizing policy as a cultural phenomenon that shapes and is shaped by interactions between the actors, institutions, and discourses associated with the policy and the context in which it is implemented (Levinson et al., 2009; Shore & Wright, 1997b). Thus, policy is understood as a practice—more than just text and mandates. Here I find Ball's (1994) definition of policy particularly useful: "Policy is an 'economy of power', a set of technologies and practices which are realized and struggled over in local settings. Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as

what is intended" (p. 10). This view of policy necessitates a shift away from the traditional policy analysis paradigm. Honig (2006) summarized this shift in this way:

> Whereas past implementation research generally revealed *that* policy, people, and places affected implementation, contemporary implementation research specifically aims to uncover their various dimensions and *how and why interactions among these dimensions* shape implementation in particular ways (p. 14, emphasis in original).

In this study, I engage this approach by analyzing the multiple ways 4K was conceptualized by teachers, administrators, district officials, and official policy makers at the institutional, district, and state level. An in-depth exploration of policy appropriation and enactment in three local schools and ECE centers provides a window in to understanding how relationships between institutions, actors, and discourses shape what a policy comes to be in particular places and times, for particular people and institutions.

Bakhtin: Theorizing the Social

Bakhtin's work on dialogism and centrifugal/centripetal forces is germane to the notion of policy as practice. Bakhtin viewed the world as heteroglossic, or multi-voiced, such that any word or utterance has multiple, context-dependent meanings (Holquist, 2002). In such a world, meaning is made through dialogue; because of the existence of multiple languages and voices "there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 426). Bakhtin used the term dialogism to describe this phenomenon. Holquist (2002) explains:

> Dialogism argues that all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space,

where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to

political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideologies). (p. 21)

For this study of 4K policy implementation in Lakeville, dialogism is a way to think about policy practice as a mutually constitutive process. State policy frameworks shaped district policy creation and implementation, just as local actors shaped what district and state policy and policy discourses came to mean in their particular context.

Bakhtin asserted that a social world, characterized by multiple and competing voices producing meaning through dialogue, was necessarily "messy" and "unfinalizable" or open (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Again, for policy, it is impossible to know in advance all the possible consequences of a policy; we cannot know how a policy will be appropriated because the process depends on whom and what the policy comes into contact with and responds to.

Amid this messiness, centripetal forces attempt to create unity and order. Though this unity is incongruent with the realities of a heteroglossic world, "it makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystallizing into a real, although still relative, unity" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 270). Attempts to create unity and order are never fully successful because centrifugal forces simultaneously work to decentralize and destabilize unity and order. Centrifugal forces create disorder:

Alongside centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their

uninterrupted work; alongside the verbal ideological centralization and unification, the

uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward (Bakhtin, 1981,

p. 272).

4K in Lakeville could be understood as a collection of centripetal and centrifugal forces operating on various levels. Through its official 4K policy, the school district attempted to produce a singular vision of 4K: a tuition-free, play-based program, open to all four-year-olds, taught by a qualified teacher. As the policy was implemented, however, it took on different meanings in different sites and for different teachers. The multiple and varied meanings of 4K reshaped the contours of Lakeville's early childhood landscape and redefined relationships between and among individuals and institutions.

Relevant Literature

In this section I examine two concepts that provide a framework for my analysis of 4K policy enactment in Lakeville. I begin with an exploration of one of the central tenets of state preK—that it is a solution to the enduring achievement gap in education—and I argue that the notion that a purely academic intervention does not address societal structures that have historically limited academic achievement for students or color, nor does it respond to the broader needs of families with young children. Though Lakeville's 4K program did not attend to these structures, it was still experienced by children and families in a distinctly raced and classed way.

The second part of this section addresses the dynamics of bringing together two previously separate systems: ECE and K-12. Understanding the differences between the two systems—their different histories, approaches to curriculum and pedagogy, and teacher working conditions—is critical to understanding how Lakeville's 4K policy was enacted in public school and community sites, and why there was significant tension between ECE sites and the school district as the policy was rolled out.

PreK Access, Equity, and the Achievement Gap

As discussed above, a key justification for publicly funded preK is its ability to close the achievement gap between white students and students of color (Gormley & Phillips, 2005). The recent state preK movement has been successful in large part because it has been sold as an educational intervention that is particularly beneficial for children of color, based on the assumption that preK participation is a way for these children to "catch up" to their white peers. A closer look at the achievement gap discourse and children's experiences in preK, however, points to evidence that preK is not the straightforward policy solution to the achievement gap it appears to be.

At the most basic level, the logic behind closing the achievement gap is flawed. For students who lag behind to "catch up" to their peers requires the achievement of those at the top of the gap to stagnate, an unlikely possibility in a climate where educational futures are determined in large part by high-stakes tests. Ladson-Billings (2006) asserts:

> Those students who are achieving at acceptable levels are not waiting for those who are lagging behind to catch up with them. Thus, the primary premise of closing the gap rests on a notion of slowed performance at the top while there is simultaneous increased performance at the lower levels (p. 316).

Research suggests that ongoing efforts to close the achievement gap, particularly those that came with the federal No Child Left Behind act, have not only failed but have actually exacerbated racial inequalities in academic achievement (Hursh, 2007).

The focus on the achievement gap also situates the educational divide between white students and students of color as a contemporary issue to be solved with an education-based intervention. This obscures the fact that educational disadvantage has accrued to particular

populations over the course of this nation's history, as a result of structures and processes that have produced exclusion and discrimination. Ladson-Billings (2006, 2007) argues that this must be conceptualized as an "education debt", or "the cumulative effect of poor education, poor housing, poor health care, and poor government services [that create] a bifurcated society that leaves more than its children behind" (2006, p. 10). Conceptualized as an education debt, the disparities between white students and students of color require more than short-term, academically-focused solutions. Instead, any attempt to repay the education debt requires understanding low achievement in the context of the broader structures that shape students' educational trajectories, including the "health, wealth, and funding gaps that impede their school success" (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 316).

Positioned as an educational intervention, preK is a siloed attempt to mitigate this disadvantage. While Lakeville's universally accessible, free, part-day 4K program was a boon to some families and schools, it did not address the broader needs of families living in poverty, who likely required full-time care and additional support (e.g. health, nutrition, and access to social services). In addition, because of how the 4K program was structured, Lakeville's program did little to mitigate stratification in the district's education system; instead, the stratification was pushed down into 4K, with white middle- and upper-class families better able to access elite 4K programs and poor families limited to lower-quality programs or shut out of 4K altogether as a result of full-time care needs and a lack of 4K classes in low-income neighborhoods. When they did attend 4K, entering into the public education system at age four may have had very different implications for children of color than for their white peers. For example, in Chapter 5 I discuss the potential detrimental impact of 4K progress reports for African American boys, who are disproportionately suspended and expelled from preK programs.

In summary, looking critically at the notion of the achievement gap, and the idea that preK participation can eliminate this gap, challenges us to reconsider what this intervention means for children and families. In this dissertation, I illustrate how Lakeville's 4K policy came took on different meanings for families and children in the district.

The Tension of Bringing Together the Separate Worlds of K-12 and ECE

When state preK is implemented through a community-public school district partnership, as it was in Lakeville, it brings together two previously separate systems—K-12 and early childhood education (ECE)—with historically different aims. McCabe and Sipple (2011) note "Although both worlds have always provided care and education for children, the balance was tipped in the ECE world toward primary caregiving and social and emotional issues and in the K-12 world toward education, including reading, writing, and mathematics" (p. e2). While much is known about child outcomes related to preK participation, preK research has not, for the most part, attended to systemic impacts of the introduction of public preK (Morrissey, Lekies, & Cochran, 2007).

As K-12 and ECE are brought together for preK implementation, their differences become visible and important. In addition to different mechanisms for funding and regulation, the K-12 and ECE systems have distinctly different approaches to the curriculum and pedagogy, different requirements for teacher qualifications, and different labor histories. In the sections that follow I discuss the structural and philosophical differences that distinguish these systems from each other in order to provide a background for understanding why bringing the two worlds together is often filled with much tension and controversy. Understanding the differences

between the two systems is critical to making sense of why preK came to mean what it did in Lakeville's ECE centers and public schools.

System vs. Non-system. Most children in the U.S. under the age of five spend some time in a non-parental care setting. These settings are diverse, ranging from childcare centers, Head Start, or state preK, to informal arrangements with relatives and neighbors or unlicensed, in-home daycare providers. Given this range of services and multiplicity of funding streams, ECE has been called a "non-system" and a "patchwork quilt" (Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2008; Lowenstein, 2011). ECE programs have historically operated in the private sector, funded by tuition dollars and grants. When they receive federal funding, it is typically in the form of grants and subsidies that flow through state governments (Kamerman & Gatenio, 2003) or direct funding to individuals, in the form of tax credits and exclusions that families can use to reduce the burden of childcare or preschool expenses (Blank & Reisman, 1989; Rose, 2010). Head Start and state preK are exceptions to this way of funding ECE; these programs receive more systematic funding from state and federal sources.

The closest the U.S. has come to having a coherent ECE policy was the Child Development Act of 1971, which had bipartisan support but was eventually vetoed by President Nixon (Zigler & Gilman, 1996). The demise of this legislation, which would have created a federally-funded system of universal childcare, affirmed the government's position that responsibility for the care of young children lay with families and not the federal government, and closed off pathways for wholesale government involvement in child care (Bushouse, 2009; Rose, 2010). Thus, the non-system of ECE evolved, funded by a mix of sources and with no central vision articulated.

Although the American public education system is perhaps one of the most decentralized in the world, there are commonalities in the structure of the K-12 system across states and districts. Although each state sets its own policies with regard to K-12 education, the system is universally accessible to children and youth, per age-eligibility requirements (McCabe & Sipple, 2011). Edward Zigler once remarked: "School is the only universal entitlement children in America have, no other, none. And we never have to worry, will the schools open in the fall, they're always going to open" (Rose, 2010, p. 96). While there is great variation in curriculum, graduation requirements, teacher qualifications, and funding systems across states, all states invest in their public education infrastructure to some extent.

In the current accountability context, state K-12 systems are being brought closer together by federal policies like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT), with the federal government increasingly involved in monitoring K-12 education and states and school districts increasingly focused on aligning curriculum with standardized tests (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). Most recently, states' adoption of the Common Core Standards has "[established] clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts from kindergarten through 12th grade" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). Moreover, related assessments will be made available to states adopting the Common Core, creating additional consistency across states. These standards and accountability requirements, as well as federal provisions for students with special needs, create linkages between what McCabe and Sipple (2011) assert "is really a set of 50 systems" (p. e5).

When state preK brings the ECE and K-12 worlds together, each system must change in some way to accommodate the other. Because it is fragmented, market-driven, and relies primarily on private funding, the ECE system is more vulnerable to such changes than the

comparatively well-established K-12 system. For example, resistance to preK being brought into public elementary school buildings is not grounded in a concern the elementary grades will be negatively influenced by ECE approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. Rather, there is concern that the presence of preK in school buildings will result in an academic push-down or "schoolification" of ECE (Hatch, 2002; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006).

Beyond the fear that the academic approach of K-12 will seep into preK, bringing ECE and K-12 together raises financial concerns for ECE centers. As a new, free option for families, public preK has the potential to move large swaths of children out of private childcare and into public programs, to the detriment of ECE centers that do not participate in public preK. If the four-year-olds that constitute the financial base of ECE centers leave private centers to enroll in public programs, ECE centers, which rely primarily on tuition dollars for income, will have a difficult time keeping their doors open. Because of ratio requirements for state-licensed childcare programs, it is much more expensive to care for younger children than older children. For example, in Wisconsin, one teacher is required for every four infants; this ratio decreases as children get older, with four-year-olds requiring one teacher for every 13 children (Department of Children and Families, 2009). Childcare centers are therefore only able to recoup the high cost of infant care if they also enroll older children. While public elementary schools do not "need" four-year-olds to stay financially viable, most ECE centers *do*. As a result, public preK is more likely to have a negative financial impact on ECE centers than public schools.

Organization of the Curriculum. Perhaps the clearest distinction between ECE and the K-12 system is how learning is structured. Whereas teaching and learning in the elementary grades is

organized into subject areas and increasingly tied to academic standards, the curriculum in ECE is typically integrated, focused on developing the "whole child" (Goldstein, 2007; O'Day, 2002). The field of ECE has a long tradition of adhering to the principals of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), which emerged in response to concerns that an academic curriculum was being pushed down into ECE and the early elementary grades (Graue, 2008). DAP articulated a view of an early childhood professional who, steeped in knowledge of child development and her student's cultures, develops learning experiences that respond to and build on children's current abilities (Copple & Bredekamp, 2010; National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2009). Although DAP was intended to apply to children from birth through age nine, it never took hold in the elementary grades; current elementary education practices seem worlds away from the tenets of DAP (Graue, 2008).

In contrast to DAP's focus on individual children's development trajectories, the standards-based learning that dominates in the elementary grades is focused on preparing all children to demonstrate understanding of a common set of content standards. As this has become formalized through federal policies like NCLB and the Common Core State Standards, ECE has not been immune to the pressures of standards and standardization; although standardized testing under NCLB begins in third grade, pressure to prepare students for these tests has led to what Hatch (2002) called an "accountability shovedown," transforming approaches to teaching and learning in kindergarten and the early elementary grades (Dombkowski, 2001).

This long-standing philosophical divide between ECE and K-12 is brought into focus by the expansion of state preK. Because preK is caught between ECE and K-12, there is disagreement over whether it should be an extension of ECE or the first step on the K-12 ladder, with a curriculum and pedagogical practices based on developmentally appropriate practice or

organized around academic content areas like elementary school. Although researchers have suggested that the DAP versus standards debate does not have to be an either-or proposition (Brown, 2009; Goldstein, 2007), the issue raises important questions about the design of preK programs.

The Teaching Workforce. The minimum qualifications for teachers in ECE settings vary widely from state to state and program to program, but are often relatively low. For example, in Wisconsin, a childcare teacher must have taken a minimum of two college-level child development courses (Department of Children and Families, 2009). Such requirements are often set by state licensing bodies, and apply to regulated home- and center-based care. Requirements for teacher credentials in state preK vary by program, but generally call for a higher credential than that of childcare workers. In 2013, for example, 30 of 53 state-funded preK programs required teachers to hold a bachelors degree (Barnett et al., 2013). In contrast, K-12 teachers in most states are required to have a bachelor's degree and teaching license with a subject area or grade level specialization, and their work is "guided by the norms and practices of state-certified teachers and under the ongoing teacher contract" (McCabe & Sipple, 2011, p. e9).

Along with different requirements for teacher credentials in ECE and K-12 comes a dramatic difference in pay. While many public school teachers are underpaid by professional standards, the situation is even more dismal for the ECE workforce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average annual salary for childcare workers in 2013 was $21,490, or $10.33 per hour (United States Department of Labor, 2013c). Preschool teachers,[3] did a bit better,

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[3] The Bureau of Labor Statistics distinguishes between childcare workers and preschool teachers based on their primary responsibilities. According to the BLS, childcare workers "attend to children at schools, businesses, private households, and childcare institutions…and perform a variety of tasks, such as dressing, feeding, bathing, and overseeing play", whereas preschool teachers "Instruct preschool-aged children in activities designed to promote

earning $31,420 per year on average, but elementary school teachers made significantly more—
an average of $56,320 per year (United States Department of Labor, 2013a, 2013b). When it
comes to structural aspects of their work like salary, benefits, and working conditions, the K-12
teaching force is more professionalized than the ECE workforce. In addition, K-12 teachers are
often protected by labor unions, which can bargain on their behalf for fair wages and working
conditions. Most childcare workers have no such access to a mechanism that might lead to
improved wages and working conditions.

Though drastic inequalities in remuneration, work schedules, and benefits between these
two groups are problematic in their own right, public preK makes this inequality more visible
and relevant. McCabe and Sipple (2011) provide the following very poignant example of why
this is so:

> Two prekindergarten teachers with similar years of experience, both teaching 18 four-
> year-old students in the same school building, right next door to each other in nearly
> identical classrooms. To the casual observer, these teachers and prekindergarten
> classrooms function the same, but one teacher's salary is more than US $12,000 greater
> than the other. Why? One is an employee of Head Start and the other is an employee of
> the public school system. (p. e3)

This example illustrates the very real tensions that emerge when policy brings the ECE and K-12
systems together in new ways. While it might appear that a simple fix for this issue would to
require higher qualifications for ECE teachers and to raise their wages to equal that of K-12
teachers, such a change would put enormous stress on an already "undercapitalized,
economically fragile industry" (Stoney, Mitchell, & Warner, 2009, p. 106), pose a challenge for

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social, physical, and intellectual growth needed for primary school in preschool, day care center, or other child
development facility." This parsing of responsibilities is problematic and reinforces the divide between care and
education by assuming that childcare has no educative function.

ECE teachers who, because of low wages and poor working conditions, have little opportunity to upgrade their qualifications (Ackerman, 2006), and potentially make public preK an economically unfeasible option for cash-strapped states.

The philosophies and traditions of the ECE and K-12 systems serve as an important backdrop for understanding what preK policy does in communities like Lakeville. When state preK is implemented as it was in Lakeville—in public schools and ECE centers, under the direction of the school district—tension arises because these institutions take different approaches to teaching and learning. Understanding the differences between theses systems makes it possible to locate teachers' actions within the broader structures that create particular opportunities and constraints for them to make sense of and implement policy.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three parts. Part I consists of the Introduction (Chapter 1) and Methodology (Chapter 2). In Part II, I outline the context for the study through an examination of preK policy at the national (Chapter 3), state (Chapter 4) and district level (Chapter 5). These chapters provide a context for understanding how 4K teachers' work in Lakeville related to broader structures, forces, and policies. The chapters in Part III provide an analysis of the three sites in which I conducted this research. Chapter 6 is about Friendship Preschool and Linda Jenkins' work as a 4K teacher, Chapter 7 highlights the work of Grace Calden at Forest Grove elementary school, and Chapter 8 introduces Bright Start Childcare Center and 4K teacher Megan Stevenson. In these chapters I start with an overview of the institution and situate preK policy enactment within this context, so that the focus of my analysis

is on how the multiple contexts of teachers' work informed their appropriation of the policy and shaped what preK came to mean at their site.

In Part IV, I turn my attention to comparisons across cases and conclusions and policy recommendations. In Chapter 9 I examine how Lakeville's 4K policy made existing inequalities between ECE and public school teachers visible and reshaped relationships, creating new hierarchies within and across institutions. Finally, in Chapter 10 I summarize the findings and provide a set of recommendations and considerations for preK policy.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In this chapter I describe the methodology used to conduct this study. I begin with the questions that framed the study and provide a rationale for the approach I employed to answer those questions. I also discuss my rationale for sampling and the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Research Questions

> Teachers are the vital agents of [policy] implementation…who…decide ultimately whether and in what ways policy proposals get worked out in classroom practice. If the only policy that matters is that which the client—America's children—receives, then what teachers do in their classroom is critical (Spillane, 2004, p. 114).

This quote, which reflects Lipsky's (1980) notion of teachers as street-level bureaucrats and Ball's (1994) assertion that policy is both text *and* action and that policy texts are rarely, if ever, implemented as written, summarizes how I think about policy appropriation and enactment and why I chose to focus on teachers in this study. How teachers enact a policy is as important as what the policy text says because teachers' classroom practices shape young children's experiences. With this in mind, I set out to understand Lakeville's 4K policy through the words and actions of 4K teachers. The following question guided this inquiry:

How do 4K teachers understand, appropriate, and enact Lakeville's 4K policy?

Three sub-questions provided additional direction for my research:

- What forces affect teachers' appropriation and enactment of the policy?
- How is teachers' enactment of 4K related to and informed by 4K policy-as-written and the information they receive from colleagues, school administrators, and district early childhood specialists?
- What resources and networks do teachers draw on as they make sense of 4K policy?

My questions were broad because my approach to the research was interpretivist; I sought to understand policy implementation through my participants' practices and perspectives (Crotty, 1998).[4] Although I had ideas about what the policy might mean for teachers, based on a pilot study I conducted and my own experiences in different early childhood settings, I wanted to know what mattered to the teachers in my study, and I pursued analytic themes that arose during interviews and observations.

Vertical Case Study

> In a vertical case study, understanding of the micro-level is viewed as part and parcel of larger structures, forces, and policies about which the researcher must also develop a full and thorough knowledge (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006, p. 96).

Although I was interested in teachers as "street-level bureaucrats" whose actions "*are* the policies provided by governments in important respects" (Lipsky, 1980, p. xvi), I also wanted to understand teachers' actions in relation to other stakeholders tasked with implementing the policy. Researchers have taken different approaches to understanding how policy moves; scholars in the field of anthropology of policy conceptualize this as "studying through" (Shore & Wright, 1997a) while others use an ecological metaphor to make sense of the interrelated webs of knowledge, power, and action that inform policy-making and implementation (Weaver-Hightower, 2008). I employ Vavrus and Bartlett's (2006, 2009, 2014) vertical case study approach as a framework for investigating teachers' actions during a particular moment in history and in relation to the discourses and actions of stakeholders at different levels of scale.

Vertical case study is an appropriate tool for this task because it "strives to situate local

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[4] Crotty (1998) notes that an interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (p. 67).

action and interpretation within a broader cultural, historical, and political investigation" (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006, p. 96). As Vavrus and Bartlett (2006) explain:

> The vertical case should be grounded in a principal site—e.g., a school, a community, an institution, or a government ministry—and should fully attend to the ways in which historical trends, social structures, and national and international forces shape local processes at this site…[I]n a vertical case study, understanding of the micro- level is viewed as part and parcel of larger structures, forces, and policies about which the researcher must also develop a full and thorough knowledge (p. 96).

A vertical case study requires analysis of vertical, horizontal, and transversal elements. The vertical element entails attending to what is happening at different levels of scale (e.g. micro, meso, and macro) and horizontal analysis "compares how similar policies unfold in distinct locations that are socially produced" and connected in some way (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014, p. 131). Finally, the transversal element looks at how policies and practices have been appropriated over time: "The transversal element reminds us to study *across and through* levels to explore how globalizing processes intersect and interconnect people and policies that come into focus at different scales" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014, p. 131).

In this study, I analyze Lakeville's 4K policy by examining it in relation to preK at the national and state level. This vertical element of the analysis provides a lens to understanding what goes on in the district and individual schools and community sites as situated within a broader set of political, social, and economic relations that structure how 4K policy is conceptualized and implemented. Through horizontal comparisons of three teachers' work in one district I demonstrate how a particular 4K policy creates and perpetuates hierarchies and inequalities that affect individuals and institutions. Each teacher's experience also engages with

different vertical elements such as: debates over teacher qualifications and compensation and provision of services in ECE centers versus school sites. I address the transversal element of vertical case study by situating this study within the recent expansion of public preK and the debates that have surrounded this expansion, examining how thinking about preK (and education more broadly) has shifted over time and created the conditions for the 4K policy to be envisioned and implemented as it was.

Pilot Study

Though the bulk of data collection spanned from October 2012 to July 2013, my investigation of 4K in Lakeville first began in October 2011. At that time, I was planning to conduct a similar study of Tanzanian early childhood education policy for my dissertation research. My participation in a year-long ethnographic methods course, however, necessitated the development of a small project through which I could gain experience with ethnographic methods for data collection and analysis. I designed a vertical case study of 4K policy in Lakeville as a proxy for my intended dissertation research. When circumstances changed and I decided to move my research to a domestic site, I realized that I had already laid the groundwork for this study. I had obtained IRB and Lakeville school district research clearance for the pilot study, which consisted of 40 hours of participant observation in three 4K classrooms and interviews with six 4K teachers, three administrators, and three members of the 4K advisory committee. I also attended a school board meeting about 4K, a 4K steering committee meeting, and one meeting of non-public school administrators involved in 4K. In addition, I interviewed administrators whose schools had decided not to offer 4K or who were not eligible to provide

4K, as well as a kindergarten teacher who shared her views on how 4K was being implemented at her public elementary school.

This preliminary research provided initial insights into 4K in Lakeville; it helped me assemble the cast of characters and begin to understand some of the dynamics of policy implementation. I met some of the key players and observed 4K classrooms in different institutional contexts, including two public elementary schools and a non-profit childcare center. Because the pilot study occurred during the first year of 4K in Lakeville Public School District (LPS), I was able to observe some of the growing pains associated with creating new linkages between private childcare centers and the school district. I heard teachers whose prior experience was in early childhood or elementary settings describe their transition into the 4K world, and I watched as they struggled to make sense of their new role. I learned from administrators about their attempts to make the world of childcare legible to school district officials and about what not being eligible to be a 4K site meant for community childcare centers. These observations and interactions informed the design of my dissertation research, helping me refine my research questions and select sites and focal teachers.

In addition to serving as background for my dissertation research, I use pilot study data in my analysis, drawing on observations from 4K steering committee meetings and interviews with teachers, administrators, and other 4K stakeholders to understand how 4K was conceptualized at the district level and in individual 4K sites over the past three years. These perspectives from teachers, administrators, and stakeholders outside the focal sites enriched my analysis by showing that teachers and administrators at similar types of institutions shared similar experiences and concerns and by indicating to me when something I observed in the three focal sites might not be common to other such settings. In addition, two of the 4K teachers and one

administrator I interviewed during the pilot study wound up participating in my dissertation research, which has enhanced the data corpus and helped me better understand these sites and how shifts in the teachers' work has related to the 4K policy and their institutional context over time.

Sampling and Site Selection

As I designed this project, I knew that I needed to look at policy enactment in several different sites. Because Lakeville's 4K program is provided in a range of public school and community sites, the research sites needed to reflect some of this diversity. Ideally, the sites would be different types of institutions that served different populations of children. As I began to identify potential sites, I found that the former was easier to figure out than the latter. While I wanted to include sites that were different from each other in terms of children's race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, this was more difficult to do because all 4K sites are technically open to all children in the school district and because childcare does not map onto neighborhood school enrollment boundaries.[5] Because of this, I decided to focus on institution type as a primary selection criterion. I hoped that studying teachers' practice in a public school, a private non-profit preschool, and a private for-profit corporate childcare center would provide insight into the variety of ways teachers experience and implement 4K policy, and help me to understand something about the role of institution type in policy enactment.

Sampling a range of institutions led to diversity in student populations. The research sites, because of their location, fee structure, and the services they provided, catered to different

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[5] Families do not necessarily enroll children in childcare programs located in their neighborhood. Parents may choose sites that are close to work or on the way to work, among other considerations. Thus, the population of a childcare center may not reflect the demographics of the neighborhood the way the demographics of a public elementary school are likely to reflect its attendance area.

populations, stratified mainly along socioeconomic lines. Along with creating a sample that reflected the different types of sites in which 4K was provided, I wanted to understand how teachers experienced 4K as it compared to what was happening at their site prior to 4K because I thought that hearing teachers talk about what had changed since 4K was introduced might help me understand how they experienced and responded to the policy. For this reason, a key selection criterion was that the 4K focal teacher had worked at her institution prior to the introduction of 4K. Finally, though unrelated to the study, a limiting factor for site selection was transportation; I would be traveling to sites via public transportation, so I only considered schools that were easily accessible by city bus.[6]

As much as I struggled to define my selection criteria, it turned out that identifying the types of sites and teachers that would be ideal for my study was the easy part. Gaining access was easy in some cases and completely frustrating in others. The first site I identified was Friendship Preschool, the non-profit part-day preschool site. Access to Friendship was straightforward: Denise Sanderson, the school's lead administrator had already participated in my pilot study and warmly welcomed me back to her school. She forwarded my email to her 4K teachers and Linda Jenkins indicated her interest. I had also already met and interviewed Linda during the pilot study, so the transition to more intensive research at the site was relatively fluid. I began observations and interviews at Friendship in October 2012.

After identifying Friendship Preschool as a research site, I began contacting elementary school principals. Because Friendship serves a relatively affluent and majority white population, I looked for schools with greater diversity and where large percentage of students qualified for

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[6] Transportation was a limitation, but because the bus system was fairly comprehensive, I felt that I had a lot of very good options within easy striking distance. Bright Start was the farthest bus ride—about 30 minutes with a transfer. Although bus rides initially felt like a waste of time, I began to realize that this downtime was productive; it created time and space to prepare for the day ahead and, at the end of the day, to begin processing what I had seen and heard.

free and reduced lunch.[7] After consulting online data sheets for a number of schools, I contacted five principals to gauge their interest. Dr. Carol Taylor at Forest Grove Elementary School was the only principal who agreed to host my research and 4K teacher Grace Calden was a willing participant who met my selection criteria.[8] Again, the fact that I had already spent some time at Forest Grove in Mrs. Calden's classroom meant that entering the field was a relatively seamless process, and I was able to begin classroom observations in December 2012.

Bright Start Childcare Center was the last site I was able to identify and access. I had originally been in contact with a 4K teacher at another corporate childcare center who was willing to participate in the research. Beth Graue had recommended this teacher as someone whose work had changed significantly since the start of 4K; she started the day in one location and ended in another. After exchanging several emails with the teacher, I spoke with the director of the center, who told me that she would need approval from the corporation before granting access. The process of getting an answer from the District Manager took several weeks. When I finally was able to reach the center's director, she informed me that they would not be able to participate in the research. I conveyed this information to the 4K teacher, who told me she wished she could have participated, but that "businesses are very different from schools". She also expressed her desire to find a position in Lakeville Public Schools, but said that she had thus far been unsuccessful. I was surprised by how difficult it was to negotiate access to a corporate childcare center; I had not anticipated that the corporate hierarchy would be more difficult to navigate than the school district bureaucracy. The time it took to determine whether this teacher could participate in my research is illustrative of the complex chain of command this teacher

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[7] Qualification for free and reduced lunch is used as a proxy for poverty or low-income status.
[8] The other principals I contacted told me that they or their teachers were already involved in one or more research studies and therefore did not want to participate in mine.

must respond to and, perhaps, a fear on the part of the corporation to opening itself up to scrutiny.

By the time this was all sorted out, it was already November. I made contact with a Bright Start site I had identified through the corporate website. The center was easily accessible by bus and in a different neighborhood from Friendship and Forest Grove. After a phone call with the director and a visit to the center, I thought I finally had my third site, but then the contact evaporated without explanation. With the holidays and school break rapidly approaching, I decided to spend as much time as possible in the classrooms I had already identified and work on finding a third site in January. In mid-January, during an interview with Denise Sanderson, the director of Friendship Preschool, I mentioned I was still looking for a corporate childcare center to participate in my study. Denise recommended Maura Evans, the director at a different Bright Start location than the one I had previously contacted, and said I could use her name when I made the contact. Once I got in touch with Maura, the rest of the process was easy. Megan Stevenson, the 4K teacher, was happy to participate, and I began fieldwork at Bright Start in February 2013.

At each site, after initial email or phone contact, I set up a meeting with the prospective focal teacher and the site administrator to further explain what the research would entail and to answer any questions. After they agreed to host my research, I asked the administrators and focal teachers for consent and provided them with a letter for parents explaining my presence in the classroom. Other participants were consented at the time of their interview.

Fieldwork and Data Collection

I conducted field work from October 2012 to June 2013, and data collection officially concluded in July 2013 with the final focal teacher interview of the study. Over the course of the academic year, I conducted 80 to 100 hours of participant observation in each site (Spradley, 1980). My original intent was to observe the three classrooms simultaneously so that I could see how the school year unfolded in each setting. As I described in the previous section, I was not able to gain access to each site right away, so my entrance to the sites was staggered. While this meant that I was unable to observe a full academic year at each site, the benefit of this approach was that I was able to spend a concentrated amount of time in each classroom at the start of my research there. The first month of research in each site was intensive; I observed in the classroom two to three days a week over a span of three to four weeks. Observing for multiple days and weeks in a row enabled me to understand not only the flow of a typical day and daily routines, but also how concepts and themes were taught and explored over time.[9] Toward the end of the research period, I was in each classroom about once each week. My classroom observations concluded in early June when the public school year ended.

During classroom observations I focused my time by following the teacher as she moved through the classroom. Observations typically lasted anywhere from three to six hours, depending on the site. At Friendship, I observed the morning 4K session and sometimes lunch bunch because Linda only taught in the morning. At Forest Grove and Bright Start, where the teachers taught both morning and afternoon sessions, I would observe either the morning or afternoon session, or the full day. I tried to observe an equal number of morning and afternoon

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[9] All three focal teachers used some sort of theme-based approach to planning, although they varied with regard to how strongly the theme determined classroom activities. Themes typically lasted anywhere from two to four weeks, depending on the site and theme.

sessions in these two sites so that I could see teachers' interactions with different groups of children.

I typed field notes on an iPad during classroom observations. After each observation I expanded my notes and wrote memos about what I had seen and heard (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I also used the iPad to take pictures during my observations. Though I did not obtain permission to use pictures of teachers or students in papers or presentations, having the pictures with my field notes helped to trigger my memory of events that I observed. I also took many pictures of the classroom environment and documented how, if at all, the environment changed from day to day or week to week. Though the iPad was a convenient tool for recording field notes, I worried initially that it would be distracting to the students. I quickly found out that the children were neither bothered nor impressed by the iPad; it was not a novelty to these children, many of whom likely had experience using similar devices (if not tablets, then smart phones were familiar to most) at home.

In addition to classroom observations, I attended several "policy events" with each focal teacher (Braun, Maguire, & Ball, 2010). I conceptualized policy events as times when teachers got information about or interacted with others in relation to their teaching practice or the 4K policy. The policy events I attended included: one school board meeting about 4K, three 4K Steering Committee meetings, four curriculum planning meetings (two each at Friendship and Forest Grove), four staff meetings (two at Friendship, one each at Forest Grove and Bright Start), and two changeovers (Friendship). Observations in this range of settings helped me to better understand the nested contexts in which teachers' work was situated and the diverse resources they drew on as they navigated the 4K policy and constructed their teaching practice.

Participant observation was complemented by semi-structured interviews with focal teachers, administrators, and other relevant stakeholders (Bernard, 2011). I conducted at least two interviews with each focal teacher. I was able to interview Linda and Grace three times because I interviewed each of them once during the pilot study. Interviews with Linda and Grace occurred after the school day was over, while my interviews with Megan occurred in her classroom during naptime on a non-4K day and over the phone.[10] For each interview I developed a set of initial questions to use as a guide. I followed the interview protocol more closely during the first interview with each teacher, but there was greater variation in subsequent interviews because I asked questions specific to the site or related to things I had observed in the classroom. In addition to focal teacher interviews, I interviewed the administrator at each site once (I interviewed Denise Sanderson at Friendship twice because she had been part of the pilot study), as well as Linda's co-teacher, Melissa.

The vertical design of this study necessitated interviews with stakeholders at different levels of policy implementation. Thus, teacher and administrator interviews are complemented by interviews with state legislators, Department of Public Instruction officials, City of Lakeville officials, and other stakeholders involved in Lakeville's 4K policy creation and implementation.[11] Interviews with state- and district-level stakeholders helped me to understand how 4K was conceptualized at these levels of implementation, providing a basis for

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[10] I found it interesting that Megan would only schedule an interview during the time she was "on the clock". The only reason our second interview occurred in the evening, on the phone, was because Megan had a family emergency on the day we had originally scheduled the final interview. Though perhaps a minor detail, the scheduling of interviews indicates something about teachers' work and views of themselves as professionals. Megan, whose working conditions were least ideal of the three teachers, resisted doing anything work-related outside the time she was being paid by the corporation. In contrast, Linda and Grace would never have scheduled an interview during the time they were with children and found it natural to work outside their scheduled hours.

[11] Interviews with state legislators and DPI officials were conducted as part of Beth Graue and Sharon Ryan's project titled *Life in Early Childhood Settings*. I conducted fieldwork for this project as a project assistant during the same time I was doing my dissertation research, and the co-PIs agreed to let me draw on state-level interview data in my own analysis.

understanding teachers' local understanding and implementation of 4K. One of the limitations of the study is that I was unable to interview anyone from the Lakeville school district. I tried on several occasions to set up interviews with LPS officials involved in 4K implementation, but no one agreed to speak with me. Thus, what I was able to learn about how the school district made sense of 4K came from school board meetings and 4K Steering Committee meetings, where I observed district officials interacting with community site administrators and teachers, and teachers' and administrators' perspectives of the district's role in 4K.

Researcher Positionality and Role

Like the three teachers in my study, I am a white, middle-class woman. I came to this study with experience as an early childhood teacher and administrator. Prior to and during graduate school, I taught preschool and kindergarten, and had worked in a variety of childcare settings. When I was unable to find a teaching job in the year before I started my doctoral studies, I took a position as the assistant director of a childcare center near Lakeville. During that year I learned a lot about the childcare industry and I became familiar with Wisconsin state licensing regulations for childcare centers. This knowledge helped me understand some of what went on at the community sites in my study.

These prior experiences provided me with some initial credibility with the focal teachers—I had been in the trenches and could speak the language of ratios, portfolios, and developmental milestones. I knew something of how early childhood classrooms worked, and I could interact with children easily. While this insider status helped me to build rapport with teachers, it also created blind spots, leading me to assume I knew what was going on when I actually did not. In my attempt to make the familiar strange, I undoubtedly fell short. At the same

time, having had little experience with public schools (my teaching experience has been in private schools) and no experience with state preK or Wisconsin 4K, I had lots of questions about how 4K worked and what, exactly, "building the plane while flying it" meant (Denise, January 2012 interview).

Finally, during the research period I was simultaneously engaged in data collection for another qualitative study of 4K in Wisconsin. Though the focus of this study was different—children's experiences in 4K—it meant that I was spending six additional days each month in 4K classrooms in two other school districts. In short, I spent a lot of time in 4K during the 2012-13 school year. Working on two projects was challenging at times because of all the moving parts—schedules to manage, communication to keep up with—and the sheer amount of time it took to write up field notes from four, sometimes five, observations each week. In spite of this, and the fact that district policies, sites, and pseudonyms sometimes blurred together, working on this project undoubtedly strengthened my own research. Not only did I benefit from ongoing mentoring from Beth Graue, one of the co-PIs, but observing how 4K was conceptualized and implemented in two other districts, by two other teachers, helped me to better understand 4K in Lakeville.

My role in each Lakeville classroom varied depending on the teacher and students. After obtaining permission from the principal or director and 4K teacher, I worked with individual teachers to set up observation dates and times. I told teachers that my role was mainly to observe their behaviors and interactions in the classroom and asked about their preferences with regard to my presence in the classroom (e.g. was there a particular place they wanted me to sit). Across the sites, variation in how teachers introduced me (or failed to) to the class seemed to shape my role in the classroom and how I was perceived by the students.

On my first day at Friendship Preschool, Linda introduced me to the class during the morning meeting and explained why I would be visiting their classroom. During morning meeting the following day, she asked the children if they remembered my name and what I was doing in their classroom. The children responded: "Kids," "How they learn," and "How they be quiet" (Field notes, 10/23/12). After this, for the duration of the school year, I was often included in whole-group activities such as answering the "question of the day" (the teachers did this, too), and the class greeted me each morning during their large group meeting after greeting the other teachers. When I returned after a week or two away from the classroom, the children asked where I had been. During choice time they frequently asked me to play with them or assist them with a task. When I was invited into children's play, I usually accepted the invitation. I always helped children who requested it, though sometimes this meant checking with a teacher first (e.g. George wants me to take him across the hall to show another teacher how much the class runner bean plant has grown in the past few weeks). One child, Henry, took a particular liking to me. On days that I visited the class, he would greet me shyly at the start of the session, invite me to play with him during choice time, and draw pictures and make cards for me. The teachers encouraged this interaction and would say things to Henry like, "Tell Bethany what you told me you wanted to tell her." On my last day at Friendship, the teachers provided a special snack—cookies—for my last day, and Henry presented me with a card the children had all signed.

My introduction and integration into classroom life at Forest Grove was an entirely different experience. I was never formally introduced to the class; from the children's perspective, I just appeared from time to time. At one point early on, Mrs. Calden explained to the children that I was not a teacher and that they should not approach me for assistance. She told them that I was there to learn about 4K and that they should not interrupt my work. Mrs. Calden

never told the children my name and they never asked. The children's lack of interest in me was not surprising, given the steady stream of volunteers and teachers that moved through the classroom on a daily basis. The children were accustomed to new faces and unconcerned by them. Ignoring the comings and goings of visitors was also something that Mrs. Calden explicitly taught the children; on several occasions, she reminded children that even if a visitor enters the room, they are to focus their attention on the teacher in front of them. She told them they were not to say hello or goodbye to visitors, but to remain focused on the task or activity at hand.

In spite of this, over time, children in the afternoon class (less so in the morning class) began to approach me from time to time, asking me to help them spell a word, play a game, or read a book to them. Once, I was even invited to participate in dramatic play, though I was quickly brushed aside when one of the girl's peers joined in the play. During our informal conversations at lunch time and after school, Mrs. Calden would comment on my interactions with children during the school day. She was particularly excited on the day that I told her I sat with Juan as he arranged magnetic letters to spell his name. She had seen the final product but, because I was sitting with him at that time, I was able to fill in the process details for her and provide her with a picture to use in his portfolio. Though Mrs. Calden supported my interactions with the children, she was also concerned about me feeling put out or distracted from my own work because of them. Mrs. Calden always refused my offers of assistance, like when I would offer to help her tidy the room or clean the tables between 4K sessions, on the grounds that I was in the classroom to do my work and not hers.

At Bright Start, Megan introduced me to the children and then referred to me by name several times over the course of my observations. For several weeks, each day that I returned to observe in the classroom, the children greeted me with questions: "What are you doing here

again?" and "How many times are you going to come to our classroom?" I explained that there was a lot to learn about 4K, so I had to keep coming back until summer. After a few weeks I ceased to be a novelty and the questions died down. Though one boy in the afternoon session, Zeke, seemed particularly interested in me, the rest of the children alternated between appearing to not care about my presence and being interested in me as a subject of investigation and potential playmate. During choice time I periodically received invitations to play. Dash frequently enlisted me as playmate on the playground, a phenomenon that did not occur at other sites. Children also initiated conversation with me on a regular basis, with topics ranging from my clothing to whether I had seen a particular movie to something they had done the night before.

My interactions with students at each site did not necessarily correlate to my relationship with the teachers. Though I engaged least with the students at Forest Grove, I came to know their teacher, Mrs. Calden, the best of the three focal teachers. Perhaps it was because we had more opportunities to chat informally—before school and during the 45 minute break between the AM and PM 4K sessions— or that our husbands share the same name, but Mrs. Calden and I connected on a personal level in a way that I did not connect with the other teachers. Mrs. Calden was the only teacher who I told I was pregnant after our last interview in June; her eyes welled up with tears and she gave me a big hug, telling me I was already a wonderful mother. We have exchanged several emails since then, and I visited her this past June to introduce her to my son and hear about her year. As we parted ways we exchanged personal email addresses, promising to keep in touch. Over the course of the research, Mrs. Calden let me in to her classroom in ways that the other teachers did not. After a troubling exchange with a student or parent, Mrs. Calden would often ask for my opinion, often seeking positive reinforcement for how she had handled

the situation. Mrs. Calden's interviews were candid and emotional; she did not need much prompting to talk at length about her experiences.

At Friendship I felt well known. The 4K children all knew me by name, I was introduced to all of the teachers at the preschool, and I developed enough rapport with Denise that I could joke around with her when we passed each other in the hallway. Spending time with Linda and her co-teacher, Melissa, during a changeover felt comfortable, and our conversations would range in topic from their children and career aspirations to the politics of 4K. Friendship was also a place that felt familiar to me because I had worked in several preschools that served a similar population; I knew the cultural codes and could navigate the environment with ease. Though conversations with Linda could be awkward at times, she often expressed her genuine interest in my research and in helping in any way she could. Linda and I did not have a lot in common, and our interactions were halting at times, but her classroom was a place that felt comfortable and familiar.

Bright Start was a different story. The place felt familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. It reminded me of much of what I did not like about the year I spent as the assistant director of a childcare center, where new policies were frequently put in place without staff input, and their feedback was not welcome. There was a lot of resentment toward the center's director (and probably me) because teachers were often fired with little warning. It felt like everything we as administrators did was reactionary; rather than build strong relationships with teachers and provide them with the support they needed to be successful, we relied on disciplinary action and new policies to get the results we desired. It is easy to see how this approach would lead to a staff that was disgruntled, disempowered, and always looking for a better opportunity.

Bright Start bore some resemblance to that center. Teachers often complained about policies or the administration under their breath or quite openly. Interactions between teachers took precedence over teachers' interactions with children, and the rich discussions about curriculum and pedagogy that I observed at Friendship and Forest Grove were replaced by complaints about how many people had called in sick that day, and what this meant for teachers' breaks and ability to go leave when their shift ended. With time, I got used to teachers' style of interaction and came to appreciate how deeply Megan cared about her students and how well she was able to connect with their parents. Some aspects of the institution never ceased to bother me, however. For example, I was appalled to see a teacher give a group of three and four-year-olds Nerds candy at 7:30 in the morning as a reward for not talking while she was reading aloud to them. This event troubled me on two levels. First, I did not think that the teacher should have been giving the children candy at all, let alone at 7:30am. Second, and more problematic, was the premise of the activity. The activity seemed designed for the teacher's own entertainment and what the children were learning was how to sit quietly rather than how to make predictions based on context clues or how to ask questions about a text.

Though getting used to Bright Start took some time (and required constant awareness of my white, middle class lens), Megan was, in many ways, an ideal participant. Easy-going and frank, she never hesitated to respond to my question, often with a juicy answer. Although she was forthcoming as an interviewee, I found it difficult to get to know Megan. Our conversations were often stilted, and on days that I ate lunch with Megan between the two 4K sessions I always felt like I was intruding or bothering her. This likely had something to do with the fact that Megan had little time to herself during her work day—her half hour lunch break was the only time during her shift that Megan was not responsible for supervising children. Megan rarely told

me anything that I did not specifically ask about, and as I look back over my interview transcripts, I realize that I did not ask enough follow-up questions. Because of this, my data from Bright Start is the least rich; it feels like it has a lot of holes.

Analysis

As I expanded field notes and transcribed interviews, I uploaded the data to Dedoose, a data analysis software. During the data collection period, I wrote analytic memos in Dedoose to explore themes and patterns that emerged in interviews and observations and to keep track of questions that had arisen. Prior to each teacher's final interview, I re-read their previous interview transcript(s) and my analytic memos related to their classroom in order to refine my interview questions. This process helped to ensure that interview questions were tailored to the different contexts and phenomena observed there.

After data collection was complete, I read through the entire data set to familiarize myself with the data. I then developed first cycle structural codes, or "question-based codes" (Saldana, 2009, p. 66), to begin categorizing interview data by broad themes. I also developed descriptive codes for classroom observations. These codes addressed the daily activities, routines, and interactions that occurred in the 4K classrooms, enabling me to begin to see patterns and make comparisons across sites. As I coded interview transcripts and field notes, I wrote analytic memos about themes and patterns that emerged (Saldana, 2009, 2011).

After this initial round of coding, I read through coded excerpts and collapsed or eliminated redundant codes. For example, I had a "curriculum" code with sub-codes like "literacy" and "math." When first cycle coding was complete, I realized these codes were too specific for the analytic themes I was developing, so I merged the sub-codes with the

"curriculum" code so that any aspect of the curriculum (observed in the classroom or discussed in interviews) would be coded "curriculum." At this time I also began writing case descriptions of each of the focal teachers and their institutions. Writing through the data at this stage of the analysis proved extremely useful and was what ultimately pushed my analysis to the next level. From this writing, which was initially clunky and inclusive of almost every theme I considered important, I was able to distill the story I wanted my dissertation to tell. As I wrote and re-wrote the case descriptions, I honed in on teachers' professional identities and career aspirations, and what 4K came to mean for each institution and teacher.

Next I began a second cycle of coding, applying these broad themes to the interview data (Saldana, 2009). As with the first, the second cycle of coding involved a lot of writing. As I coded interview transcripts I wrote about how each teacher conceptualized what it meant to be an early childhood professional and how this intersected with her career aspirations. This became the first draft of Chapter 9. As I reread and revised this chapter, I decided that what I really wanted it to be about was broader than professionalization, so I went back to the data and coded for themes related to inequality and hierarchies. This process involved re-reading interviews and field notes in order to understand: how teachers were making sense of their work and working conditions in relation to others in their school and across the district, how teachers and administrators explained the changes that had occurred at their site after the 4K program began, and how the daily interactions I observed among teachers and between 4K teachers and their administrators related to these claims.

Coding field notes from classroom observations presented a greater challenge than coding interview transcripts. First, I had a lot of pages of data. At one point I thought I would print my notes so that I could read them in hard copy. After compiling all of my notes into a pdf

and realizing that I had close to 400 pages, I abandoned this tactic. Instead, I started by coding several days worth of notes from each site, using codes that helped to break down the structure and flow of the day. For example, I coded for large and small group activities, teacher-student interaction, and curriculum, among many others. This helped me familiarize myself with the data and start to see similarities and differences across sites. Once I developed second level codes from interview data, I was able to go back to the whole body of my field notes in a more focused way, looking for examples of the themes in teachers' practice.

A Note about Names

One of the things I struggled with as I wrote the chapters about the individual sites was how to refer to the teachers in my writing. Using their proper titles—Mrs. Jenkins, Ms. Stevenson, Mrs. Calden—would be a way to recognize and show them the respect they deserve as professionals. In two of the classrooms, however, children addressed teachers by their first name. At Forest Grove, which was not surprising given that it is a public elementary school, this was not the case. Once, the children tried to test the limits and Mrs. Calden made it clear that they were not on a first name basis with her.

> *After Mrs. Calden gives her some goldfish crackers for snack, Nellie says, "Thank you, Grace!" Fiona chimes in, "Thank you, Grace!" The girls and some other kids giggle, and the two girls definitely look like they're testing the boundaries – they know they're not supposed to call their teacher by her first name. Mrs. Calden says calmly, "Grace is my name and I love Grace, but at school you call me Mrs. Calden", and the whole episode is over.* (Field notes, 1/17/13)

In the end, I decided to use the names that the teachers used in their classrooms. Therefore, this is a story about Linda, Mrs. Calden, and Megan.

Triangulation

An assumption of interpretivist research is the existence of multiple perspectives or interpretations of the same event. Stake (1995) asserts that with this approach "there is no way to establish, beyond contention, the best view" (p. 108). Nevertheless, researchers employ various strategies to ensure the reliability and validity of their data and interpretations. One such check for reliability is triangulation, defined as "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 128). Data source triangulation and methodological triangulation were two approaches I employed in this study to ensure that my interpretations were reliable.

Data source triangulation entails "[looking] to see if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently" (Stake, 1995, p. 112). To do this, I observed teachers in multiple settings: in their classrooms, during curriculum planning meetings, at staff meetings, and in district-wide meetings. Through these observations, I was able to see how teachers spoke about the 4K policy, their teaching practice, and their working conditions in different settings and with different groups of people. In addition, I employed methodological triangulation, or the use of multiple methods to confirm or dispel interpretation. Using a combination of methods—observation, interview, and document analysis—allowed me to find out whether my interpretation of what I had seen or read matched the teacher's perspective. Furthermore, my time with focal teachers allowed for numerous informal conversations, especially with Linda and Mrs. Calden, that provided opportunities for asking questions about phenomena I had observed and following up on themes that were developing in my analysis. I often learned from these conversations that events I had observed were more complex than I originally realized. Finally, observations in multiple like sites during the pilot

study and research period allowed me to compare differences and similarities across settings and to understand whether phenomena were particular to a site or more broadly representative of the way a particular type of institution engaged with the 4K policy.

One commonly used method for data triangulation is a member check, where the researcher shares written work (field notes or analysis) with participants so that they can review the work for accuracy (Maxwell, 2012; Stake, 1995). During the research period I regularly emailed field notes to the focal teachers. I do not have a good sense of whether teachers read the notes on a regular basis, if at all. I did have several conversations with one of the focal teachers, Mrs. Calden, about field notes. She mentioned that she liked to read my notes because I saw things in the classroom that she did not. She also said that she liked to see her practice reflected back to her, because it helped her to discover areas that she wanted to change or improve. Linda once responded to the field notes I emailed: "Wow – you sure take down a lot!" She and Melissa noted that the photographs I took could help them document the way they arranged the classroom environment during different thematic units. On the whole, the teachers did not say much about the field notes, which was not surprising, given how busy they all were. This situation is not ideal, however, and my analysis would have been strengthened by feedback from the teachers or additional time built in to the research period to discuss findings with the teachers. While I did not have opportunities for formal member checks, ongoing conversations with teachers were a mechanism to do this informally; as I shared my observations and preliminary interpretations with teachers, they were able to verbally confirm or disconfirm my assertions.

Limitations

I have already mentioned several limitations to this study. One of the biggest limitations is the lack of district-level data. Although I collected as many school district documents about 4K as I could and attended as many 4K Steering Committee meetings as I was able, I was never able to ask LPS early childhood education officials for their take on how the 4K policy was conceptualized and implemented. Despite introducing myself in person at steering committee meetings and repeated attempts to contact district early childhood staff by phone and email, no one agreed to speak with me about the program.

Not being able to include district officials' voices makes the data and my analysis less robust. What I know of how the district thinks about 4K comes from document analysis, my own observations, and from teachers and administrators, who often portrayed the school district in a negative light. Had I been able to speak directly with school district officials, I would have been able to depict the school district in a more nuanced way; as I present it here, the school district is a monolithic actor, when in reality it is an institution comprised of people with varied experiences and backgrounds and, most likely, different ideas about how a program like 4K should operate. The school district's lack of response also says something about the culture of the district itself. Perhaps it was because I was working with a well-respected professor of early childhood education, but in the research I conducted for the 4K project with Beth Graue I had no trouble accessing school district officials, who were more than happy to speak with me about their program. It could be that I was only a lowly graduate student asking to talk to important people with busy schedules or the fact that the district is highly researched. LPS officials'

unwillingness to be interviewed could also signify an organization that does not want their practices made visible for some reason.[12]

Another gap I uncovered during analysis was with my data from Bright Start. As I coded them, I realized my interviews with Megan were not very generative because I did not ask good follow-up questions; they were focused on areas I had already identified but did not bring up much in terms of issues I had not considered. I also had fewer informal conversations with Megan than I did with the other teachers, which would have provided a space to ask additional questions. Anytime I tried to do this with Megan I always felt like I was intruding and using up a precious commodity—time—if I asked too many work-related questions during her lunch break or before her shift started. As I described previously, this had a lot to do with Megan's institutional context and working conditions, which imposed limits on the time she had to herself during the work day and, quite possibly, her desire to spend time outside her contracted hours on school-related tasks.

Finally, I wish I had built in a follow-up interview with the focal teachers to hear about how some of the issues identified during the research period wound up playing out. Mrs. Calden had one foot out the door at Forest Grove because she was retiring, but I would have liked to know where the other teachers wound up a year later, and how they were feeling about it. I did run into Linda at one point and learned that she was considering leaving the field of education all together, but I was not able to find out what Megan wound up doing after the research year. In addition to the individual teachers' trajectories, I would have liked to better understand how new mandates, like the use of the PreK Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS), were addressed by teachers and administrators.

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[12] I could not even get permission to attend school district professional development sessions. I would have thought that the district would want to show off this aspect of the 4K program, to highlight the way they were supporting their teachers, but these sessions were explicitly not open to anyone except the presenters and the 4K teachers.

PART II: CONTEXT

Chapter 3: PreK on the National Stage

The American early childhood education system has been described as "fragmented," "patchwork," a "non-system," and even a "far-flung archipelago" (Fuller, 2007; Lowenstein, 2011; McCabe & Sipple, 2011; Rose, 2010). ECE has historically been a diverse field, with a range of providers operating programs in settings as varied as private homes, child care centers, and public elementary schools.[13] In addition to being fragmented, the ECE system has been a divided one, with "different care for different kids" (Wrigley, 1989). Many publically-funded programs for young children began as interventions targeting "at-risk" populations.[14] Historically, programs for low-income children and children of color were designed to "compensate" for their home lives, while programs for middle- and upper-class children were intended as a supplement to the home, with a focus on preparing children for formal education (Beatty, 1995; Cahan, 1989; Grubb, 1989; Rose, 1999). The early establishment of this two-tier system has had a far-reaching effect on federal and state approaches to funding ECE programs. Ideas about who should be served by public programs and what the focus of those programs should be remains controversial as state preK expands (Cahan, 1989; Kagan & Reid, 2008).

Publicly-funded preK has risen in popularity over the past several years as a result of research about brain development, increased attention to school readiness, and reports of the economic benefits of investing in early education (Bartik, 2011; Heckman, 2011; Kagan & Reid, 2008; Watson, 2011). Envisioned as a panacea for a range of social ills, preK has been positioned a good investment for society, a solution to the educational achievement gap, and a

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[13] I use the term early childhood education (ECE) to refer to programs that children may participate in prior to kindergarten entry and preK to describe publicly-funded programs for four-year-olds. When I refer specifically to preK in Wisconsin, I use the term 4-year-old kindergarten, or 4K.

[14] The buzzword "at-risk" has been criticized as a deficit approach to thinking about children and families who are located outside the mainstream. Swadener suggests the use of the phrase "at promise," instead, in order to reconceptualize children as destined for success rather than failure (Swadener, 2000)

boon to the national economy and workforce productivity (Bartik, 2011; Gormley & Gayer, 2005; Heckman, 2011; Lowenstein, 2011). Importantly, state preK has been positioned as education and not childcare, which has allowed it to succeed where past attempts at providing publicly-funded childcare have failed (Rose, 2010). State preK, defined as "programs funded and administered by the state with a primary goal of educating 4-year-olds who are typically developing and who are in classrooms at least 2 days per week" (Barnett, Friedman, Hustedt, & Stevenson-Boyd, 2009), has been touted "education's biggest success story" of the past decade (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011).[15]

Despite its status as a relative newcomer to the field, the state preK movement is infused with debates that have long characterized the field of early childhood education: where services should be located, who should be served by publicly-funded programs, and what constitutes appropriate environments and curricula for young children (Kamerman & Gatenio, 2003; Zigler, Gilliam, & Barnett, 2011). Here I examine how the educational policy climate of the past half-century helped to pave the way for state preK as it exists today, and discuss current trends in the state preK movement.

Paving the way for PreK: From Head Start to Race to the Top

In the 1960s, federally-funded Head Start was developed to provide low-income three- to six-year-olds with comprehensive services that would address their needs across a range of domains, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development, in order to mitigate

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[15] That state preK programs serve "typically developing" children distinguishes state preK from programs funded by the federal government under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which are designed for children with special needs. Barnett and his colleagues count state supplementary funding for federal Head Start programs as state preK, categorizing Head Start programs as private preK providers, as long as the state's primary goal in providing the funding is to increase enrollment and the state is involved in the administration of the program in some way (Barnett et al., 2013).

the detrimental effects of poverty (Bushouse, 2009; Cahan, 1989; Karch, 2010; Rose, 2010; Zigler & Styfco, 2010). The logic behind Head Start was that providing children and their families with this support would help to "level the playing field" and increase their chances of school success (Rose, 2010; Zigler & Styfco, 2010).

A decade and a half after the creation of Head Start, concern over the quality of the American workforce raised new questions about the effectiveness of public schools, and educational reformers turned to early childhood education as a basis for improving the education system as a whole. The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* generated renewed attention to early childhood education and led to "a dynamic education reform movement…[that] embraced early childhood education as an important tool for improving educational outcomes for poor children" (Rose, 2010). Although the report focused on the poor quality of American high schools, reformers, inspired by research touting the long-term cognitive benefits of preschool, turned to ECE as a mechanism to improve the educational system by enhancing children's school readiness (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Vinovskis, 1999).

In 1980 only five states funded preK programs, but by the end of the decade, four-year-olds (and in some cases three-year-olds) in 28 states had access to state-funded preK (Hustedt & Barnett, 2011).[16] In some places, state support for early education came in the form of supplements to existing federally-sponsored programs like Head Start, or preschools established with federal Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) and Title I funds. In other cases, states developed new preK programs either by allowing districts to use state education funds to create classes for four-year-olds or through legislation that more broadly defined the scope and qualities of preK programs (Morado, 1989). These new state preK programs were mostly small-

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[16] Although four-year-olds were increasingly gaining access to state preK programs, it is important to note that not all four-year-olds were included because many of these programs were targeted and therefore available to only a small segment of the population.

scale, targeting low-income children. A few programs, however, were open to all age-eligible children living in certain districts; states like Georgia and Oklahoma planted the seeds for what would eventually grow into state-wide universal preK (UPK) programs. Some state preK programs were housed in community child care sites, but many were located in public school buildings, sparking debates about the appropriateness of public schools for four-year-olds (Lubeck, 1989; Moore & Phillips, 1989; Morado, 1989; Rose, 2010). Throughout these debates, the preK movement persisted, bolstered by a growing understanding of the long-term effects of early environments, research positioning the early years as a critical time for brain development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), and economic studies revealing that investments in early childhood education were likely to yield future economic benefits (Heckman, 2011; Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003). In addition to all of the research pointing to the benefits of preK, the fact that preK was positioned as education and not care enabled it to become a viable public policy option (Rose, 2010).

As the preK movement gained momentum, its focus shifted. In the 1990s, advocates began promoting UPK rather than targeted programs, because they believed UPK would garner a broader base of political support. Education reformers and teachers' unions supported efforts to expand UPK for three- and four-year-olds because of its potential to improve alignment in the education system and to increase overall educational achievement (Rose, 2010). The business community also signed on as a critical ally of the UPK movement (Lowenstein, 2011; Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). A 2002 report, *Preschool for All: Investing in a Productive and Just Society*, published by the Committee on Economic Development was, at the time, "the most detailed and systematic vision of preschool policy to be found anywhere" (Rose, 2010). Though this influential group of business leaders had previously favored targeted preschool programs as

more cost-effective, they increasingly felt that preK quality might be improved if programs were made available to all children.

From 2001 to 2011, the preK movement received a significant boost from the involvement of the Pew Charitable Trusts, which funded preK advocacy and program development, with the goal of "fundamentally [changing] the way this country invests in education for its three- and four-year-olds" (Bushouse, 2009). The campaign was considered a success because it: doubled state funding for preK; increased preK enrollment from 700,000 to over one million; increased the number of states providing UPK from three to nine; and, created new preK programs in three states (The Pew Center on the States, 2011).

Federal initiatives have also put preK in the spotlight in recent years. The Bush administration's 2001 *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) included a focus on ECE and the 2002 *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative aimed to "[help] states and local communities strengthen early learning for young children…to ensure that children enter kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed" (U.S. Department of Education, 2001; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).[17] More recently, President Barack Obama made early education a key issue in his 2008 bid for the presidency and in his 2013 and 2014 State of the Union addresses (Lowenstein, 2011). Although many of his goals for ECE have not been realized, President Obama has increased funding for Head Start and established the *Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge* (RTT-ELC), which provided $500 million in competitive awards for states with plans to improve ECE services for children from birth to age five (Lowenstein,

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[17] While the increased attention to early learning has been welcomed by the early childhood community, critics also worry that the federal government's current focus on standards and accountability will have negative implications for young children (Rose, 2010; Stipek, 2006).

2011; The White House, 2011).[18] State preK has even been lauded as a bipartisan issue, with candidates from blue and red states increasingly taking up the charge (Severns, 2014).

State PreK Policy

> The question isn't 'Will there be prekindergarten?' We've won that battle. Now the question is 'What kind of pre-K will there be?' *–Libby Doggett, former director of Pre-K Now* (Kirp, 2007, p. 6)

In 2013 there were 1.1 million four-year-olds attending state preK programs in 40 states and the District of Columbia, a figure that represents a significant increase over the past two decades (Barnett et al., 2013). Between 2002 and 2013 the percentage of four-year-olds enrolled in state preK doubled, from 14% to 28%, and since 1988 13 states have begun funding preK programs (Barnett et al., 2013, 2009).

True to the field they grew up in, state preK policies and programs are a diverse bunch. With no federal oversight or regulating body, there is wide variation in who programs serve, where they are located, and how they are funded (Barnett et al., 2009). As preK continues to expand, the movement is infused with debates over where programs should be located, who should attend, who should teach preK, and how quality should be defined. In the sections below I provide an overview of these issues, which are important for understanding Lakeville's 4K policy.

Who is preK for?

In the debate over who preK should serve, there are two camps: those who believe state programs should serve only children deemed "at risk" by some measure, and those who believe it

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[18] Although funds allocated to the ELC have been reduced from the initial pledge of $10 billion, a second wave of the competition will enable states who scored well in the first round to compete for an additional $133 million in funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

should be available to all age-eligible children. Proponents of targeted preK argue that such programs are more cost-effective and yield greater benefits than universal programs, since the social and cognitive gains experienced by low-income children who participate in preK are greater than those experienced by their wealthier peers (Fuller, 2011b; Kagan & Friedlander, 2011). These groups point to examples where universal programs have not received the expected broad base of political support (e.g. California's Proposition 82 was voted down in 2006) and highlight Americans' willingness to support investments in human capital (e.g. college scholarships for low-income students) as evidence that programs do not need to be available to everyone in order to gain support (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2011).

On the other side of the debate, supporters of UPK argue that whereas targeted programs like Head Start do not reach all eligible children, universal programs provide access to more low-income children by making it easier for their parents to navigate the system (Zigler et al., 2006). They also argue that it is not just the poorest families who have difficulty accessing high quality preK programs; families just above the income-eligibility cut-off for Head Start often lack access to quality early education programs, and UPK would be a way to meet those families' needs (Polakow, 2007). Furthermore, UPK advocates cite research showing low-income children achieve more when they are not in income-segregated classrooms, and point to studies that demonstrate an achievement gap between middle- and upper-income children as a way to reinforce their claim that preK should be universally available (Barnett, 2011a; Doggett & Wat, 2010; Kagan & Friedlander, 2011).

Where should preK classes be located?

PreK occupies a unique position in the educational landscape, situated between early childhood programs and the elementary grades. Because of this, there is a lack of consensus over the purpose of preK and whether programs should be housed in public schools or ECE centers (Brown, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Rose, 2010; Zigler et al., 2011). These debates stem from a long-standing philosophical divide between early childhood professionals and public schools; whereas the early childhood community places a premium on early education that addresses the holistic developmental needs of young children (Brown, 2009; Copple & Bredekamp, 2010), learning in elementary schools is typically organized by discipline and governed by standards and accountability frameworks (Goldstein, 2007; O'Day, 2002).

Ultimately, the debate over where preK classes should be located is about whether preK should focus on academics or take a play-based approach. This debate, which has a long history in the U.S., questions whether a curriculum for early childhood education should focus on cognitive skills and academic development or take a more holistic approach by focusing on multiple domains of a child's development including social and emotional development, which has been shown to play a role in cognitive development (Bishop-Josef & Zigler, 2011). Historically, at times when American society has registered concern for academic performance and global competitiveness, there has been renewed focus on academics, often at the expense of play, which has long been held up as the *sin qua non* of developmentally appropriate practice (Bishop-Josef & Zigler, 2011; Brown, 2007; Copple & Bredekamp, 2010; Stipek, 2006).

As state-funded preK expands, many early childhood professionals worry that if preK programs are subsumed by the K-12 system, they will be stripped of the qualities that have long-defined the early childhood education landscape and begin to look more like elementary school,

where teachers' work increasingly responds to the demands of high-stakes tests (Brown, 2009; Graue, 2011; Hatch, 2002; McCabe & Sipple, 2011). On the other side of the debate, advocates in favor of incorporating public preK into public elementary school buildings assert that this leads to better alignment of the curriculum from preK to grade 12 and helps children transition into kindergarten more easily (McCartney, Burchinal, & Grindal, 2011). At the heart of this debate is the different way each side imagines the child and teacher, as well as the role of preK in society.

Who should teach preK?

Barnett (2011b) contends that "one of the most vexing questions in early childhood policy is how much education should be required for teachers in publicly funded programs" (p. 48). The issue lacks a simple answer because studies of the relationship between teacher efficacy and education credentials have found mixed results and because requiring higher levels of education for preK teachers leads to more costly programs. In addition, Barnett notes that preK programs are also considered workforce programs; if a higher qualification is required of teachers, fewer people will be eligible to participate. In spite of this, the general consensus seems to be that teachers in publicly-funded preK classrooms should hold a four-year degree.

Many state preK programs require teachers to hold a bachelor's degree; this comes in response to evidence showing that higher levels of teacher education lead to better outcomes for students (Barnett, 2011b; Bowman, 2011). Critics warn that the relationship between credentials and student outcomes is not as straightforward as it seems, citing flaws in research showing a correlation between the two (Bogard, Traylor, & Takanishi, 2008; Fuller, 2011a). In spite of disagreement over credentials, however, most agree that preK teachers' work will be most

effective if they have opportunities to hone their skill through pre-service practicum opportunities and in-service professional development (Bowman, 2011; Pianta, 2011).

The idea that preK teachers need a bachelor's degree, at a minimum, represents a shift in thinking about credentials in early childhood education. In most states, early childhood teachers are required to have little education or training. According to Bowman (2011), this is because of a general perception that because ECE teachers do not formally teach academics, they need little in the way of training or preparation.

What does quality in preK look like?

When the positive outcomes associated with preK participation are extolled, it is typically with the caveat that programs must be "high-quality" in order for these cognitive, social, and economic benefits to accrue. Although the discourse of quality is frequently mobilized to describe the type of experiences envisioned for young children, definitions of quality are often narrow, restricted to the structural inputs purported to lead to quality education. For example, a common assumption is that low student-teacher ratios, small class size, and a teacher with a bachelor's degree all contribute to high-quality ECE experiences (Fuller, 2007; Tobin, 2005). The idea that adjustments to these easy-to-observe elements are all that is needed to improve preK quality is compelling and leads to the assumption that quality is straightforward. Researchers assert, however, that quality must be understood in a more nuanced way, in terms of an interaction between structural and process elements of quality (Fuller, 2007; La, Pianta, Stuhlman, Paro, & Stuhiman, 2013). For example, studies have shown that lower staff-child ratios and smaller class sizes lead to more responsive and higher quality interactions between children and teachers, leading to better academic outcomes. These studies indicate that class size

and ratios are not solely responsible for increased learning. Instead, as Fuller (2007) asserts "…facets of quality reflected in the organizational *structure* of preschools overlap with the responsiveness of teachers and human *processes* inside the classroom" (p. 215, emphasis in original). In spite of findings such as these and the availability of process-orientated approaches to assessing program quality like the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2004; Pianta et al., 2005), the only systematic evaluation of preK quality to date adopts a relatively narrow definition of quality.

As a component of its 10-year campaign for the expansion of state pre-K, the Pew Charitable Trusts established the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), headed by economist Steven Barnett at Rutgers University. Throughout Pew's *Pre-K Now* campaign and beyond, NIEER would serve as the research arm of the campaign, generating policy briefs about preK and evaluating programs. In the absence of another way to compare diverse state preK programs and evaluate their quality, the 10 benchmarks developed by NIEER have become the de facto system for determining quality in preK programs. The institute's annual *State of Preschool Yearbook* ranks each state's preK programs based on the following standards:[19]

Table 1. National Quality Standards Checklist Summary

Policy	Benchmark	Of the 53 state-funded preK initiatives, number meeting benchmarks
Early learning standards	Comprehensive	53
Teacher degree	BA	30
Teacher specialized training	Specializing in preK	45
Assistant teacher degree	[Child Development Associate's] degree or equivalent	15

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[19] Although only 40 states and the District of Columbia have public preK programs, there are 53 programs total because some states have more than one program.

Teacher in-service	At least 15 hours/year	42
Maximum class size	20 or lower	45
Staff-child ratio	1:10 or better	46
Screening/referral and support services	Vision, hearing, health; and at least 1 support service	36
Meals	At least 1/day	25
Monitoring	Site visits at least every five years	32

Source: (Barnett et al., 2013, p. 7)

NIEER's benchmarks represent structural elements of quality, or program inputs that are assumed to lead to positive child outcomes. While these standards seem relatively reasonable and desirable, the fact that all programs meet only the first standard says something about how diverse state preK programs are. Further, given the current focus on standards and accountability in K-12 education, it is perhaps unremarkable that this has filtered down into ECE, with all states now reporting comprehensive early learning standards (Barnett et al., 2013). While these measures of quality are not the only ones used to evaluate preK settings, they are powerful because, thus far, NIEER has been the only organization to systematically evaluate public preK programs.

Conclusion

In this chapter I traced the rapid expansion of state-funded preK over the past 30 years. I provided a brief history of the growing public interest in ECE in order to illustrate how preK came to be seen as an education reform that made sense to policy-makers, politicians, and the public. Unlike previous attempts to secure public funding and broad-based support for an ECE program that would reach many of the nation's children, the preK movement gained momentum because it positioned preK as education, not care (Rose, 2010). As state preK expanded it did not coalesce into a coherent system. Instead, a defining characteristic of state preK is the diversity of

programs that exist. Moving away from the national level, I now zoom in to Wisconsin, where

public preK has been around much longer than the preK movement I described in this chapter.

Chapter 4: PreK in Wisconsin

Wisconsin has a long history of including four-year-olds in its public education system. In this chapter I detail the history of Wisconsin preK and describe how preK is implemented in Wisconsin school districts. Wisconsin's preK policy, which stands out among other state preK policies for being low-regulation, allows for significant variation in program design at the district level, giving preK in the state a grassroots flavor. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of how preK was conceptualized by state policy-makers and education officials.[20] As state officials described the goals of preK, their comments mirrored some of the national discourse around preK, but they also pointed to components of preK that were uniquely Wisconsin. Within this group of actors, there was also contradiction; not everyone agreed on the purpose of preK or agreed on how the impact of preK should be evaluated.

History

Wisconsin's state preK program, called four-year-old kindergarten (4K), has been a feature of the educational landscape in Wisconsin since the state's founding in 1848, as a result of a constitutional provision for public schooling for children age four through 20 (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2008b).[21] The constitution states: "public schools shall be as nearly uniform as practicable, and such schools shall be free and without charge for tuition to all children between the ages of 4 and 20 years" (Rhyme & Eilers, 2005, pp. 2–3). The state's innovative ideas about ECE are purported to have arrived along with waves of German immigrants who, inspired by Friederich Froebel's kindergarten movement, established the first

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[20] Interview data in this chapter come from my work on Beth Graue and Sharon Ryan's "Life in Early Childhood Settings" project.

[21] While public education for four-year-olds is a constitutional provision, districts are not required to provide 4K. Instead, if a district *chooses* to offer 4K, it must be made available to all age-eligible children, and cannot target only a subset of the 4 year-old population (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2006).

American kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2010). As kindergartens became more popular in the late 19th century, legislation passed enabling school districts to establish publicly-funded kindergartens for four- and five-year-olds and to levy taxes for these programs (DPI, 1989). By 1900, about half of all four-year-olds in urban areas of Wisconsin attended 4K. In spite of its early surge in popularity, the number of 4K programs declined sharply from the 1920s to the 1970s as districts shifted their focus to primary and secondary education. This decline reflected a broader national sentiment that the best place for young children was at home with their mothers (Rose, 2010). Over time, 4K funding and enrollment dwindled such that, "[b]y 1980, only six districts were offering public 4K using local funds" (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2010).

Although other ECE programs emerged between 1940 and 1980, 4K did not reappear until the 1980s. When the state decided to reinstate 4K in the 1980s, the proposal was initially met with opposition—detractors worried that its reintroduction would negatively affect Head Start and private preschool and childcare programs. Finally, in 1984, after four years of debate, 4K programs once again became eligible for state funding (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2010). School districts are not required to provide 4K but state law mandates that those that do, make the program universally available to age-eligible children.

School districts that offer 4K share the cost with the state "based on a formula that [measures] each district's ability to cover costs", called equalization aid (WCCF, 2010, p. 7). Equalization aid is financial assistance districts receive from the state that can be used to "[fund] a broad range of school district operational expenditures" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). The purpose of these funds is "to reduce the reliance upon the local property tax as a source of revenue for educational programs…[in order to] level the playing field by

aiding districts with fewer resources at a higher level than those districts with more resources (Fath, 2013). Districts receive a certain amount of equalization aid for each K-12 student they enroll. Districts with 4K programs receive half of this per-pupil amount for each 4K student they enroll. So, for example, if Lakeville Public Schools (LPS) received $12,000 per pupil in equalization aid from the state, the district would receive $6,000 for each 4K student. In 1991, a financial incentive to provide outreach to parents and families of 4K students was added; districts that provide 87.5 hours of parent outreach per year receive 0.6 of the state per-pupil reimbursement.[22]

Once state funding for 4K was reintroduced, it expanded rapidly throughout the state. In the 1996-1997 school year, only 72 school districts offered 4K. Ten years later, that number had risen to 257, and by the 2013-14 school year, 386, or 93% of Wisconsin school districts, had 4K programs serving a total of nearly 50,000 four-year-olds (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2012, 2014a). This growth was driven by factors similar to those that sparked the preK movement in other states, including research about the long-term benefits of preschool to individuals and society. DPI official Helen Jenkins described it as part of a broader national trend: parents were feeling pressure and "schools were just starting to see all the 'close the achievement gap stuff'". The expansion of 4K in Wisconsin was also bolstered by declining public school enrollments, which led school districts to turn to 4K as a way to obtain additional funding from the state (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2010). The contemporary 4K movement in Wisconsin was also influenced by the national Pew Charitable Trusts *Pre-K*

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[22] According to the Wisconsin DPI, "State equalization aid is a major source of funding for 4K in many districts. Wis.Stats. § 121.004(7) defines state funding requirements in order to count 4K students as part of a school district's membership for state equalization aid eligibility. To count students as a 0.5 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), a district must operate a program for a minimum of 437 hours per year. Of that time, 87.5 hours (20 percent) of the 437 hours may be used for outreach activities for the school staff to link to the child's primary caregivers. Additionally, a district may add 87.5 hours of outreach to the minimum 437 hours and count students as a 0.6 FTE" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2008b).

Now initiative. Wisconsin received about $200,000 from *Pre-K Now*, which was used to hire regional 4K coaches and to create 4K advocacy and advisory groups in the state. DPI official Helen Jenkins remembered that "… *Pre-K Now's* little amount of money went really far in Wisconsin."

In recent years, legislators have twice attempted to cut 4K out of the state budget but the funding was preserved when then-governors (one a democrat and the other a republican) used their veto power to protect 4K funding (Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2001, 2005). Although Wisconsin 4K still has vocal detractors (DeFour, 2010), it appears to have secured a relatively stable funding stream and a broad base of support.

> Yeah, I think [4K is] not going away. I don't think we have to worry about it going away. Like, I mean, every budget, I was like, "Oh God," it always would come up; it always would come up that, you know, we need to cut down. If we're gonna cut money, we need to cut 4K. I think that's not there [anymore]. The question, then, is not so much the money, but is- the ideas like [State Representative] Kurt Sewell has, are we gonna really say, "Okay, if you're gonna have a program, this is the program you gotta have; this is the kind of quality. This is the numbers. We're just not gonna let you use this as a cash cow." And that, I think, could be the next fight. You know, we have standards for everything else. We have the Common Core curriculum, the whole nine yards. Is this gonna trickle down there? (State Senator Oscar Larson)

Senator Larson's assertion that the question was no longer whether Wisconsin would fund 4K, but what 4K would look like reflects the quote from Libby Doggett that I included in the previous chapter. State Representative Kurt Sewell put it more succinctly: "I believe that the argument over whether or not we're going to have 4K in Wisconsin is over. The new discussion

is "What's it gonna look like?" and "Are we going to get what we pay for?" As the country and Wisconsin move toward a broader base of bipartisan support for state preK, the conversation is shifting from whether it makes sense to fund preK to what quality looks like in preK and how programs can be evaluated. As I highlight below, interviews with Wisconsin state policy-makers revealed that discussions about 4K were already infused with references to data, evaluation, and accountability.

4K Policy

Wisconsin's 4K policy is low-regulation; with few state-level requirements, it is at the local level that 4K programs take shape, ideally in response to community needs and priorities. In order to receive state funding for 4K, however, district programs must adhere to the following requirements:

- The 4K program is under the supervision of the school district;
- The district's 4K program is providing a minimum of 437 hours of instruction;
- The district is providing transportation to and from the 4K program;
- The district has appropriately DPI-licensed teaching staff for its 4K program;
- The district, not some other entity, is incurring the cost of the 4K program; and
- The 4K program is open to all eligible resident students, [free of charge]. (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2008a)

Within this framework, decisions about curriculum, class size, and where 4K classes will be located are made locally. The state provides recommendations, for example that the curriculum be "developmentally, individually, and culturally appropriate for four-year-old children" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2008b, p. 9), but many decisions about 4K are ultimately left up to the school districts. Funding for the program flows from DPI to individual school districts, which then allocate funds according to local need and implementation model.

Implementation

Many school districts implement 4K exclusively in public elementary schools, but when asked about the elements that defined 4K in Wisconsin, state policy-makers and education officials pointed to the 4K Community Approach (4K-CA), in which districts partner with the local childcare community to provide 4K. 4K-CA was a point of pride for state actors including the state superintendent, legislators, and DPI officials. Here I describe this defining feature of Wisconsin 4K.

4K Community Approach (4K-CA)

A cornerstone of Wisconsin's 4K policy is its community approach (4K-CA). Though not mandatory, the DPI encourages districts that provide 4K to do so through a community approach, in order to foster collaboration between the public schools, local Head Start programs, and other community child care sites. In 4K-CA districts, 4K services are delivered through a "school-community interface," a model early childhood advocacy groups in the state contend is key to preserving a district's childcare system and ensuring that all families are able to access high-quality 4K (Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners, 2010).

4K-CA emerged as an implementation model during the height of 4K expansion in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As more school districts began to develop 4K programs in public elementary schools, they were met with resistance from the local childcare community. Childcare providers opposed 4K because they worried that four-year-olds would leave their centers to attend free programs at public schools, which would put them out of business. Childcare centers spend the most on infant care because of low teacher-student ratio requirements (1:4); as children get older, the ratio requirements decrease (1:13 for four-year-

olds), which means that older children provide the profit base for most childcare centers. Because of this reality, there was widespread concern that new, tuition-free programs for four-year-olds would decimate the local early childhood community. Representative Sewell summed it up this way:

> I remember some people a few years back- it was probably maybe a decade [ago] already where a district decided it was going to implement a 4K program and without consulting with anybody, they said "Here we go!" and the parents found out about it from the providers. Providers [were] saying, "Well, we're gonna close because the school cut us out, the school just killed us financially" and the parents went to the school district and said, "No you won't," and they had to go all the way back to the drawing board and start over and then they came back with a community model (4K-CA).

Pioneered in LaCrosse, Wisconsin in 2001, 4K-CA brings public schools and community preschool and child care providers together in order to ensure that "*every* 4-year-old in the community access to a quality learning experience" (Bulebosh, 2000, emphasis in original). Districts using a community approach to 4K provide services through one or more basic program models. Model I programs are located in a public school building with a public school teacher. Model II programs are housed in a community site but utilize a district-provided (and paid) teacher. In Model III programs, community sites provide 4K programming and supply a licensed early childhood teacher. A fourth option is home-based support and resources (Bulebosh, 2000; Landsverk, 2003).

4K-CA has grown in popularity in recent years, and during the 2013-2014 school year, 27% of Wisconsin districts provided 4K through a community approach, up from less than 2% in 2001-2002 (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014c). The state has also incentivized

4K-CA; from 2004-2006 it offered 4K-CA planning grants through the Wisconsin Center for Children and Families (WCCF) and from 2008-2011, start-up funding totaling $3 million for the development of new 4K-CA programs (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2010; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2008c). In addition, the DPI provides 4K coaches to assist districts with the process of building community-school partnerships (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, 2010).

An evaluation of 4K-CA in Wisconsin found that the benefits of community collaboration included: greater choice, accessibility, and flexibility for parents who could choose among different types of programs; fewer transitions for children, who were increasingly able to participate in preschool and receive wrap-around care at the same facility; increased access to preschool programs for low-income four year-olds; greater access to funding streams (for ECE centers); and, increased communication and resource-sharing among early childhood stakeholders, leading to new opportunities for learning and collaboration (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003). Though the benefits to the community approach are attractive, attempts to bring diverse groups of stakeholders together also presents a challenge. Some of these challenges include: building the necessary trust among stakeholder groups to make the collaboration fruitful, productive, and effective; coordinating transportation to and from community sites; and, unequal compensation for community site teachers versus school district teachers (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2003). In spite of these challenges, as school districts continue to add 4K programs, many elect to adopt a community approach.

What 4K Meant to State Officials[23]

When state officials talked about the goals of 4K and what 4K did in the state, their depiction of the program sounded a lot like national preK discourse. Concepts like "readiness," "achievement gap," and "intervention" came up time and again. As state officials spoke of the future of 4K, they highlighted the fact that 4K was increasingly connected to national efforts like RTT-ELC and the standards and accountability movement. Although everyone was proud of what they believed made Wisconsin 4K unique—4K-CA and a commitment to local control— the influence of the national education landscape on 4K appeared inescapable, infusing conversations about 4K with talk of program evaluation, assessment, and the need for data. In the sections that follow I discuss how state policy-makers and DPI officials made sense of what 4K was, how it fit into the education system in Wisconsin, and what 4K might be in the future.

Rationale for 4K

State policy-makers said that 4K made sense because young children were primed to learn. Senator Larson, the chair of the education committee, cited brain research, comparing young children's minds to a sponge:

> Well, you know, the brain research says that kids learn a lot- the sponge is more absorbent at a young age, and as I get older, that's pretty obvious. … And so, their minds are more absorbent, so then it would be wise to start teaching them…when they're receptive to learning.

Larson also said he was convinced of the value of 4K when he heard economist James Heckman speak a number of years prior. After hearing this talk, Larson agreed "that the research showed

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[23] We interviewed three state legislators, the state superintendent and deputy superintendent, and the two early childhood specialists at DPI. The legislators were chosen based on their involvement in education matters in the state.

that 4K was a good thing to do." Larson was so convinced that 4K was a good value that he said he would rather do away with senior year of high school before cutting 4K because "I think [4K] has that big of an impact on children versus senior year."

Representative Sewell believed 4K was important because it provided a foundation for children. He likened education to a building block system, and saw 4K as the base, which set the conditions for future learning:

> Education is a building block system and I know that the research has started to kind of flood now, showing us the value of 4K and quality 4K and that…if we're right about 4K being worth the investment, it should benefit kindergarten, it should benefit first grade, second grade, third grade, and all the way to adulthood because we had a different foundation, more solid foundation to build on. They should be better math students in fifth grade and better readers in third grade, right?

In a similar vein, Senator Larson compared education to planting crops; if you thought about where you wanted kids to be when they graduated from high school, you had to take the time to "tend to the crop". You could not just start in middle or high school—you needed to start with a "seedling".

Academic Readiness and the Achievement Gap

Many state officials conceptualized 4K as a means to boost academic readiness for all children, with the goal of closing the achievement gap. State Superintendent Eric Tollen said, "Well, certainly the primary goal is to make sure that our youngest children are prepared for the [kindergarten] through 12 system and the opportunities it offers…I think it's just a great, for lack

of a better term, head start for kids." Deputy State Superintendent Brenda Stanton focused her comments more explicitly on the achievement gap issue:

> …we see that kids are coming to kindergarten already with an achievement gap, and then the gap just continues to grow and grow and grow. And I think 4K is a great example where we're able to kind of get in with kids that don't have as rich of preschool opportunities to be able to provide that, and so I think we get in on that sooner, and hopefully can intervene and have the readiness be a little bit more equitable as kids enter the [kindergarten] world, both academically as well as socially, emotionally.

Representative Sewell also thought of 4K as a way to give children who might need it an extra boost before kindergarten:

> The goals of 4K? I think it should be to help build a learning foundation for the young student. We should use the opportunity to identify a potential need for extra help or corrective intervention…It should be an opportunity to get not only kids on the right track, but the family or the parents on the right track.

Sewell was a big proponent of the parent outreach component of 4K and expressed his belief that what 4K did for children would mean little if schools and ECE centers did not also connect with parents.

While many state officials subscribed to the idea that 4K was an intervention that ensured children were ready for kindergarten, two of 4K's most vocal advocates were wary of using the language of readiness when it came to 4K. Former DPI consultant Marty Jameson put it bluntly: "[I] never met a four-year-old that wasn't ready for school. They're just all ready for something different". Jameson believed the logic behind readiness was flawed; if you sat down with community members and asked them, "they never say the purpose of being a four-year-old is to

get ready to be a five-year-old". Jenkins was similarly troubled by the readiness discourse—she did not want 4K to be characterized only as something that prepared children for kindergarten—but she recognized its power to convince people of the importance of 4K. She described a colleague who had "resurrected the words 'school readiness' again" because "[he] sees that in some states that term really resonates with people".

Part of the System, but Different

Although state officials were quick to speak of 4K as part of, or an extension of, the K-12 system, they were often just as quick to assert that 4K was something different. So, while State Superintendent Tollen said that 4K was "viewed as part and parcel of K-12 even in districts that have strong community approaches," Deputy Superintendent Stanton pointed to the importance of "developmentally appropriate classrooms where we can teach kids how to go to school and how to be with one another and how to get along and how to listen to a teacher in a group". For Stanton and others, 4K was not just academic preparation, but something that embraced early childhood traditions of fostering the development of the "whole child".

For Helen Jenkins it was important that 4K be different from the K-12 system; she thought that 4K might be a connector of sorts, a way "to really influence the system before and after the four-year-olds". Similarly, Senator Larson thought 4K could play a key role in creating a more coherent continuum of services from early childhood through high school. He saw 4K as narrowing the gap between school and childcare; 4K was a middle ground between "playtime" and school. On the whole, state policymakers voiced their desire for 4K to look and feel like early childhood education, rather than the elementary grades. They believed that even if it did not look academic, 4K was still providing children with a strong early academic foundation.

Increasingly, however, there was pressure for ECE stakeholders and policymakers to prove that 4K was effective, which I describe below.

Data and Accountability

State officials described increased pressure to prove the value of 4K. While Representative Sewell confidently asserted, "Quality early childhood programming really does offer us…the best opportunity to have a long term impact," he also noted that the state had no way of knowing what was going on in 4K classrooms and whether 4K was effective. He added: "We have over 400 school districts and many, many, many 4K classrooms, and no one can tell us how we're doing." Senator Larson also stressed the need for some way to evaluate programs and hold districts accountable. Citing the example of Milwaukee, where 4K classrooms had as many as 30 students with one teacher, he explained that accountability would be a way to improve quality:

> As we come up with school accountability stuff and report cards, and Milwaukee is not achieving at the levels it's gonna need to be achieving, people are gonna come in and say, "We're gonna turn this thing upside down." And if they look at it and say, "Aha! Well there's an obvious thing: you've got 34 kids in 4K. That is ridiculous because you're not getting the benefit. You're sort of just warehousing these kids. And if we lower that number down—cut it in half—we will get results that are where we need to be." … I think it'll be pressure from the outcomes that schools have to exceed [that leads to improvements], versus "Oh, we saw the light. Let's just do it."

For Larson and others, ensuring and improving quality in 4K was something that could be done with a carrot-and-stick model similar to federal accountability policies like No Child Left

Behind. State officials wanted to find a way to put pressure on districts to improve the quality of their programs. Representative Sewell suggested linking funding to program quality:

> So I think we need to do more to evaluate individual district programs and…I think in time we're going to have to build and create a funding mechanism that is based on a graduated system of performance measurements.

This talk of the need for evaluation and accountability mechanisms was a noticeable departure from the emphasis on community needs and local control that the same stakeholders touted in their discussions of 4K. While developing a 4K program was something that could be done with input from families and the community, policymakers' vision for how these programs might be evaluated sounded a lot like a K-12 model for accountability.

As a result of federal initiatives like RTT-ELC, Wisconsin had already put a mechanism for evaluating ECE centers in place; the state's new Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), YoungStar, was used to rate the quality of childcare centers that received state funding. Centers with higher ratings received additional reimbursements through the Wisconsin Shares childcare subsidy program. YoungStar ratings applied to 4K classrooms in childcare centers, but could not be used in public school 4K programs because the department responsible for YoungStar did not have the resources or authority to evaluate them. While not everyone thought it was necessary to evaluate 4K—Helen Jenkins noted: "On the one hand, I would say, well, do you ever see us evaluating fourth grade?"—there were efforts afoot to figure out how to collect some sort of data on 4K so that the state would know if its money was being spent wisely. Although not everyone agreed with RTT-ELC requirements like the development of YoungStar, policy-makers noted that they would "color in the lines" in order to get the funding. During a

time of economic uncertainty, the desire to secure additional federal funds for education overshadowed philosophical concerns about program evaluation.

Conclusion

With its storied history, ability to bring together school districts and local early childhood communities in the name of four-year-olds, and relatively secure funding formula, Wisconsin's 4K was deeply engrained in the state's educational identity. Although not everyone was in agreement, state officials viewed 4K as an important part of the state education system that played a critical role in preparing students for kindergarten and helping to close the achievement gap. With federal programs like RTT-ELC as a driver, state officials increasingly looked for ways to evaluate 4K in order to ensure program quality and to prove the state was investing its money wisely. In the next chapter I demonstrate that these ideas about the goals of 4K and ways of evaluating 4K were visible in discussions about 4K in Lakeville and the policy text.

Chapter 5: 4K in Lakeville

> So if you're just moving to Lakeville and ask, "What's this 4K program about?" A doctoral student would have a hard time explaining [it]. Well, how did this get created? Well, there isn't an easy answer. (Marty Jameson, former DPI consultant)

Lakeville's 4K policy was developed and implemented after a decade-long struggle between the school district, the local teachers' union, and the childcare community. As 4K programs sprung up all around it, one of Wisconsin's largest school districts could not seem to make it happen. In the early 2000s when people first began talking about starting a 4K program in Lakeville, the school district ran a pilot program in a preschool and a Head Start classroom. When the money for the pilot ran out, everything ground to a screeching halt and the program was not scaled up. Part of the reason 4K did not take off at that time was resistance from the local teachers' union, who saw 4K as something that would take jobs away from the public schools. Marty Jameson, a former consultant for the Department of Public Instruction, said that eventually the superintendent decided to pass on 4K because the whole process was becoming so complicated.

When 4K eventually came to fruition, it was not because people started playing nicely together. Helen Moyers, a City of Lakeville childcare official, said 4K happened when it did because the district started to feel pressure as surrounding school districts started 4K programs. Families in the LPS attendance area wanted 4K and would enroll their children in neighboring districts to get access to it. This meant that neighboring districts benefited from additional per-pupil reimbursement funds from the state for 4K and, potentially, other grade levels, if families continued to enroll their children in other districts. As a result, not providing 4K meant that LPS could start to lose money. Masters' take was more cynical—he said that the new LPS superintendent was intent on bringing 4K to Lakeville, even if he had to "ram" it through,

because he had done it in his previous school district and was determined to leave 4K as his legacy. Whatever the reason, the policy-making process was fraught with tension. Although the process included many large community meetings, "vested interests and people protecting their turf" made reaching a consensus difficult (Marty Jameson, May 2013 interview). When Masters talked about vested interests, he was referring to the teachers' union and their leader, who, according to Masters "…sits and waits and keeps all his power cards very close. He had no interest in working collaboratively. And he'll say that openly: 'My job is to protect my people.' He's only interested in wages and working conditions. He had zero interest in young kids or childcare. So, he just agrees not to play."

Eventually, Masters said, a 4K policy was developed because something had to be implemented after all the time they had spent discussing it. A lot of time had passed and Lakeville was one of the last districts in the region to provide 4K. Over the course of this long process, the teachers' union was able get two provisions included in the policy that had a significant influence on what the policy came to mean for teachers and families. First, the union would only agree to the policy if the district ensured that the majority of 4K teachers would be employed in public schools. What this meant in practice was that the public schools would most likely always enroll more 4K students, and participation of community sites in 4K would be limited. Community sites' participation in 4K was also limited by the second provision: that only childcare centers and preschools accredited by the City of Lakeville or the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) would be eligible to become 4K sites. For the teachers' union this was a way to ensure that centers implementing 4K were high quality.

This vision for 4K was very different from what the childcare community had hoped for. Rather than make accreditation a prerequisite for 4K, the childcare community thought 4K could be a mechanism for improving the quality of childcare in Lakeville. Helen Moyers explained that there were a lot of centers that were not accredited and may never be because they were unable or unwilling to meet the standards for accreditation. Unfortunately, there were also a lot of low-income children concentrated in those centers. Moyers thought a "middle way" for unaccredited centers would be to have an LPS teacher come in to teach 4K while the childcare center worked with the City of Lakeville toward accreditation. The way the 4K policy was written, however, ensured this would never happen. In spite of areas of disagreement and areas of significant concern for the childcare community, 4K came to be in Lakeville. Moyers noted that although the policy was not exactly what the childcare community wanted, there was no way they would not participate because, if there was a chance to get public money into early childhood, the childcare community "would be foolish not to [do it]".

In the end, 4K was slated to begin in September 2011 in 23 elementary schools and 32 ECE centers.[24] By October of the first year of 4K, enrollment had exceeded the school district's projections; there were nearly 1800 children attending 4K, primarily in public school sites. Something had been set in motion, but what 4K would actually mean in Lakeville was still unclear. When people described Lakeville's 4K program they said things like "It's a potpourri of all this different stuff" and "…it really is kind of a Frankenstein—let's sew things together". What follows is an attempt to explain the different pieces of this policy and how they all fit together.

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[24] The 4K policy was actually completed in January 2010, and the school district wanted the program to begin the following September. Community sites were not happy with this decision because they did not feel it gave them enough time to prepare for 4K in terms of teaching staff and providing information to families. In the end, the childcare community succeeded in delaying the start of 4K until September 2011.

4K Policy

Lakeville's 4K program was administered by the district's Department of Early Learning. A search for 4K on the LPS website yielded an overview of what parents need to know about 4K. First was that the program was open to all children in the district who would be four by September 1st of the year they planned to attend 4K. The website also listed a handful of "Quick Facts" about 4K:

- 4K is tuition-free*
- It is not required
- It is a half-day program
- There are 2 sessions - AM and PM
- It follows play-based learning standards to get your child ready for Kindergarten
- It takes place in many [LPS] elementary schools and in early childhood care and education centers in Lakeville[25]

Below this list was a promotional video about 4K, aimed at families. The video was about a minute long and showed paper chains of children, presumably four-year-olds, moving around the screen. The visual display went along with the theme of the text: "Four-year-old kindergarten is cut out for kids." A conversation between two children provided a brief overview of the program and a glimpse into some of the major tenets of the policy:

> Boy: Four-year-old kindergarten is cut out for kids. Watch their world unfold before them through a play-based curriculum.
>
> Girl: So I get to learn my letters and numbers while playing?
>
> Boy: That's right.
>
> Girl: Plus I learn to share?
>
> Boy: Yup.

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[25] The asterisk next to the bullet point "4K is tuition-free" was present on the website, but I could not find the corresponding asterisk and explanation about the cost of 4K anywhere on that page. (The cost of 4K is addressed in a document "4K Questions and Answers". There is a link to this document on the 4K website.)

Girl: Will I learn to place a jetpack on my back and fly to the moon?

Boy: Ummm, probably no rocket science yet, but you *will* get to pretend and use your imagination.

Girl: And meet new friends.

Other kids: Learn a lot and have a lot of fun. Four-year-old kindergarten is awesome.

Families also had access to a "4K Questions and Answers" document, which provided additional details about the program. Like all 4K programs in the state, Lakeville's was free of charge, open to all children in the district who turned four on or before September 1st, staffed by teachers with a preK or kindergarten certification, and operated for a total of 437 hours during the academic year. In the sections below I discuss the main components of the policy: implementation models, logistics, finances, enrollment and transportation, students with special needs, curriculum, parent involvement, and support for ECE partner sites.[26]

Implementation Models

The 4K policy in Lakeville was implemented in a combination of public elementary schools and private ECE centers. A range of different types of ECE centers served as community partners for 4K including: for-profit corporate childcare centers, non-profit childcare centers, and non-profit part-day preschools and nursery schools. Lakeville chose to adopt three implementation models developed by the Wisconsin DPI. Model I sites were in LPS school buildings with LPS teachers. For Model II, ECE centers in which an LPS teacher, assigned by the school district, taught 4K. Finally, Model III sites were ECE centers that provided their own teacher for 4K. Model I teachers—school district employees in public school sites—were paid according to the district salary schedule. Teachers in Model II programs were paid by the school

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[26] These are categories set out by the policy text, not my own.

district according to the district salary schedule, whereas teachers in Model III programs were paid according to the norms for that particular program.[27]

When they applied to become 4K sites, ECE centers indicated their preference for Model II or III. The school district anticipated that the majority of centers would choose to be Model III sites, and this is what wound up happening. The school district framed Model II as a good option for ECE centers who did not already have a licensed teacher on staff:

> We fully expect that with the high level of quality work currently being done with four-year-olds in our community, most centers will want to continue what they are doing as a Model III program. However, Model II may be available to accredited centers that may not have a currently licensed 4K teacher in their building. (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, p. 3)

Because of an agreement with the Lakeville teachers union, the majority of 4K classes had to be staffed by LPS teachers. In the first year of Lakeville 4K, there were 23 Model I sites, 2 Model II classrooms, and 32 Model III sites.[28]

Prior to the start of 4K, the school district sent out a Request for Proposals for community partner 4K sites. In order to become a Model II or III site, ECE centers had to be licensed by the State of Wisconsin and accredited by either NAEYC or the City of Lakeville.

Logistics

Teacher requirements. Per DPI regulations, all 4K teachers were required to hold a Wisconsin regular education teaching license that included kindergarten. Community partner sites were able to make their own staffing decisions for 4K and teachers were considered

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[27] The sites for my dissertation research were Model I and III. There were only two Model II sites in the district. Throughout the dissertation I refer to Model I sites as "public school sites" and Model III sites as "community partner sites". Both of these model types were under the umbrella of the school district and reported to school district officials.

[28] Although there were more Model III (30) sites than Model I (23) sites, the balance of LPS versus non-LPS teachers was maintained because there were more Model I classrooms overall.

employees of that school or center, not the school district. In Model II sites (community site with an LPS teacher), the school district would be considered the employer and would make 4K hiring decisions. Only one teacher in each 4K classroom had to be 4K certified—assistant teachers did not. Substitute teachers in 4K had to have a DPI substitute license. Model II sites had access to an LPS pool of substitute teachers, but Model III sites did not. As part of the agreement between the school district and the teachers' union, it was mandated that the majority of 4K teachers in the school district had to be LPS employees.

Schedule. To comply with state regulations, 4K programs had to operate for a total of 437 hours per year. Public school 4K and Model II classes were offered Tuesday through Friday for about three hours. Mondays were devoted to teacher professional development, planning, and parent outreach activities. Community partner sites were able to set their own schedule, which had to be approved by the district.

Teacher-student ratios. Neither DPI nor LPS had a required teacher-student ratio for 4K. Community 4K sites were bound by NAEYC and City of Lakeville regulations that specified a ratio of 1:10 with a maximum group size of 20. LPS budgeted for a teacher-student ratio of 1:18, but class size varied from school to school. Some sites also had an educational assistant (EA), while others did not.

4K Finances

Reimbursement. Because 4K in Wisconsin is funded through the state equalization aid formula, districts receive money from the state for each student enrolled in 4K. Each 4K student "counts" as .5 of the full time equivalency (FTE) in the funding formula.[29] The school district then uses this money to fund its 4K program. Because 4K was implemented in community

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[29] Districts receive .6 FTE per pupil if they meet parent involvement requirements.

partner sites as well as the public schools, the school district had to pass some of that reimbursement on to the ECE sites they contracted with.[30] Model III sites received about $3,500 per 4K student and Model II sites received about $2,200 because LPS paid the teacher's salary. Each center's reimbursement rate was calculated based on attendance figures submitted to the district on the third Friday in September and reimbursements were paid in three installments: October, March, and June. The school district did not regulate how these funds were spent, but suggested "the funds be used to increase wages for teachers, purchase new or additional curricular materials, provide additional professional development for teachers, provide a tuition reduction for parents, or in other ways that increase the quality of programming for students" (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, pp. 7–8).

Tuition. Per state regulations, the 4K program had to be provided free of charge to families. If a community partner site enrolled children in 4K who also received wraparound care at the same site, the hours that 4K was in operation had to be free for families. If children came to the center only for 4K, this was straightforward and families paid nothing. The calculation became tricky when children stayed for an eight or ten hour day, and part of that time was 4K. When 4K began, parents in this situation expected to receive a tuition discount because the 4K was supposed to be a free program. In many cases, they did not receive a tuition break because of 4K. This was due to the way many childcare centers calculate full time rates. In most sites, a child is considered "full time" if s/he attends the center for more than five hours per day. Many full time students spend eight to ten hours per day in childcare centers. From a childcare center's perspective, this meant that even if 4K time was subtracted from the total time a child was in the

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[30] How much of the reimbursement went to community sites was at the discretion of the school district. In LPS, I have heard that the district receives over $6,000 per pupil but gives little more than half of that to community partner sites. Because of situations like this, critics of 4K have argued that school districts only provide 4K in order to make money off of the program.

center, the child would still be attending the equivalent of full time. Because of this, many centers did not discount tuition for 4K families. Some centers did provide families with a discount, and part-day programs like Friendship Preschool could not charge anything for 4K. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6, 4K had a negative effect on the finances of part-day programs like Friendship because the district per-pupil reimbursement did not cover the actual costs of operating the program.

Enrollment and Transportation

4K enrollment occurs in LPS elementary schools beginning in February. Families must complete an enrollment form online or in person and bring it, along with their child's birth certificate and proof of address, to their local elementary school. On the enrollment form, parents indicate their preference for 4K site, choosing up to three options. The policy states that "Acceptance at any site will be contingent on space parameters and enrollment requirements set by individual ECE centers" (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, p. 1). Families that do not need transportation can choose any of the 4K community or public school sites, but those requiring transportation are assigned to the public school that serves their attendance area. Families are able to get transportation from 4K (in a public school site) to a childcare center if the center is within the school's transportation area. Although all 4K sites are technically open to all families in the district, the availability of transportation limits options for some families, a phenomenon I discuss further in Chapter 10.

Students with Special Needs

4K students with an individualized education program (IEP) were served by special education teachers if they attended 4K in a public school or by special education itinerant teachers if they were enrolled in a community site. Support for English Language Learners was site-dependent, though there were four bilingual 4K programs housed in public schools. As I describe in Chapter 7, public elementary schools did not receive additional funding to provide services for 4K students with special needs. Instead, principals were required to use existing funds to meet the needs of additional students.

Philosophy and Curriculum

There was no set curriculum for Model III programs, but Model I and II programs were required to implement the Creative Curriculum for Preschool and its attendant Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment, which are both widely accepted as "best practice" in the ECE field (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002). The Creative Curriculum is play-based, modeled on the central tenets of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): early childhood teachers make decisions about the curriculum based on their knowledge of child development, individual children's needs, and children's family and cultural contexts (Bredekamp, 2009; Teaching Strategies Inc., 2010). The Creative Curriculum focuses on intentionality in setting up classroom environments and promoting constructive play and comes with an array of materials that provide guidance for teachers. In addition to the Creative Curriculum, public school 4K teachers were required to implement Second Step, a scripted curriculum designed to "instill social-emotional skills"(Committee for Children, 2014).

Model III programs were not required to use the Creative Curriculum or Second Step, but did have to identify a 4K curriculum that met the following requirements:

> …4K curricula must be developmentally appropriate, align with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) and accreditation criteria, be play-based, inclusive, research-based, inclusive of culture, race, social class, gender, languages and needs, and designed to promote partnerships with families. (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, pp. 3–4)

The rationale for not having a standard curriculum for Model III sites was that the district "[wanted] to value the expertise and knowledge in our community [ECE] partners" (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, p. 4). Although curriculum materials would not be provided by the school district, the policy stated that community partner sites would have access to school district support people and professional development opportunities related to curriculum implementation.

Assessment

Public school 4K teachers (Model I & II) were required to use the Creative Curriculum's paired assessment, Teaching Strategies Gold. The assessment's website describes Gold as an "authentic, ongoing" assessment tool aligned with Common Core Standards. The website boasts that Gold is easy to use; it "[takes] the guesswork out of the [assessment] process" (Teaching Strategies Inc., 2014). Teachers use the Gold program to record children's progress across social-emotional, cognitive, and physical domains of development and can generate reports comparing individual children's progress to expectations for typically-developing children.

Model III programs were not required to use the Gold assessment, but all 4K sites had to complete a district-created progress report twice yearly for each 4K student. In addition to progress reports and the Gold assessment, in the 2013-14 school year, teachers in all sites had to administer the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS). This was not district policy— it was a statewide mandate. I provide additional information about PALS in Chapter 9.

The progress report asked teachers to evaluate children's progress across developmental domains (social-emotional, cognitive, physical) and provide a numeric ranking from 1 (not yet) to 4 (exceeds expectations). Although the progress report addressed benchmarks that were similar to those covered by the Gold assessment, the two were not well-aligned. Mrs. Calden described the extra work this created for teachers, who had to translate students' Gold assessments into numerical data for progress reports.

Although families never saw children's Gold assessments, progress reports were sent home and became part of the children's permanent records. In Chapter 10, I discuss the potential negative implications for having a 4K progress report become part of a child's permanent record.

Parent Involvement

As noted in the previous chapter, school districts that provided 87.5 hours of parent outreach annually received a .6 FTE per pupil reimbursement from the state instead of .5. Although I do not have the exact numbers, the .6 reimbursement rate probably meant that LPS received an extra $1,200 per 4K pupil from the state. Because Lakeville decided to include a parent involvement component in its 4K program, the policy provided guidance to teachers and administrators on how the 87.5 hours could be met. Community site and public school 4K teachers were required to maintain a record of parent outreach activities, which could include:

"open houses, family nights, home visits, and take-home activities" (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, p. 5). In order to "count" toward the total outreach hours for the year, activities had to comply with DPI regulations:

> Outreach activities can occur in or outside the school facilities and within or outside of traditional school hours. It is suggested that outreach activities be flexible and varied in order to be accessible to all potential participants and recognize the varied needs and abilities of different families. Such outreach activities should also be sensitive to cultural, racial, and religious differences among families. Districts can work with Family Centers, public libraries, YMCA's [sic], or other programs to have appropriate outreach activities available for parents. (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, p. 5)

In order to help public school and community site 4K teachers meet these requirements, LPS provided parent outreach packets each month. The packet contained a "Family Learning Calendar" as well as a variety of materials that could be used to do the activities on the calendar. Parent outreach packets appeared to be geared toward supporting parents' ability to reinforce school learning at home. For example, each day on the Family Learning Calendar had a prompt for a different activity parents could do with their children. For example, the first week of the March 2013 calendar included the following prompts:

- March 1: Fold paper airplanes. Which airplane is biggest? Smallest? Fastest? Which flies farthest?
- March 2: Pretend to be airplanes and fly around the room. Can you name other things that fly?
- March 3: Make Oobleck (attached). Play with textures and shapes.
- March 4: Use masking tape to make large shapes on the floor. Carefully walk on the lines.
- March 5: Sing "Five Green and Speckled Frogs". Make frog puppets (attached).
- March 6: Play "I spy" (attached).
- March 7: Show your child examples of "many" and "few" using beans, toy cars, rocks, or buttons.

According to teachers and administrators, these activity calendars allowed them to easily meet the required number of parent outreach hours. Denise at Friendship said that the materials provided by the district, along with the weekly newsletter that went home with parents, accounted for all of their annual parent outreach hours.

Though undoubtedly a huge help to teachers and administrators concerned with meeting parent outreach requirements, the Family Activity Calendars provided by the district reflect a narrow vision of parent outreach. Rather than attempting to engage parents in the life of 4K or bringing children's home lives into the school setting, LPS focused on educating parents so that home could emulate school. District officials seemed less concerned with reaching out to parents and more focused on making sure they could check the appropriate boxes so that they would receive the higher per-pupil reimbursement. This is not to say that other forms of parent outreach did not exist in LPS 4K sites, but the type of support provided by the district, along with state policy, created a disincentive for teachers to seek out other ways to engage with parents. For example, parent teacher conferences and home visits did not count as parent outreach because, in order to be counted, outreach activities had to be open to all families. So, if Mrs. Calden had visited the homes of each of her 32 students, she could count this as one, not 32 hours of outreach. However, if she hosted a two-hour event at school and invited all families, but only a few showed up, she could count this as two hours of parent outreach. Thus, the rules for parent outreach disincentivized the types of interactions between teachers and parents that might foster better relationships and a greater understanding of the multiple contexts in which children's lives are lived.

Support for ECE Partner Sites

In addition to providing special education services for children and curriculum support for teachers, the policy stated that the school district would provide the following support for community ECE centers implementing 4K:

Child Find will be available to assist with questions about early identification of students with disabilities. Professional development support will be provided to teachers in ECE centers. Some parent outreach activities may be coordinated centrally for participation by all contracted ECE centers. (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, p. 6)

Professional development opportunities that were made available to all 4K teachers included monthly district-wide meetings, an annual Summer Institute, and on-site visits.

Unfortunately, the rhetoric about school district support for community 4K sites did not match reality. If ECE centers were structured the same way as public elementary schools and had access to the same resources, they would have been able to fully take advantage of what the school district provided. Instead, because the structure of childcare is different than public school, teachers' ability to draw on school district resources was limited. I describe this further in Chapters 9 and 10.

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What 4K Meant to LPS

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A policy text is one thing, but what it comes to mean for individuals and institutions may be something entirely different. As Ball (1994) asserts: "Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended" (p. 10). In the sections below I describe how the Lakeville school district conceptualized 4K and the goals of the policy. For the most part, the district's goals for 4K reflected broader state and national discourses about the

importance of preK and the rationale for funding a public program, focused on kindergarten readiness, the achievement gap, and providing equal early learning opportunities for children. As I describe in detail in Part III, this alignment of aims broke down at the institution and classroom levels, where teachers and administrators had different ideas about what 4K was for, leading to tension between 4K sites and the school district. The fact that the school district's actions and policies did not always mirror their rhetorical vision of 4K added to this. In the sections below I discuss the school district's conceptualization of 4K—what LPS officials believed 4K would do and how the policy would achieve these goals. [31]

A "Great Equalizer"

> The vision of the [LPS] 4K program is to provide **high quality** early learning experiences so that **ALL** children enter kindergarten with the resources to succeed. (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014b, p. 7, emphasis in original)

LPS officially implemented 4K to address two related goals: closing the achievement gap and improving kindergarten readiness. Although the achievement gap between white and minority students is an issue in school districts across the nation, Wisconsin's achievement gap was the worst in the nation in recent years (Beck, 2013). Of all districts in the state, Lakeville had one of the largest gaps; during the 2011-12 academic year the four-year graduation rate for white students was 86.7% but only 63.2% and 53.1% for Latino and African American students, respectively. Along with other initiatives, turning to 4K as a solution to the achievement gap was supported by the logic that if children were better prepared for kindergarten they would make greater academic gains in elementary school, which would help to close the achievement gap

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[31] I have already noted that I was unable to interview any school district officials. Because of this, my conclusions are drawn from observations at school board meetings and 4K Coordination Committee meetings as well as an analysis of 4K documents from the LPS website.

between high- and low-income students and between white students and students of color. One district official described the issue in this way:

Our preliminary data shows big socio-economic differences in school achievement. We need to think about what's happening in areas with high poverty that kids are not demonstrating certain skills. (Tracy Keebling, 5/6/13 4K Coordination Committee Meeting)

4K was formally recognized as part of the district's action plan for closing the achievement gap in its 2010-11 strategic plan, which listed the program as an action step in this process: "Develop and implement partnerships to prepare every student for kindergarten (EC options…[and] universal 4-K)". District officials also mentioned kindergarten readiness and the achievement gap in their discussions of 4K. At a school board meeting in early October 2011, about a month after Lakeville's 4K program had begun, Superintendent Davies began by explaining that the 4K initiative was "off to a good start" and that "the key goal of 4K is to prepare children for kindergarten" (Field notes, 10/3/11). At the same meeting, Eric Stohler, a district early education official, told the school board that the primary goal of 4K was to decrease the achievement gap and that one of its aims was to bring all children in the district to 80% preparedness for kindergarten.

For the school district, assessments were an essential part of this process. Kindergarten Screeners, administered in March, would determine children's preparedness for kindergarten. When a school board member asked what skills were needed for kindergarten, Stohler replied: "Among other things: writing their name, social skills, language development, being able to follow directions. But above all, the programs are play-based" (Field notes, 10/3/11). This statement highlights a contradiction in the school district's framing of 4K. On the one hand, LPS

stressed the importance of ensuring 4K was play-based and built on the expertise of the Lakeville early childhood community. At the same time, the district's penchant for data and assessment, which mirrored national trends and the pressures of the accountability context, signaled to teachers and administrators that assessment ruled the day.

District officials also pointed to ongoing assessment like the PALS as an important tool for identifying children in need of additional intervention. At a 4K Coordination Committee meeting, Stohler told the assembled community site administrators and teachers that the PALS would be "helpful [for identifying] students that may not be performing," which he asserted was not a problem at most sites, but at some places kids were "falling through the cracks" (Field notes, 5/6/13). Keebling pointed to broader trends when she noted that the country was moving away from a "wait to fail model" where children had to be performing poorly in order to qualify for help. She said that whereas the system used to follow a deficit model, now there was more thinking about "how to support kids at the earliest possible moments." Keebling asserted that balanced assessment, including a screener like PALS, was needed in order to "understand where kids are at." She went on to say: "You need to understand what's normal developmental growth and what's not. Kids who are off track early will stay off track, and the achievement gap widens" (Field notes, 5/6/13).

4K, in the district's opinion, would help close the achievement gap by providing all children with equal early learning opportunities. Stohler noted that many children were "coming in behind" but if they attended quality 4K programs, 4K had the ability to be a "great equalizer" (Field notes, 10/3/11). This discourse of 4K as an equalizer reflected state- and national-level conceptualizations of what preK meant for young children and the education system.

A Way to Build on Community Expertise

While the goals related to the achievement gap and kindergarten readiness came through the clearest in 4K documents and discussions about 4K, another thread of meaning-making around 4K had to do with 4K being a way for the school district to highlight and build on the expertise of the early childhood community. For example, part of the rationale behind not requiring that community partner sites use the Creative Curriculum was the district wanted to "value the expertise and knowledge of our community Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centers" (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, p. 1). An optimistic reading of statements such as this would be to assume that the school district recognized that ECE centers had been providing programming for young children for a long time, and that the school district could learn something from them. The reality, unfortunately, did not match the rhetoric in this case. Even 4K Coordination Committee meetings, once viewed as a venue for dialogue between the district and community sites, quickly morphed into a space where information was simply passed on from the school district. Helen Moyers, a City of Lakeville childcare official, explained:

> But what it is now, it's just a meeting with directors. It's a way for the school district to pass on information. Which is very nice, but it does not at all play the role that the advisory committee did, in trying to figure out whether [4K] is working well or not.

Community sites' limited ability to have their ideas and opinions heard and recognized by the school district led to considerable tension between these two groups. This tension was particularly noticeable when it came to discussions about assessment and the resources community sites needed to implement the policy, points I return to in Chapter 9.

Conclusion

In this chapter I provided an overview of Lakeville's 4K policy, describing how the policy came to be and what 4K meant to school district officials. 4K arrived in Lakeville only after years of political battles and negotiations between the school district, the teachers' union, and the early childhood community. The policy that resulted brought EC centers and public elementary schools together to implement 4K programs. Community partner sites, which previously had little or no interaction with the school district were now regulated, in part, by the district, through the 4K policy. The chapters that follow tell the story of what happened when these two very different entities came together.

PART III: THE SITES

Chapter 6: Friendship Preschool

In this chapter I introduce Friendship Preschool and Linda Jenkins, the 4K focal teacher from this site. I provide an overview of the institution, including its mission and philosophy, administration, teaching staff, and demographics before examining how Linda implemented the 4K policy. By doing this, we can understand Linda's classroom practice as situated within and informed by the culture, philosophy, and dynamics of her institution. The school's long history of providing play-based early education and its focus on learning environments shaped how Linda and Friendship's executive director, Denise, interacted with the policy and the school district. At Friendship, although it was integrated into the life of the school, 4K was seen as something different than the high-quality programming provided by the preschool; the reasons for becoming a 4K site were primarily economic. Denise and Linda frequently clashed with the school district, which they believed was not able to meet the needs of four-year-olds in the developmentally appropriate way that the early childhood community could.

Institutional Context: "Learning through Play the Friendship Way"

A first-time visitor to Friendship Preschool will be struck by the aesthetics of the building it shares with a church. Constructed in the mid-1900s, this building that once overlooked rolling farmland has seen a city gradually grow up around it. The property, which is bookended by the local university and an upscale neighborhood, is easily accessible from a major thoroughfare yet set back far enough from the road to feel peaceful and isolated from the hustle and bustle of the outside world. Upon descending the long staircase to the preschool, which is located on the ground floor of the church, it becomes clear that this is not your typical church basement. In fact, the space was renovated in the 1960s specifically for the preschool. Floor-to-ceiling windows in

each classroom bring the outdoors in, and most classrooms open directly onto the playground or a grassy courtyard. Though pleasing to the eye, the space is not necessarily practical for busy young children. The classrooms are relatively small, with strange angles and little wall space. Teachers struggle with arranging the space and figuring out where to display children's work.

The narrow hallway that connects the classrooms is lined with cubbies that burst at the seams with children's belongings. Children's mailboxes, fashioned out of paper towel tubes, are stationed near each classroom and notices for parents adorn classroom doors. During drop-off and pick-up times, the hallway is busy, filled with dads on their way to the office, moms in expensive yoga gear, and nannies who will transport children to their next scheduled activity. A small lobby area outside the main office has a bookshelf filled with resources for parents and a bulletin board that displays photographs of the school's board of directors and their families. In April, the entire hallway is given over to Friendship's annual fundraiser, which includes a two week silent auction that culminates in an adults-only event with a live auction with prizes like a week-long stay at a time share and "30 drive-through drop-offs or pick-ups during the 2013-2014 school year". Notices about silent auction items adorn the halls, and the types of prizes (Green Bay Packers tickets, a 30-minute private plane ride) as well as the bids (a starting big of $60 for the opportunity to go flea market shopping with Friendship's director) provide insight into the socioeconomic status of the families Friendship serves.

Mission and Philosophy

One of the things that distinguished Friendship from the other research sites was its strong institutional culture and sense of history. Teachers and administrators prided themselves on being a part of a program that had been around for over 50 years. Denise noted that she

believed the school provided some of the best play-based programming around. The school's commitment to its philosophy of learning through play provided a framework for pedagogy and teachers' approach to planning. The school's website described its philosophy in this way:

> The philosophy of [Friendship Preschool] is learning through play. We firmly believe that "To Play Is To Grow," and continually strive to foster an environment for our children to thrive while actively learning in play-based activities.

The school's mission is closely related to this philosophy. The mission statement, also posted on the school's website, reads:

> The mission of [Friendship Preschool] is to:
> - Provide students with an educationally sound program in an atmosphere of warmth, friendliness, and freedom
> - Offer opportunities for exploration, experimentation, and inquiry
> - Encourage curiosity and expression of ideas
> - Accept each child as an individual, helping the child grow in accordance with his/her own needs

The website says teachers enact this mission by providing developmentally appropriate programming (Copple & Bredekamp, 2010) that supports children's development across social, emotional, cognitive, and physical domains, noting that growth across these domains happens simultaneously.

Finally, even the school's website provides a visitor with the sense that its practice is steeped in a long history and a dedication to its pedagogical ideals:

> Throughout its long and proven history, [Friendship Preschool] has not wavered from its philosophy of learning through play, established…so many years ago. [Friendship Preschool] Executive Director [Denise Sanderson] says, "Educational pendulums swing back and forth, but we've never deviated from our core philosophy that kids need to play. That's how they learn and grow."

This strong identification with learning through play and developmentally appropriate practice was visible in teachers' practice and conversations about curriculum and pedagogy. I discuss this further in the section on curriculum.

Program

Friendship provides part-day preschool for children ages two through six. Though it has a total enrollment of about 130, only 65 or so children are in the building at any given time, due to the variety of schedules available. The preschool follows the Lakeville public school calendar but also offers a summer program. Unlike childcare centers, which are generally open year-round and during school vacations, Friendship is closed for many holidays and school breaks. There are five classrooms at Friendship, most staffed with two teachers, and a variety of scheduling options. With the exception of 4K, there are two three-hour sessions per day – morning and afternoon, and children attend two, three, or five days per week, depending on their age. Parents may extend their child's day by purchasing "a la carte" options like extended morning or lunch bunch, but the maximum amount of time a child can be at Friendship on any given day is five hours, per state licensing regulations for part-time providers. The school provides snack, served family style, during both morning and afternoon sessions, and children who participate in lunch bunch must bring a sack lunch. Parent volunteers prepare snack and deliver it to classrooms at a set time during each session. During the research year, Linda was the teacher responsible for shopping for snack foods, a task she had volunteered for.

4K Program. In the 2012-13 school year there were four 4K teachers who taught three 4K sections at Friendship. There were two 4K classes in the morning and one in the afternoon. Each class had about 16 children and two teachers. The classes were taught by co-teachers, who

had equal responsibility for teaching and planning the curriculum. The class I observed was taught by Linda Jenkins and Melissa O'Sullivan. Linda was one of the focal teachers for my study. Both Linda and Melissa had the proper credentials to teach 4K—a preK or kindergarten teaching license, but in the other classroom only one teacher was licensed. This was the cause of some difficulty when it came to finding substitute teachers, an issue I describe in Chapter 9.

The 4K program operated five days a week for two and a half hours and was completely free of charge for families with the exception of a nominal materials fee required by the district. The table below shows the daily 4K schedule in Linda and Melissa's classroom.

Table 2. Friendship 4K Schedule

Time	Activity[32]
8:45-9:15am	Greet Outside (arrival and outdoor play)
9:15-9:45am	About the Day (calendar and weather)
9:45-10:30am	Exploration Time (choice activities)
10:30-10:50am	Story Time (books and songs)
10:50-11:05am	Snack Time (wash hands and eat together, snack provided by the school)
11:05am	Question of the Day
11:15am	End of 4K, dismissal for students whose parents did not purchase optional ½ hour
11:15-11:45am	Outside (large motor activities)
11:45am	Dismissal

Because the 4K schedule did not align with scheduling for the rest of the school (programs for other age groups were three hours long), Denise encouraged families to buy an extra half hour of time and to enroll in lunch bunch. This was also a way for the school to make up the difference between the district per-pupil 4K reimbursement and its actual costs. In a meeting of 4K directors, Denise said that she was not shy about asking parents to ante up to cover this gap:

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[32] Terms for daily activities are the teachers. This list of daily activities was posted in the classroom without specific time allocations. The amount of time allocated for each activity comes from my observations.

Denise tells the other directors that she's "brazen" with families. She tells them that the 2.5 hours of 4K are free but the reimbursement from the district doesn't cover their actual costs. Because of this, she tells parents that she's counting on them to buy an extra half hour in order to balance the budget. Someone asks whether this approach worked, and Denise says that this year they're okay but as of now they have not had as many people buy the extra half hour for the coming school year. Only six out of 48 children did not purchase the extra time this year, but for next year there is a larger portion who have not opted to extend the 4K time. She explains that the extra half hour is not enrichment, it is an extension of playtime. If a parent gets upset that their child is not getting what other children are because they only stay for 2.5 hours, her response is to tell the parent "You can pay for it."(Field notes, 1/26/12)

Because most Friendship families are affluent, Denise probably felt that since they were getting 4K for free, they could afford to pay something extra to help the school cover its costs.

In Linda and Melissa's class, three out of 16 students did not stay for the extra half hour. They were picked up at 11:45, right before the rest of the group went out to play on the playground. Adding an extra half hour to the school day five days a week cost families $178 per month.

Linda's work day was also part time. Her contracted hours were 8:15am until 12:15pm, which included a half hour in the morning before children arrived for the day. Linda was able to increase her take-home pay by supervising lunch bunch until 1:15pm every day. Linda's only regret about supervising lunch bunch was that she missed out on eating lunch with the other teachers.

Demographics

Most families at Friendship were white or Asian and affluent; this group of white collar professionals was comprised of doctors and nurses, professors, and businesspeople who could afford the relatively steep tuition and who had the flexibility or outside help to be able to send

their children to a three-hour program that did not offer wrap-around care.[33] While many families paid full tuition, the school also offered a few need-based scholarships. 4K teacher Melissa noted that the families who received scholarships were typically graduate students at the local university; although they were not able to afford Friendship, their social and cultural capital was very much aligned with the other families at the school. Though many were able to afford the tuition, the introduction of 4K meant that families could look forward to a financial break when their child turned four, which Denise described as a marketing boon.

> I think for families, that they get two and a half hours of free early education is amazing.[34] You know, in these economic times—granted we have some families that can readily afford it and some that it is a struggle to send their child to Friendship—so if they stick with us for two- and three-year-old, here's the icing on the cake. That's been, for families, a real boon. And we're getting more families coming to us younger because they're told if you're registered with us as a three-year-old you're guaranteed a spot in 4K in our building. So that's been a nice marketing boon to us. (January 2013 interview)

While this was certainly a perk for families who had been able to afford Friendship all along, it also meant that families who only wanted to send their children to 4K at Friendship may have been crowded out by existing Friendship families who were guaranteed a spot. Guaranteeing spots meant that although the 4K program is open to all children in theory, it is not quite universal in practice, a point I return to in Chapter 10.

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[33] Wrap-around care is care that is provided outside of 4K program hours. Public school 4K sites do not offer wrap-around care, while many community 4K sites do because they are full day childcare facilities. Friendship is licensed as a part-day preschool and does not offer wrap-around care; a child can attend the preschool for a maximum of five hours per day, whereas a childcare center can provide care for ten hours.

[34] Families who attended 4K at Friendship Preschool did not have to pay anything for the 2.5 hour session. Though child care centers could not charge for 4K time, in most cases this did not result in a cost-savings for parents because of how full time care was calculated. Because Friendship only offered part-day programming, families could enroll in 4K without paying any tuition. See Chapter 5 for more on this.

Denise and the 4K teachers readily acknowledged that they did not serve a high-needs population. The families were primarily affluent, there were no children with special needs in Linda's 4K class, and most children came to 4K with many of the skills they would only be asked to demonstrate by the end of the year. Linda gave the example of an activity they did one of the first weeks of school, where children were asked to write their first name by copying what was written on a card the teachers had prepared. Many children already knew how to write their last name in addition to their first. Melissa pointed out that while the children at Friendship are "on a really solid footing with their academics" (June 2013 interview), they had needs in other areas, particularly when it came to social emotional skills.

> I think the big one is social emotional. As I've gotten this year under my belt I realize that's something I would like to do more next year. This demographic usually comes in on pretty solid [academic] foundation. However, it seems like there might be a different set of issues with this demographic. … . I think a lot of the behaviors we see coming up are just [about] taking responsibility. Accountability at this age is a little lofty, but- being truthful and if something happened, kinda listening and thinking it out and not finding this quick escape or "not me". Making the right choices. We emphasize that a lot in our room, [asking kids to reflect] "Why did you do that? What happened at the rug?" And they're all really great kids, but I do think the set of behaviors… Something we want to brainstorm as a staff is really getting them to reflect a little bit and think about what they're doing. I think at this age they can do that. Not having consequences, per se, but natural consequences in place where they can learn that when I do something, it has an effect on someone else. And I can't just do it and then not have any accountability for how I might have affected someone else's feelings or project or things like that. And

when I say "this demographic", I don't know if there's less follow-though if parents are busier—if they have multiple caregivers, where maybe they don't have as much follow-through, or… But sometimes you do see this, and it may just be this age, but it is something we've been talking about. Like "You can make a good choice and it feels good to make a good choice". So I think all that falls under social emotional piece. (June 2013 interview)

Thus, while 4K students at Friendship had needs of their own, their participation in 4K was not critical to the district's goal of closing the achievement gap.

Administration

Denise Sanderson was the first person you might encounter upon entering the school building. A self-described "Jill-of-all-trades", she could be found mopping up a spill in the hallway, soothing a child dealing with separation anxiety, or meeting with a teacher to discuss the teacher's professional goals for the year. Denise had been at Friendship for a total of 18 years—six as a teacher and 12 as director. With this long history, Denise was a keeper of institutional memory and played a significant role in shaping daily life at Friendship and what 4K came to mean in this school. She was a strong believer in play-based early childhood education and was quick to assert that Friendship was one of the best play-based programs around.

From the time LPS first began exploring the possibility of 4K over a decade ago, Denise was actively involved in discussions about 4K policy development. She initially participated in the planning process because she figured that if the early childhood landscape in Lakeville was going to change, she did not want Friendship to be left out. A testament to her desire to be

involved in 4K, Denise was an active participant in the 4K Coordination Committee and the progress report committee. She used her position on these committees to advocate for what she believed was important in early childhood education, which often resulted in tense interactions with LPS early childhood officials. For example, during a May 2013 4K Coordination Committee meeting about the Governor's recent decision to mandate the use of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) assessment in 4K starting in fall 2013, Denise asked pointed questions about how this would affect community sites.[35] After a series of questions about when the assessment would be done and who would be administering it, Denise had the following exchange with Eric Stohler, a school district official:

> *Denise: Will this take the place of other assessments?*
>
> *Eric: We'll still do Teaching Strategies Gold [in the public school sites], but you're not required to do that.*
>
> *Denise: We're assessing the hell out of these kids. What can we give up?*
>
> *Eric: Portfolios are not required.* (Field notes, 5/6/13)

Stohler's assertion that Friendship could drop their portfolio-based assessment if they felt children are being assessed too much was significant because this was the one assessment that Denise and the teachers actually valued. Though she did not say it, Denise likely wanted Stohler to say that they did not have to complete the district mandated progress reports, which she believed were unnecessary. To Denise, the progress report exemplified the district's limited

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[35] According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), "Wis. Stats 118.016(1) requires an early literacy screener to be administered to all 4 year old kindergarten to 1st grade students enrolled in public school districts and charter schools for the 2013-14 school year and beginning in the 2014-15 school year to expand this requirement to also include all 2nd grade students enrolled in public school districts and charter schools. This assessment provides administrators, teachers, and parents with valuable information necessary to improve the reading skills of students. Results are used to identify reading problems early on and to inform instruction. The data from the screener is not part of the new accountability system." While districts are not responsible for purchasing assessment materials, they are responsible for the cost of administering PALS. In their conversations with community site administrators, Lakeville district officials made it clear that the cost and burden of administering PALS would be passed on to the community sites.

understanding of the developmental needs of four-year-olds, and was one element of a school district versus community site binary that Denise and the teachers used to define 4K at Friendship. I return to this in the "4K at Friendship" section of this chapter.

Though she did not always agree with the district's decisions about 4K, Denise was an important link between the school district and 4K teachers at Friendship. While teachers were able to contact school district officials directly with questions or concerns, they most often went to Denise, who had regular contact with officials in the early learning office and did not hesitate to get in touch with them as questions arose. Denise's role as a trusted go-between meant that she had considerable influence over how Friendship teachers understood the 4K policy.

Denise was committed to being as informed about 4K as possible so that she could field questions from families and teachers. In the first year of 4K, getting answers was not as easy as it was in year two. Denise referred to year one as "the year of the dance" and used the metaphor "building the plane while you're flying it" when she talked about the unknowns and unanticipated questions that arose that year. Because of her relationships with district officials, which were quite good despite of moments of tension, Denise was able to influence how some of those questions were answered. For example, her participation on the progress report committee meant Denise was able to advocate for listing social-emotional skills, rather than cognitive skills, first on the progress report. This was important to Denise because it symbolized a commitment to what she believed was a key goal of early childhood education—social-emotional development—and helped to downplay the importance of assessing academic learning.

> The fun part about being on the committee for designing the progress report, though, was that we could put them in any order we wanted to. So the first domain you see on the progress report for 4K is social and emotional development. Priority! The last thing you

see is the ABCs and 123s. You know, so we were able to do that. And we were able to

pick which benchmarks we felt were a real good snapshot of helping a child be prepared

to move into that next step in their education. (January 2012 interview)

Denise's confidence in her own early childhood expertise reflects the preschool's strong

institutional culture, or its strong sense of "how we do things", which is probably related to its

low staff turnover rate and her long tenure as director.

Teaching staff

Friendship had 10 teachers on staff—all white women—including one "floater," who was

like a permanent substitute. She was in the building every day and could fill in if a teacher was

absent. Denise explained: "Everybody knows her. And it's like your favorite aunt coming to

visit. It's really nice to have one person in the building that knows every single child" (January

2012 interview).[36] All of the teachers were white women and most were middle-aged, married

with children. Many of the teachers had also been working at Friendship for a long time,

something atypical in early childhood education. With the exception of two teachers, all the rest

had been at Friendship for at least seven years. This is unusual for preschool and childcare

settings, where high turnover rates are common (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1998;

Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). This continuity in staffing and strong sense of what early childhood

education should look like could be a strength or a weakness, depending on the situation; change

was more difficult when "the way we've always done it" was deeply engrained in teachers and

administrators.

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[36] During the research year, the floater teacher had a teaching license, which meant she was qualified to substitute
for 4K teachers. This was not the case every year, however, which presented an issue when Denise had to find a
substitute for one of the 4K teachers. I talk about this issue in depth in Chapter 9.

The minimum qualification teachers needed to work at Friendship was a two year associates degree in early childhood education or a Child Development Associates degree. During the research year, three 4K teachers and the float teacher had a bachelors degree and a Wisconsin teaching license. Although they had to have certain credentials, Denise explained that credentials were not the only qualifications she looked for when hiring 4K teachers.

First and foremost [what I look for is] someone that understands early childhood education. Well, let me back that up. First they have to have a degree and license. That would be required. Then they really do need to understand, early childhood education and [age] four and down. [Age] four and up is a plus, but four and down is really important because I'm more concerned where the children are coming to 4K from and not so much what's going to happen beyond the doors. … I would look for somebody that hopefully has experience, is creative, understands play-based environments and curriculum, can be a team member, and is interested in continuing to learn. … That lifelong love of learning is always a plus because if you get somebody like that, that's going to spill over onto the children. You know, those are the people that say, "Gee, I don't know, let's find out." And what more could you possibly want? Nurturing, caring, loving, creative, you know all of the things that I would look for in any of the rooms in this building. But I think that it's important that they really, really, really understand play, and what that looks like in a four-year-old classroom. (December 2012 interview)

Because of the requirement that 4K teachers hold a teaching license for kindergarten or preK, becoming a 4K site necessitated shifting teachers around. There were already enough teachers in the building with the appropriate credentials, but existing teaching teams had to be broken up so that the school would be in compliance with district policy. Some teachers

struggled with these transitions in the first year of 4K, but by year two things were falling into place. The 4K program and teachers appeared to be seamlessly integrated into daily life at Friendship. This may have been in part due to the fact that three of the four 4K teachers had been teaching at Friendship long before the start of 4K, but probably also had something to do with Denise's commitment to treating teachers equally; whenever she learned that public school 4K teachers were being provided with particular materials or resources, she looked for creative ways to provide those for her 4K teachers *and* the other teachers at Friendship. As I describe in Chapter 9, this commitment to equality meant that 4K at Friendship did not create new hierarchies among teachers like it did at other schools.

Relationships and Hierarchies

Teachers at Friendship were all on the same plane; classroom teaching teams are co-teachers with equal responsibility and autonomy, and 4K teachers were not "above" non-4K teachers. Although she had the final say when it came to policies and procedures, Denise worked to make Friendship's organizational structure relatively flat. Denise valued teachers' professional expertise, and took their ideas and input into consideration when changing school policies or developing new ones. As a new teacher, Melissa was impressed by Denise's willingness to hear new ideas even though there was clearly a "Friendship" way of doing things.

> I feel like they're very open to always improving. I think it really is a group, the dynamic is every voice is heard. Denise is always quick to say, "Let's try it out" or "How can we make it happen?" It really has been more that way than I anticipated. I think Denise really puts her trust in the teachers she hires, and she knows who she's hiring and what she wants out of them and then says, you know, empowers them to do what they think is right

for their students. So, I've been very impressed. I think Friendship has been around for so long that there are ways of things happening and they just happen because that's how they've always been done. I've heard a few staff members say, "Oh, I like that way of thinking" because there's nothing that says it has to be [the way it's always been done]. It just falls into this pattern and flow. But they always seem to be brainstorming and having deliberate mindful ideas of what goals are on the horizon, what we can do. So I feel that I can really bring a lot to the table if I had ideas about one subject or another. And I have in the past, and people listen. It's really nice. (June 2013 interview)

Staff meetings were one venue for the discussion of new ideas. In one of the meetings I observed, teachers spent the better part of an hour discussing puddle play—whether they should allow children to play in puddles and get wet out on the playground, what puddle play might look like at different times of the year, and what allowing puddle play would mean for teachers' and parents' schedules. During this discussion, which became heated at times, Denise appeared open to hearing teachers' diverse opinions and potentially changing the school's policy on puddle play based on what the teachers had to say. By the end of the discussion, the teachers had not reached a consensus, so Denise asked them to continue thinking about it and said they would revisit the topic at the next staff meeting.[37] Linda reflected on this particular meeting as an exemplar of teachers' ability to weigh in on school-level decisions.

And we—you've been to some staff meetings—we discuss a puddle for three hours! So I think…as a staff in general- Denise is pretty good at giving us input. And sometimes she has to be the boss and make that decision, and that's her job, so that's fine. But rarely do I

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[37] I never found out whether this discussion resulted in a policy change. During another staff meeting, however, teachers decided that it would be okay to let children go up the slide instead of insisting they only go down the slide. They decided that this should only be done if there was adult supervision. The change came after a discussion of the book *Big Body Play*, which prompted teachers to consider how comfortable they would be with various degrees of rough play on the playground.

feel that we have no say or it went against anything that I wanted or that people wanted. Yeah, and we all still have some differing opinions and philosophies, but I think in general [we are] more or less on the same page. (May 2013 interview)

Staff meetings were also a time to come together as a community of learners. An entire meeting was devoted to a discussion of the book *Big Body Play* (Carlson, 2011), which Linda had suggested the staff read. The teachers discussed key points from the book and had a lively debate about whether and how what they learned from the book should impact school policy and classroom practice. Other staff meetings were devoted to teachers reporting on workshops or conferences they had attended; the emphasis was on teachers sharing new ideas and being pedagogical and curricular resources for one another.

Congruent with this emphasis on continual development and teacher expertise, teachers at Friendship had considerable autonomy when it came to their daily practice, as long as they did not depart from the school's central tenets of play-based learning and a focus on the prepared environment. The preschool's philosophy provided a strong framing within which teachers were able to make decisions about curriculum and programming. Linda explained:

As far as the staff goes, I think we're all fairly like-minded and you know, trying to promote self-help and independence. We're all interested in nature and setting up an environment that the children get to explore and all that and then we each have our own little classrooms and we're pretty independent within our room. (May 2013 interview)

Denise thought highly of her staff and trusts teachers to make curricular decisions. When asked what keeps families coming back to Friendship, she was quick to assert, "The staff…It's the staff. There is a history of an amazing group of people that teach here. I think that, first and foremost [is what keeps people coming back]" (January 2012 interview). Denise's regard for the

teachers and her respect for their professional expertise was reflected in the way teachers interacted with one another. While they also talked about their personal lives, much of the conversation between Linda and Melissa each morning as they prepared for the school day was focused on pedagogy, curriculum, and goals for individual children.

> *I arrive at around 8:30 this morning. Denise is in the classroom with both teachers. There is a large stump on the counter and Denise asks where they got it. Melissa says that she got it from her neighbor's wood pile. She says she thought that it would be a good one to show the kids because it is so beautiful. Denise leaves and Melissa tells Linda that she had dinner with some Waldorf teachers on Friday and she got an idea for something to do in the classroom. She says that they do an activity called "new do review" when they read a book. It involves reading a story and having kids draw a picture about what they remember from the story, and then reading the book again and reviewing the pictures they drew.*
>
> *The conversation shifts to a discussion of the food drive donations they've collected. They talk about having the kids write a thank-you note to some of the families that donated a lot of food. They also talk about how they might talk about the food in the classroom and relate it to thanksgiving. Linda says that she got some books from the library about Thanksgiving but she returned one of them because she didn't like how it depicted Native Americans.*
>
> *Just before they head out to the playground, the teachers discuss whether Derek, who is child of the week, is going to be doing anything special today. They say they don't think there is anything special, and that they still don't know when one of his parents is going to come in and do something special.*[38] (Field notes, 11/13/14)

While much at Friendship stayed the same year after year, a culture of professional learning and development permeated daily life at the preschool. Teachers frequently stopped into each other's classrooms to borrow materials and ideas. Denise encouraged ongoing professional development by making funds available for teachers to attend workshops and professional

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[38] The "Child of the Week" gets to bring in a poster with pictures of him or herself. During the first large group meeting of the day, he or she is invited to show the poster to the class and talk about the pictures. The child's parents can also arrange to come in to do a special activity with the class one day that week. For example, Delilah's dad, an engineer, came in for an hour and to teach the children how to make helicopters out of a drinking straw and a small piece of paper.

development classes and then making time for them to share what they learned with the rest of the staff during staff meetings.

Denise included herself in the community of learners; in the spring of the research year she and Linda attended the statewide *Preserving Early Childhood* conference together. When Linda reported back to the rest of the teachers about this conference during a staff meeting, Denise says that she enjoyed getting to spend so much time with Linda one-on-one and would love to attend a workshop or conference with each of the teachers.

Inside the 4K Classroom

4K Focal Teacher: Linda Jenkins

When the 2012 academic year began, Linda had been teaching at Friendship Preschool for seven years. She always wanted to be a teacher, but never thought she would like teaching younger children until she had to work in a kindergarten classroom during her undergraduate studies. After earning a bachelor's degree in elementary education, Linda taught kindergarten, first, and second grade for LPS. During this time she worked in high-poverty schools and received little direction from her administrators about curriculum and planning. Feeling burnt out after five years of teaching with little support and limited resources, Linda decided to stay home to raise her children. When Linda eventually decided to go back to teaching she found that it was quite difficult to get a public school job. Instead, she found a position at Friendship, where she taught the three-year-old class for five years. When Friendship became a 4K site, Linda was moved to a 4K classroom because she was one of three teachers in the building who met district qualifications for 4K teachers. This transition was challenging, both in terms of learning to work with a new co-teacher and having to re-calibrate her expectations for preschoolers.

[With the three-year-olds] we always did a certain amount of, obviously, literacy and math, but [now it's] thinking a little more ahead about school skills: "Oh, in kindergarten they're gonna want you to write your name with a capital and lowercase". So I keep that in the back of my head. Some of the parents are like, "Oh does my child know all the ABCs?" I'm not real stressed about that, but, you know, it's there. And just knowing that's the next step, versus when they're three, knowing the before. (January 2012 interview)

Linda's primary goal for children in the 4K year was to develop social-emotional and self-help skills, though she became increasingly concerned with academics.

[My goal is] social-emotional: how to get through the school day, following a routine, learning to cooperate or take turns or share. [Also], self-help type skills like putting a coat on and washing hands. I want them to like coming to school. I hope that [they do]. We do hear that from people, that it's a Saturday and they're wanting to come to school. I feel like they're gonna be in school a long time, you might as well start out loving it! So I guess that is my main thing. I hope they are excited to come. I hope they feel confident and certain and empowered, like "I can do this." And knowing that there are academic goals, too. I feel like it's kinda like exposure, not mastery. That's kinda what we do, build that ground level for the background knowledge. So even if they don't completely get a concept, then next year they're like "Oh, we did this." So laying a lot of that groundwork. And then sometimes I think it's nice to interest them in something new. We did a lot of this Africa stuff with the last unit, or things that they might not have thought about before. I know they say start with what children know, and I think that's obviously a starting point, but I hope that we can then get a few new things in too. And try to help

with some of those friendship things. 'Cause I figure it's that hierarchy of needs [and] feeling accepted and liked and all that is important. (December 2012 interview)

Linda loved to learn and said she would be a perpetual student if she could. She lamented the fact that she could not afford to go back to school for an advanced degree. Linda seemed to take advantage of every professional development opportunity she could. She participated in a two-year course for 4K teachers focused on early childhood math and attended many conferences and workshops around the state. Although she was not required to (or paid for the time), Linda also participated in almost all of the district professional development sessions for 4K teachers. During the research year, I saw Linda incorporate what she learned at workshops and PD sessions into her classroom practice. For example, after a weekend PD Linda arrived at school Monday morning with a large bucket containing pieces of wooden molding and a jar of marbles. During morning meeting she showed the materials to the children, and demonstrated how, if you set one end of a piece of molding on the floor and held the other end at an angle, it could become a ramp that the marble would roll down. She told the children that the items would be available in the block area. The materials proved to be wildly popular over the weeks that followed; children learned about the properties of physics as they experimented with placing ramps at different angles, pushed pieces of molding together to see how far a marble would travel, and used wooden blocks to create tunnels and "jumps".

Linda had strong beliefs about what constituted best practice in early childhood settings, but she also questioned whether she was doing the right thing. This could be seen in the way she struggled with two aspects of the 4K day: calendar time and small group activities.

The calendar is such a big issue. I can't figure out what to do. I know LPS says don't do calendar. We've switched to a real calendar and I've kind of liked that. I feel it's more

authentic—this is really what a calendar is used for. And we've done things where we put the kid's birthday on it and we count how many days until their birthday. And I think that stuff is good. The beginning of the year we did patterning and counting, so I don't know if we don't have that… I'm sure there's plenty of ways to fit it all, get it all in. So that's a question I have. ... I [also] kinda wonder, do we have official small group time? Where maybe we rotate kids through centers? It seems like every day we're like, "Oh, next year let's try this" or "Let's do that differently." (May 2013 interview)

In some ways, Linda's practice was continually evolving based on what she learned in different venues. At the same time, her interactions with Melissa during planning meetings revealed Linda's propensity for keeping things the same.

> *It's a rainy Thursday afternoon and Linda and Melissa sit down to plan next week's "Geology" theme. After a few minutes' banter about how squirmy the kids have been this week, Linda pulls out a large plastic bin full of materials that she has used in the past for this theme and begins to sift through it. She says that in the past they've focused on rocks, dirt, dinosaurs, and fossils during this unit. Melissa describes an idea she has for a project related to archaeology and excavation. Linda says they can probably do this but then goes on to tell Melissa that there is a set of cow bones they can put out and pretend they're dinosaur bones. She says in the past they've set up the dramatic play area as a science lab; the kids can use brushes to dust off the bones and magnifying glasses to inspect them. Later in the conversation, Melissa again proposes an idea: making faux fossils with clay. Linda responds by describing something they did last year, where the children made a fossil cookie by pressing a dinosaur figurine into cookie dough.*
> *The teachers pull out a calendar and map out the activities for each day of the unit. Linda wonders aloud what the focus of the third week of the unit should be. Melissa suggests talking about crystals because many children won't realize that gemstones are rocks. Linda replies, "Oh, that reminds me of something else we've done in the past: sink or float. All the rocks sink except for the pumice." She goes on to talk about an activity where children paint rocks with water.* (Field notes, 4/11/13)

This excerpt shows the general flow of a planning meeting. Linda frequently talked about how open she was to change and new ideas, but when it came down to making decisions about the

curriculum, she almost always shifted the focus back to what she had done in the past. This volleying of ideas was amicable, but Melissa almost always deferred to Linda.[39] For Linda, it seemed, there was a fine line between branching out to try something new and repeating what worked in the past.

Like other teachers at Friendship, Linda was very focused on her classroom environment, to the point where program quality and aesthetics became conflated. She spent a considerable amount of time outside her contracted hours preparing materials.

> I probably double my time. When we do those changeovers that takes over my life. I often spend three, four, five or six hours. Because I stay on Fridays and I almost always come in on Sundays. And three or four hours for a changeover is not unusual. Particularly when I want to make signs or do this or that, I spend several other hours that weekend. I guess, once we do the main changeover, I don't necessarily do a whole lot – it doesn't take as much time during the week. But you know I'm at the library twice a week, probably. … and I'm like, oh I'll have it done so next year I won't have to. But even if I do reuse it, there's always something new to do or make or you set things up just a little differently. Like making all those labels for our baskets; it's crazy. Part of me is like, really? It's a basket label—why does it take that long? So yes it gets a little easier, but there's always something new. (May 2013 interview)

The "changeover," which took up so much of Linda's time, was an important aspect of Friendship Preschool's culture. I describe this in greater detail in the next section.

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[39] In an interview, Melissa told me she was trying not to "rock the boat" too much because she did not plan on being at Friendship for long. Working at Friendship was a way for her to get back into teaching after being out of the teaching workforce for about a decade (she had been raising her children and starting a business with her husband), but she did not want to stay in early childhood long-term. She often deferred to Linda because of this, and because she recognized Friendship's strong institutional history and the amount of time Linda spent preparing materials.

In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Linda was an active and outspoken participant in 4K meetings with the school district. She attended most 4K Coordination Committee meetings and had also recently joined the progress report committee. Denise encouraged her participation, and Linda believed she played an important role on the committee by providing the sole teacher perspective:

> I felt like it's sort of good because I'm the only one [on the progress report committee] who had really done this with real kids. In some ways I'm surprised how few people are represented, [given] how many different sites there are. I don't know if it was ever offered--I sort of invited myself to the party. (December 2012 interview)

Like, Denise, Linda seemed invested in these committees because it was a way for her to ensure that her perspectives on early childhood education were heard and, potentially, incorporated into district policy, as well as a way to demonstrate her professional knowledge and expertise.

The Curriculum: "The environment is a big thing."

Friendship did not use a specific curriculum, though Denise said the school's philosophy most closely aligned with the Creative Curriculum. When 4K began and community sites had to identify a district-approved curriculum to use for 4K, they chose the Creative Curriculum. Denise explained:

> Well, you know, we've been around since 1949—that's when our program started. And it started as a play-based program, so it's always been a play-based program. It's thematic in nature; the teachers use themes to prepare the classroom and the environment for the children and to give a sort of scope to the activities that they provide for the children. As part of 4K you did have to identify a curriculum, and we most closely identify with

Creative Curriculum, so that's what we said. Because it's so open-ended, and it's just an outline. It's not a "today is Tuesday, this is what you do today." And it is Friendship. I mean, it is absolutely who we are. So if we had to say what curriculum it would be Creative Curriculum. (January 2012 interview)

Teachers designed thematic units lasting two to four weeks to support this play-based approach. Thematic units shaped the classroom environment, which changed according to the theme. This focus on the environment was something that attracted families to the school, according to Denise:

…time and time again I hear from families - there's just a feeling. You walk in the door, and there's just a feeling about this place. The environment is beautiful. The teachers do a phenomenal job of preparing the environment for the children. (January 2012 interview)

How Denise and the teachers conceptualized the curriculum was tied to their belief in the importance of a carefully-planned environment. This approach was premised on the idea that it was the teacher's responsibility to create an environment for children to explore independently, which reflects the Piagetian notion that "children [construct] their own knowledge through interaction with the environment" (Walsh & Gardner, 2005). In the sections below, I describe the importance of the environment to teaching and learning at Friendship, and how the environment set the stage for child-directed learning in the 4K classroom.

Setting the stage for learning.

It's 12:30pm on a Friday. The children have gone for the day, and Linda sets several large bins out on the tables. Inside are a variety of materials related to the Safari theme, which will dominate classroom activity for the next three weeks. She and Melissa begin sifting through the materials and discuss their ideas for safari-themed projects and activities. Linda reminds Melissa that they should not plan anything teacher-directed for the first day of the theme, because the kids are so always preoccupied with exploring the new materials that they never want to come over to the project table.

Linda sets out safari-themed books, puzzles, and games throughout the room, while Melissa arranges the displays on top of the bookshelves. As they work, the teachers talk about how they'd like to see the children writing numerals more because this is something they seem to struggle with. Linda suggests putting a strip of numbers up along the top of the easel and seeing what the kids do with it. By 5pm, the classroom has been transformed—the safari theme has taken over. In spite of this, Linda plans to come back on Sunday to finish preparing the room for Monday morning.

Friendship teachers valued child-initiated and directed interaction with the environment. During changeovers, like the one illustrated by this vignette, teachers created the conditions for such interactions by preparing an appealing and engaging environment for children to explore. Changeovers were opportunities for teachers to stock the classroom with new theme-related materials. They typically occurred on Friday afternoons prior to the start of a new theme and involved taking materials out of each area in the classroom and replacing them with new ones related to the upcoming theme. Though teachers claimed to dread changeovers because they were time-consuming, they were a defining element of the Friendship's approach to early childhood education.

The school provided teachers with considerable resources to support changeovers. At the beginning of the school year, teachers filled out a chart indicating the weeks they would focus on particular themes to ensure that shared theme-related materials would be available. Materials were stored by theme—"Pet Shop", "Transportation", "Community Helpers"—in large bins in communal closets. Though the school provided many materials, teachers also supplemented these with their own items from home.

Linda took up changeovers with abandon; her devotion to this cultural phenomenon meant that she spent four or five hours at school on Friday afternoon and several hours on Sunday each time she prepared the classroom for a new theme. When she began teaching

preschool, Linda was surprised by how long it took to set up the classroom, but over time she came to accept it as part of what it meant to be a preschool teacher.[40]

> So once [the children are] here, it's actually…easier, but… Those changeover weeks are hard! And my poor family, I sort of say, "It's a changeover!" and I spend my whole weekend getting ready for school. So that's where the bulk of the time is. Because I do believe that once the kids are here…letting them explore and learn through what they're playing, what they're doing, what they're experiencing. (December 2012 interview)

Part of the reason changeovers were so time-consuming for Linda was that she attended to even the most minute details of the classroom environment, ensuring that they related to the new theme. For example, with each new theme, she changed the display on top of each shelf in the classroom and put something new in wooden blocks with a clear Plexiglas middle. When the theme was construction, these blocks were filled with screws and bolts; during the fairy tales and fables theme, they contained gumdrops. Another example was the play-doh table. The 4K teachers were vigilant about making play-doh on a regular basis. Rather than making normal play-doh, the teachers added food coloring and fragrance so that the play-doh corresponded to the theme. For example, during the "Geology" theme, the play-doh was dark brown and gritty, like dirt, thanks to the coffee grounds Melissa mixed in. Linda was known among her colleagues for her attention to detail; when other teachers stopped by the classroom they often commented on the theme-related details of the classroom environment.

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[40] As I alluded to earlier, the focus on the environment at Friendship is not unique to this particular school; well-known curricular approaches adopt a similar focus. *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool* (Dodge et al., 2002) provides teachers with a framework for setting up environments that facilitate learning. A primary focus of the Creative Curriculum is the preparation of interest areas. The Reggio Emilia approach also addresses the environment, but in a slightly different way. In a Reggio Emilia classroom the environment is considered the "third teacher". This approach asks teachers to "pay close attention to the myriad of ways that space can be made to 'speak' and invite interaction" (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007, p. 41). In addition to these more specific approaches, textbooks for pre-service early childhood teachers often include a chapter explaining how to set up an early childhood environment (e.g. Brewer, 2007).

Linda spent so much time thinking about and preparing the classroom environment that she appeared insulted when the children are not as interested or excited about something as she hoped they would be. One day she brought in a memory game called "I Never Forget a Face" to support a lesson about diversity. During the morning meeting she read the book *The Colors of Us* and demonstrated the project for the day: painting a self portrait. She showed the children the memory game and said they could play it during free choice. Later on, during free choice, Linda expressed her frustration that none of the children played the game:

> *Melissa comments to Linda that the game she bought is cute and asks where she found it. Linda says she's been wanting it for a long time and then adds in a somewhat exasperated tone, "But you can see how well it's going! You never know."* (Field notes, 5/10/14)

Linda's enactment of the carefully planned-environment was put into perspective by her co-teacher Melissa. The research year was Melissa's first year at Friendship; her background was in elementary special education and she took the job as a way to get back into teaching after eight years of full-time mothering and starting a business with her husband. Melissa noted that she did not spend as much extra time at school during a changeover as Linda. She explained that she felt conflicted because there was a lot of pressure to spend a lot of time preparing the classroom environment and she not want to look like a "slacker" in comparison to Linda, but she had to prioritize time with her family over working extra hours for which she was not reimbursed.

> You know I've tried not to [come in on the weekend], but Linda really likes to do that, so you feel like a slacker. So I did this weekend, but really when you start to think of the job, from that perspective it really is very frustrating because you think of the hours that we are needed because of the environment that we teach in, but we're not usually compensated for the fact we have all these demands of the room set up. So it is an

interesting dynamic, you know. And we don't have to come in on the weekends, but if you have a certain standard of your teaching you can't fly in here on Monday morning…and whip something up. And Linda and I hold ourselves to really high standards and I think that's part of the dilemma – there just isn't enough time. And I think the time she spends is unbelievable to me. Since day one I've been blown away by the time and energy and commitment that she has to this job. And the detail. (June 2013 interview)

Melissa felt pressure to spend more time getting the classroom ready because, at Friendship, the prepared environment was closely tied to notions of quality. At the same time, as a relative outsider (most of the other teachers had been at Friendship for close to a decade or more), she questioned whether the emphasis on changing the environment led teachers to lose sight of learning goals. Melissa explained her concern that aesthetics are often conflated with quality teaching and learning at Friendship:

Bethany: So you want more– here's what we did and here was the intent behind it?

Melissa: Yeah. I think it would be helpful. Yeah, "What is the goal of the sensory table this week?" Sometimes I think when teachers plan it's more [about] the material instead of the purpose. So I think you should do the purpose and then find the materials. There's a lot of materials that go into every weekly thing and that's been a learning process for me. It's not planning activities or small group activities, it's planning like you're setting something on a shelf and, you know, so it's a different– it's more like you're planning for the environment. And we'll bring in activities, you know, but it is a different way of planning. (June 2013 interview)

Melissa questioned Linda and others' approach to planning, which consisted of designating activities for the different areas of the room—blocks, dramatic play, sensory, etc.—for each day of the week. Melissa found this formula problematic, noting "…it's just too watered down for my taste, and you aren't really asking 'Why are we doing this?'" One of Melissa's goals for the year was to devise a new system of planning where teachers would indicate not only the activity, but the goal of the activity. Melissa's approach was to start with a goal and then plan activities that would help children reach that goal. This reflected the way an elementary school teacher might start with a learning standard and then plan lessons to help students achieve that standard. Old habits die hard, though; during Linda and Melissa's planning meetings, the old style of planning always prevailed in spite of Melissa's attempts to implement a new template.

As much as the classroom environment was positioned as essential to learning and engagement, the aspects of the physical space were also viewed as an obstacle to learning. When asked what was different about being a 4K teacher, one of the things Linda highlighted was the 4K classroom space, noting that with an oddly shaped room it was difficult to figure out where all of the "areas" (e.g. blocks, dramatic play, writing) should be.

> I think it's the different room that in many ways has been the bigger issue. I don't feel we have as many little areas in my new classroom. Which in some ways is nice because I don't have to plan for quite as much stuff. But I wish we had one more area for kind of a more permanent science thing. So, the space has been different. (January 2012 interview)

The classroom's wooden loft was another constant source of frustration for Linda and Melissa. Like the other areas in the classroom, the spaces underneath and on top of the loft changed with the theme. Over the course of the year, I observed several conversations between the two teachers in which they discussed how much they would like to get rid of the loft and

speculated whether Denise would allow them to do this. Linda told me they did not like the loft because it was difficult for the teachers to get under it to join in children's play; whenever they did, she explained, the play seemed to change or stop. When asked what she would do differently next year, the loft was central to Linda's response:

The room setup. Do we keep the loft? Do we get rid of it? I don't know. I'm about 75% get rid of it. But sometimes it is kinda nice. And then how would we set up the room otherwise? (May 2013 interview)

In addition to feeling like the space under the loft was inaccessible to adults, there was a lot of concern about the top of the loft. In addition to concern that children would fall and get hurt as they climbed up and down the ladder, the loft was perceived as a space for misbehavior. This vignette illustrates how teachers monitored behavior on the loft.

Linda and Melissa chat briefly by the counter area about a "developing situation" on the loft, which is set up like a library this week. Linda says, "I was going to go see" and Melissa indicates that she was just making her way over there, too. Linda climbs up to the top of the loft and talks to Fiona, Cecilia, and Owen.

The kids in the writing area are making mail and bringing it up to the loft. Linda says that mail is great, but they can't bring it up to the loft. When Linda comes back down she and Melissa confer again. They discuss having the children come to the project table because things might get wild up on the loft.

About ten minutes later Linda goes back over to the loft, where Keegan and Fiona are playing noisily. Linda scolds them, "If you're up there, you need to read a book." Her voice is very firm. The children come down from the loft and find somewhere else to play. (Field notes, 4/18/13)

The teachers were very tuned in to what transpired on the loft, and most behavior management occurred in that space.

Another aspect of the physical space that posed a challenge for teachers was the fact that it was shared with the church. The church used the preschool classrooms for Sunday School, which meant that every Friday the teachers had to move furniture and put materials away so they

would not be disturbed by the Sunday School classes. This not only resulted in extra work for the teachers but, as Melissa described, created a set of constraints for the curriculum.

> The hard part with this room is everything has to be put away and not kept out. It's hard to teach in that environment because you can't build [on things]. I think of [another preschool where I worked] that has this huge block area and they have "Work in Progress," meaning you can come back to it. There are these "Work in Progress" signs hanging up. I love that feeling of a classroom as a discovery lab. (May 2013 interview)

The environment was central to the experience of teaching and learning at Friendship, both in 4K and in programming for other age groups. In the next section, I explain how the centrality of the classroom environment aligned with Linda's commitment to child-directed learning.

Daily life in 4K. The school's focus on the environment provided a framework for Linda's emphasis on child-directed activity in the classroom; a carefully-planned environment allowed teachers to step back and play a less prominent role in the classroom when children were present. Linda's teaching practice was premised on the idea that the bulk of a teacher's work happened behind the scenes before the children arrived. When the children were in the classroom it was their job to use the materials prepared for them.

> I feel like we start the day more teacher-directed with a group time. The middle, play part, depends on the day but in some ways I feel like we step back and let the kids play and kinda do what they want. Obviously you have to supervise and sometimes…go to different areas and maybe bring out different things. I find that with [the toys and games area] they often don't go over there completely on their own, but if I go get started on something they'll come over. So introducing things. Depending on what we're doing with the project, sometimes that takes more direction. We put in so much time outside of the

day trying to set up the environment…So I feel like, not to say that I don't do anything once we're here, but I feel like the environment is a big thing in trying to set things up and think about what items we have out that to then let the kids come in and negotiate the room on their own. It's kinda their job, once they're here. I guess we kinda bookend. A little more teacher-directed at the end [with] "question of the day" and whatever sort of wrap-up activity. (December 2012 interview)

Linda's commitment to child-directed learning was coupled with a hesitancy to have students involved in anything that appeared teacher-directed. She did not want others to think she employed a didactic approach. Several times I spent the morning with her as she prepared for the day, Linda was apologetic and visibly self-conscious about an activity she had planned because it involved a worksheet or something similarly closed-ended. The irony of this was that even the child-directed aspect of the school day were actually orchestrated by teachers. Children had choices, but only within the range of options that teachers made available to them; they were able to direct only after being carefully directed.

More than half of each 4K session was spent in free play outdoors or free choice in the classroom. During free choice, children moved through the different areas of the classroom, self-selecting materials. When I first began observing at Friendship, choice time was structured so that children had to indicate their choices on the "Choice Board" before playing in a particular area of the room. The Choice Board limited the number of children who could play in each area of the room at any given time. Several months later, the teachers decided to eliminate the Choice Board, giving children more freedom to move in and out of different centers. There were no formal limits on how many children could play in each area. During the first large group meeting of the day, the teachers highlighted the choices that would be available that day. One of the areas

that most children visited during choice time was the project table. The teachers prepared a new art project each day and kept track of who had not done the project. As the end of free choice neared, teachers took stock of who had already visited the project table and asked children who had not yet completed the project to do so.

During free choice, one teacher typically facilitated the activity at the project table while the other teacher circulated around the room monitoring behavior, asking children about their play, and, sometimes, joining in children's play. Free choice was also a time when teachers prepared curriculum materials and attended to housekeeping duties like hanging children's artwork. The following depicts a scene that was typical of choice time.

> *Several children are busy in dramatic play today. Nora and Cecilia are pretending to be a mother and daughter. Elijah is also playing under the loft, but he plays by himself. He says he's going home – he was in Minnesota. Delilah comes over and asks Nora if she can play with them. Nora says "You can be my sister." A moment later, Linda pops her head under the loft and tells the children that there's paint on the table and they can paint if they want to. No one responds, and Linda walks away. Nora and Delilah pretend that they're going to school. The leave the loft area and walk over to the stage. Nora says, "Let's play with dolls, the teacher says. Because we are girls and we play with dolls." Reese approaches Nora and Delilah. She is pretending to be a kitten. Nora asks Reese, "Did mother say it's okay for you to play at our school?" Reese nods. Cecilia comes over and the three girls follow her back under the loft. Delilah is a kitten now, too. They all go to the driving bench. Linda comes back and asks Elijah to come make his Mother's Day gift. He leaves and follows her to the project table. Nora sits on the stage. She reads a book to the "kittens" and tells them to sit with their mother. Cecilia pets Reese on the head. Nora reads them a book about guinea pigs. She is making up the words but provides quite a bit of detailed information about guinea pigs.* (Field notes, 5/10/13)

While Linda was committed to providing unstructured free play time, Melissa, who was more familiar with elementary school structures and routines, was less comfortable with this approach. She was concerned that the free choice hour would not be spent productively if there was little teacher direction.

The big thing hard for me to adjust is I'm not used to just an hour open time. I'm really used to smaller groups or deliberate centers where you're working with a group and you're tracking right there and then you're planning the next group based on that. So I think in way that, just the hour of free play…is a challenge to me. I would like to [do small groups], but that's because I default more to a kindergarten or first grade [model] and I don't know – I don't think that's very developmentally appropriate. Maybe a shorter amount of time, but I would like to find a way—and Linda and I have talked about this—to really just have a more deliberate mind frame in what kids are doing when, even if it's free choice. Because sometimes that hour kinda drags on, and if you're not really mindful in that time, it can become this- I just want to make sure the kids are getting as much as they can out of that hour. So [one of my goals for next year is to look] at that free play time and [make] sure we're really taking advantage of learning opportunities. (June 2013 interview)

Over the course of the school year, Linda also questioned whether there should be more structured small group activities and asked me to share what I had seen in other 4K classrooms. This was coupled with Linda's growing concern about whether the children in her class were getting enough academics, a line of thinking that reflects broader debates in the field of early childhood education (Bishop-Josef & Zigler, 2011; McCabe & Sipple, 2011).

4K at Friendship: "It's a group of four-year-olds playing…but with purpose"

In this section I explain how teachers and administrators at Friendship conceptualized 4K and how this was reflected in teachers' practice. At Friendship, 4K came to symbolize a school district/community site dichotomy. 4K was seen as a way for Friendship to stay viable in a

changing early childhood landscape, and 4K at Friendship was defined by what it was not—a program at a public elementary school.

Preservation and Continuity

4K was purported to benefit community sites because they would receive an infusion of funds from the school district. While this may have been true for some sites, the district 4K reimbursement fell $50,000 short of covering the actual cost of the program at Friendship. The school district reimbursement was about $3,400 per student per year, but Friendship's actual cost was about $5,000 per student. As I have already noted, to make up for lost revenue, Friendship began offering "a la carte" programming that parents could purchase to extend the school day.

In spite of the fact that the district reimbursement would not cover the school's costs, Denise wanted Friendship to be a 4K site because she believed that if the school did not offer 4K it would lose its four-year-olds.

> [We did this] for preservation of Friendship. The district had sent out a blurb to everybody that, you know, they're gonna do it, come and hear about the early learning initiative. And then I just felt like this was something that could happen and could impact community centers. So I wanted to stay with it. … We were concerned about [losing four-year-olds to the school district sites]. Because [4K is] free! And people's budgets are people's budgets… (January 2012 interview)

Denise's concerns were not unfounded; colleagues at Friendship's "sister schools" who chose not to take part in 4K initially later applied to become 4K sites because four-year-olds had begun withdrawing in order to attend 4K.

Despite the fact that 4K brought some change to Friendship—staffing, assessment practices, and resources—Denise and Linda both asserted that 4K had not fundamentally changed classroom practice. Instead, they saw 4K as means to ensure that Friendship was able to continue doing what it had always done well.

> As far as, you know, the functioning of the classrooms, it's still Friendship, which was one of the reasons why we really really wanted to be 4K: because we feel strongly about the program that we offer. We think it's…one of the best, as far as play-based programming for early learning. And [4K] allowed us to continue to offer that to children. (Denise, January 2012 interview)

Us vs. Them: Defining 4K by What it Wasn't

One of the ways 4K was conceptualized at Friendship was through a school district versus community site binary. Denise believed that 4K should only be offered in community sites (rather than public schools) because they were designed with four-year-olds in mind and filled with people with deep knowledge of child development. In her opinion, the elementary schools were not appropriate for four-year-olds.

> You know, I'm not bashing the district, it's just that our center was built for four-year-old children. The school district buildings, some of them were not, and they're having to be retro-fitted. Bathrooms down the hall, that kind of thing. The children are probably going to be absolutely just fine. But [Friendship] is purposeful and accommodating to the age that we're serving. (January 2012 interview)

Linda expressed similar skepticism about the school district's approach to 4K, wondering whether the ideas the district espoused would be carried out in practice.

> And I don't want [preK] to turn into school, you know? I really hope we can work and
>
> make it learning through play and authentic experiences. And I've been really happy to
>
> hear—I think the school district has that philosophy. How it all turns out in practice, I
>
> don't know. Like trying to do these progress reports, where they want an exact number of
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> how many letters they know. That's not really all that appropriate. So I guess that's my
>
> biggest concern. (January 2012 interview)

As these quotes illustrate, Denise and Linda's concerns about the school district's new involvement in preK were two-fold: first, that elementary school environments were not appropriate for four-year-olds, and second, that the form of 4K—curriculum, pedagogy, and assessments—would be too academic and come to resemble elementary school. These concerns reflect debates that have surrounded the expansion of public preK (Graue, 2011; Hatch, 2002).

For Denise and Linda, the district's decisions about assessment were proof of its limited understanding of early childhood education. They viewed the district-mandated progress report as incongruous with a play-based curriculum because it required teachers to assign a grade in a way that did not reflect the fact that development happens along a continuum. Part of the issue was that LPS insisted the 4K report card mirror elementary report cards, where children received a score of on a scale of one to four, indicating the degree to which they met expectations in a particular area.[41] A four was used when a child exceeded expectations in a particular domain. Denise found this particularly problematic in an early childhood setting.

> How do you exceed in blocks? You know? Maybe it's an upper level thinking, but we're
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> play-based, you know? And I would rather take the numbers away and say, you know, B
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> for beginning, M for meets, and N not at this time or something like that. So it doesn't

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[41] See Appendix A for a copy of the 4K Progress Report. The grading scale for the 4K Progress Report was: 1-not yet, 2-beginning, 3-meets, 4-exceeds.

have a number- the higher the number the higher the grade that kind of thing. (January 2013 interview)

Denise was concerned, too, that this system of assessment led parents to be hyper-vigilant about their four-year-old's grades. She said that parents just wanted to see a "4" on the report card; they did not necessarily understand that it was okay (and expected) for a child to start out with a 1 or a 2 at the beginning of the year and work up to a 3 or a 4.

That children were being assessed was not what upset Denise; she took issue with the *type* of assessment that was used. Prior to 4K, Friendship had been using a developmental portfolio aligned with the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS). After 4K began, teachers continued to make portfolios for 4K students in addition to the required progress report and PALS assessments. Linda described this as doing "double duty". When asked what she would change about 4K, Denise did not skip a beat before saying she would get rid of the progress report.

> If I had all the power and could change? I would have 4K completely in community sites that were designed for early childhood education. I would eliminate progress reports, because I just think that it's not necessary for a four-year-old. Even though I was on the progress report committee, and it's very developmentally appropriate, I just think that the portfolio is enough. I think that parents already put too much emphasis on performance for children, especially little ones. I don't want kindergarteners having progress reports or report cards. We *did* get the district to call it a progress report and not a report card; we did think that that was a little victory. Small victories, you know! (January 2012 interview)

Though the progress report was controversial in a very real way, it also symbolized a philosophical divide between the school district and Friendship Preschool staff. With its orientation toward elementary school curriculum and assessment practices, LPS did not speak a language of early childhood education that Denise and the teachers could understand. This led to their perception that 4K in the public schools must be very different from 4K at Friendship. As the following quote illustrates, Denise did not even classify the four-year-old program at Friendship as 4K, because 4K was something she envisioned as more standardized and less developmentally appropriate.

So you know someone walking in wouldn't say, "Oh this sure looks like a 4K class to me." It's just a group of four-year-olds playing, but with purpose and with…real educational background to the activities and things that are put out for them. (Denise, January 2012 interview)

Linda also conceptualized her work as a 4K teacher as peripheral to the school district. Though she participated in district-wide 4K professional development sessions, she did so less for her own advancement and more to keep track of what LPS was doing. She explained, "I find it interesting to know what the district is doing and presenting. So I kinda go to spy a little (laughs). But, no, I'm interested in what they're doing" (June 2013 interview). Linda and Denise believed that Friendship's approach to 4K was more developmentally appropriate and of a higher quality than what the school district was offering. While they acquiesced to district 4K requirements and regulations, they saw their work as outside of the school district and often in contrast to LPS.

Conclusion

4K at Friendship was a viewed as a label, affixed to a package of services that the school had long provided for four-year-olds. This conceptualization of 4K was reflected in Denise and Linda's frequent assertion that little about their program had changed since the introduction of 4K, expressed in the common refrain: "We've been doing this for 60 years at Friendship!" It was not that Denise and Linda did not take ownership of the program—they were actually quite involved in all matters related to 4K—it was that they believed what they were doing at Friendship was fundamentally different from 4K in the public schools, and made it part of their mission to educate the school district about best practice in early childhood education. Denise and Linda took an activist stance during meetings with the school district, where they were often the first ones to ask the blunt questions that were probably on everyone's mind. Denise and Linda were invested in 4K in the sense that it helped Friendship stay viable and because they believed in the importance of early childhood education, but they questioned whether the public schools could deliver on the school district's promise of high-quality 4K. This school district versus community site binary shaped the way teachers interacted with and implemented the policy.

Chapter 7: Forest Grove Elementary School

In this chapter I describe 4K and Mrs. Calden's 4K teaching practice at Forest Grove Elementary school. I begin with an overview of the school, highlighting its unique position in the school district as a paired school, part of an LPS desegregation effort in the early 1980s. I then analyze Mrs. Calden's classroom practice and interaction with the 4K policy in relation to the dynamics of her institution. Even though it seemed like the public school would be the best fit for the "4K as school" paradigm promoted by the policy, 4K was deeply marginalized at Forest Grove. A former kindergarten teacher at the same school, Mrs. Calden's 4K experience was radically different from previous years. When she moved down to 4K, Mrs. Calden experienced physical and professional isolation as it became evident that 4K was not as valued as the elementary grades. 4K was also a struggle for Dr. Taylor, the school's principal, who, with little assistance from the school district, had to figure out how her building could accommodate a new population of students.

Institutional Context: "A Population with Many Kinds of People"

Forest Grove Elementary School is located in a quiet, tree-lined neighborhood with modest homes. The school building is surrounded by large grassy fields and a playground. In one corner of the school grounds houses a community/school garden, established in 2006 to be used for "meeting, eating, teaching and sharing" (Forest Grove school website). At the beginning and end of each school day, the sidewalk and lawn in front of the school are packed with children, parents, and teachers and the street in front of the school lined with large yellow school busses.

To enter the school building, visitors must buzz an intercom located next to the front door and then sign in at the main office on the first floor. The hallways of the two-story building are

lined with reminders for parents and students. A sign outside the main office exclaims, "Attendance Matters!" in English, Spanish, and Hmong. The school's Behavior Matrix, posted on hallway walls and doors, reminds students to be "respectful, responsible, and safe" and instructs them to use a "butterfly," "mouse," or "lion" voice in different areas of the building.

Each day before students arrived, the principal, Dr. Carol Taylor, announced over the loudspeaker that children were about to enter the building; she reminded teachers to be present in the hallway to support positive behavior. As they streamed into the school building, Dr. Taylor greeted the children at the door in English, Spanish, and Hmong. The hallways quickly became noisy, crowded with students stowing their belongings in hallway lockers before entering their classrooms. By the time all of this happened, the 4K students were tucked safely inside their classrooms eating snack because the 4K schedule was slightly different from the rest of the school.

A Unique History

Forest Grove is different from most other schools in Lakeville because it has a paired school, Sommerset, located about five miles away. Children in the Forest Grove and Sommerset attendance areas attend Forest Grove for kindergarten through 2nd grade and Sommerset from 3rd through 5th grade. Students who do not live in the neighborhood of the school they are attending are bussed by the school district.

The Forest Grove-Sommerset school pairing was established in the early 1980s as part of a desegregation plan aimed at addressing the disproportionately minority student population at Sommerset and another elementary school in the district. Whereas the district average at the time was 13% minority enrollment, over 50% of students at the two targeted schools were minority.

In comparison, Forest Grove's student body was 8.2% minority. According to a local newspaper, "The goal of the pairing plan was to reduce the minority population at both schools to about 30 percent, or no more than 15 percentage points above the district average for elementary schools."

Forest Grove was not originally included in the desegregation plan, but became a de facto site when public hearings drew strong public opposition from parents and citizens opposed to having their neighborhood school paired with Sommerset. The decision to pair Forest Grove with Sommerset was not initially a popular one, but many parents and community members now see it as one of the district's "best-kept secrets", according to a report in a local newspaper.

[Many community members and parents] say the Forest Grove-Sommerset pair is the best-kept secret in the [Lakeville Public School District], a magnet for excellent teachers, passionate administrators and exceptional resources. They say the school's rainbow student population, which includes a high percentage of non-native English speakers and special needs children, is an advantage for students because it is a microcosm of the real world and prepares them to learn from all kinds of people.

Program

Forest Grove serves about 500 students in 4K through grade 2. According to the school's 2013-14 state report card, Forest Grove "meets few expectations" in terms of overall achievement based on performance on math and reading standardized test results. Forest Grove was one of Lakeville's Dual Language Immersion (DLI) schools, offering instruction in both English and Spanish in every grade except for 4K. There are 16 bilingual teachers for kindergarten through grade 2 and 12 English language teachers for the same grades. The school's principal, Dr. Carol Taylor, noted that the DLI program attracts many families to the school,

including families of 4K students who think that having their child attend Forest Grove for 4K gives them a competitive edge for being admitted to the DLI program.

> A couple people asked me [whether being here for 4K will help their child get into DLI]. [They say], "So, if I come here then…" And I can tell because their kids keep trying to talk to me in Spanish. They're like, "Hola, Hola." And because, yeah, so I think they do hope [they can come here]. … And what can I say, I understand, but… I explain everything, but I'm not sure that it clicks all the time. (Dr. Taylor, May 2013 interview)

Since families could enroll in any 4K program in the district, many chose Forest Grove strategically; if they did not wind up being admitted to the DLI program for kindergarten, they would attend their neighborhood school instead.

4K Program. In the 2012-13 school year there were two 4K classroom at Forest Grove. Mrs. Calden taught a morning and an afternoon session, and Mrs. Preston taught a morning session. Mrs. Calden was the focal teacher for my research and had taught kindergarten at Forest Grove for 15 years prior to becoming a 4K teacher. Like other public school sites, children attended 4K at Forest Grove four days per week – Tuesday through Friday. The morning session ran from 8:15 until 11:19, and the afternoon session was from 12:07 to 3:17. At the start of each session was a short snack time; parents signed up to provide foods for snack, which were stored in a pantry in the classroom. During the morning session, a child who qualified for free and reduced lunch received a school breakfast instead of this snack. The table below shows the daily 4K schedule at Forest Grove. The morning and afternoon sessions were identical in terms of amount of time allocated to each activity, so here I only show the morning schedule.

Table 3. Forest Grove 4K Schedule[42]

Time	Activity
8:15am	Arrival
8:25-8:45am	Snack (parents contribute snack items to be shared by class)
8:45-9:00am	Bathroom (teachers lead entire class to restrooms down the hall)
9:00-9:20am	Group Time (calendar, story)
9:20-10:25am	Workshops
10:25-11:19am	Outdoors/Music and Movement[43]
11:19am	Goodbye

Mrs. Calden had a break between the morning and afternoon session for lunch and to prepare the room for the afternoon session. Mondays were reserved for 4K teachers to plan lessons and activities for the week, complete parent outreach activities, and attend professional development activities. Though community site teachers envied the fact that public school teachers had no teaching responsibilities on Mondays, Mrs. Calden explained that Mondays were not quite as good as they seemed:

So that Monday's a great day, but it's not all that it's made out to be either. 'Cause I have no planning time at all [the rest of the week] and—you've seen me—no prep time really, unless I get here at 7 or 7:15 in the morning. [All the planning and prep] is condensed into one day. (June 2013 interview)

Beyond this, Mrs. Calden had to attend staff meetings the first Monday of the month, a school committee meeting on the second Monday, and the district's 4K professional development workshops on the third. This left her with only one Monday each month that was entirely hers.

Mrs. Calden had 17 children in her morning class and 16 in the afternoon and an educational assistant, Maestra Inez,[44] who was with her for most of the day. [45] Mrs. Calden's

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[42] Activity names and times are copied from a schedule board that hung in the classroom. Descriptions in parentheses are my own.
[43] There was often a short whole group meeting prior to going outdoors. This meeting typically lasted no more than 5 minutes.

classes were relatively diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, but not as diverse as the overall school population. The AM and PM classes were both majority white, with a total of 22 white students, 2 African American students, 2 African students, 6 Asian students, and 1 Latino boy. Many of Mrs. Calden's students received special education services of some sort, and throughout the day there was a steady stream of support people coming into the classroom to pull children out for various interventions. One boy in the afternoon class was autistic and had a paraprofessional in the classroom with him for most of the session.

The reason Mrs. Calden's class did not reflect the school's demographics was, in part, because the children did not all live in the Forest Grove attendance area. Of the 33 students, 17 would be attending Forest Grove for kindergarten while the remaining 16 would attend six other schools in Lakeville. Another reason that Mrs. Calden's 4K classes did not mirror the diversity of the school population was because Forest Grove's paired school, Sommerset, also had 4K. Thus, 4K students who lived in the more diverse neighborhoods near Sommerset attended that school for 4K and then moved to Forest Grove for kindergarten. While this created a lot of transition for Sommerset students, attending their neighborhood school for 4K likely created more opportunities for families to interact with teachers and the school during the 4K year.

4K's open enrollment model, where parents were able to choose any 4K site across the district if they could provide transportation, created obstacles for integrating 4K into Forest Grove. Because she knew many of them would not attend kindergarten at her school, Dr. Taylor did not feel like the 4K students were her students, and she described the 4K as "a district

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[44] "Maestra" is Spanish for "teacher".

[45] This changed from year to year. As the 2013-14 school year approached, Mrs. Calden was distressed to learn that she might have as many as 18 children in her class. Allocation of educational assistants was also not a given; during the first year of 4K Mrs. Calden had an assistant for part of the day; she felt lucky to have a full time assistant during the research year. The reason the public school 4K sites could have higher ratios while the community sites had to maintain a 10:1 student-teacher ratio was because public schools were not held to state licensing or city accreditation standards like community 4K sites were.

program placed at schools". She wished that children were required to attend 4K in their enrollment area, and asserted that this would create more continuity for them and their families. Dr. Taylor's perception that the 4K students were not "her" students shaped her interaction with the program and the 4K teachers, and, thus, Mrs. Calden's sense that 4K was marginalized at Forest Grove.

4K students were able to receive transportation to Forest Grove if they lived outside the attendance area, and if their local elementary school did not have a 4K program. Although it was their paired school, children from the Sommerset area did not get bussed to Forest Grove for 4K because there was 4K at Sommerset, too. Most of Mrs. Calden's students were dropped off and picked up by their parents or caregivers. A few came on foot and many came by car. A handful of children in each class came to school by bus. Some parents were professionals—pastors, teachers, or businesspeople—while others appeared to be full time caregivers for the 4K students and siblings. I never saw the parents of children who came by bus, and my interaction with parents, overall, was limited because parents were not allowed in the school building at drop-off and pick-up times. Whereas parents in the other two sites lingered in the classroom from time to time, Mrs. Calden's interactions with 4K parents at Forest Grover were limited to the time we spent outdoors retrieving children where they waited in front of the school building. Later in this chapter I return to Mrs. Calden's interactions with parents and how parents responded to policies that kept them from entering the building.

Demographics

Because it drew from the surrounding neighborhood as well as the Sommerset attendance area, Forest Grove's student body was diverse: 15% Asian, 18% African American, 35% Latino,

and 31% White. About 43% of Forest Grove students were English Language Learners, 8% were classified as students with disabilities, and nearly 60% were low income, defined by eligibility for free and reduced lunch.

A commitment to diversity was foregrounded at Forest Grove. The school's website boasts: "The diversity at [Forest Grove-Sommerset] mirrors the real world – a population with many kinds of people" (Forest Grove website). Dr. Taylor viewed diversity as a strength, noting that the school was an "asset-based environment":

> I'm very clear about this with staff, and I think at this point staff are all this way – but I'm a real asset-based thinker. This is an asset-based environment. It doesn't matter to me whether I have one hundred percent minority kids or whether I have – I would never define or even behind the scenes define that as a reason for challenge for a school. So it's not really a big deal, but it is different. (May 2013 interview)

Forest Grove appeared to be a place that embraced diversity. From hallway signs translated into Spanish and Hmong to the number of bilingual resource staff, the school seemed committed to helping all students succeed.

Administration

The research year was Dr. Taylor's third as principal at Forest Grove for three years. She had a bachelor's degree in elementary education with an ESL bilingual certification and an Ed.D. in educational leadership. Prior to becoming principal, Dr. Taylor had been a preschool director, an ESL teacher, and a bilingual coordinator for LPS. She was also involved in creating the district's DLI program.[46] Watching Dr. Taylor interact with the students in her building made it

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[46] Dr. Taylor continued on at Forest Grove for the 2013-14 school year then took a position as coordinator of the DLI program for Lakeville in 2014-15.

easy to see how she supported the school's diverse student body. On numerous occasions I heard her engaged in conversations with children in Spanish, and each morning she stood at school's front doors, greeting children in English, Spanish, and Hmong as they arrived.

Dr. Taylor had been part of the 4K planning committee when she worked for the school district prior to becoming principal. She says this helped her when Forest Grove became a 4K site, because she was already familiar with the curriculum and many aspects of the policy. At the same time, Dr. Taylor did not feel a sense of ownership for the 4K program; she viewed it as a district program which was imposed on her. Forest Grove became a 4K site not because Dr. Taylor asked for it, but because the results of the school district's space analysis indicated that the school could accommodate 4K classrooms. For an administrator who already felt pulled in too many directions, 4K was a hassle—it required dealing with a new population of children and parents and figuring out how to stretch already thin resources even further. I discuss this, and what it meant for teachers, families, and children, in more detail in the final section of the chapter.

Dr. Taylor framed her goals for the 4K program in terms of readiness. The 4K year was an opportunity for students to acquire what she called "novice" skills and a firm academic foundation.

> I think [the goal of 4K at Forest Grove is] to prepare the students to be successful in K. that would include social emotional skills, understanding the routines and both the kind of pro-social routines for problem solving and for getting along. Also, I think, navigating the routines of the day in terms of like making decisions like, you know, should I go to this thing should I go to that center, what do I do if they're all there. That kind of thing. Which is sort of a baseline for how other things happen as they get older. I would say

also pre-academic sorts of skills that would still be considered academic but they're sort

of at a more novice range. Learning about letters and sounds and understanding that print

sends a message, and that they can be authors and all those sorts of things. Concepts of

print, all that kinda stuff. I would say also initial math skills. Probably understanding a lot

about spatial kinds of reasoning skills that form a foundation. Learning through play a lot.

(May 2013 interview)

As I have already mentioned, such a focus on academic readiness is why many early childhood

professionals are skeptical of bringing preK programs into public schools; they are afraid that

bringing preK into closer proximity with K-12 will result in an academic push-down, crowding

out opportunities for play and developmentally appropriate practice (Halpern, 2013; Hatch,

2002; McCabe & Sipple, 2011).

In order to achieve goals related to kindergarten readiness, Dr. Taylor asked the 4K

teachers to build the curriculum around standards, even if it meant foregoing some activities that

they liked to do:

I made it very, very clear to [Grace] the first year and as well as to Donna [this year] that

we were using the Creative Curriculum, and we were meeting those standards, and that's

what we were doing. So even if we had all these fun things we had done before, that was

not necessarily what we were going to do. And it's not that we can't necessarily pull in

some of that, but I think the foundation needs to be consistent. (May 2013 interview)

Dr. Taylor also wanted the 4K classrooms to be as similar as possible. Creating

continuity and consistency was a focus of Mrs. Calden's and Mrs. Preston's weekly planning

meetings.

We try [to coordinate across 4K classrooms] as much as we can. And this is kind of at the request of our principal that if she goes from one to the other classroom she'll see the same furniture, the same materials out, but she also likes to see that the same things are going on. Even though we don't teach in exactly the same way—we might not use the same books or whatever, but we pretty much use the same themes at [the same time], and sometimes it isn't a theme. So we're pretty much the same in that way. (Mrs. Calden, April 2013 interview)

In spite of this desire for the classes to be uniform, there was little oversight of teachers' work. Dr. Taylor asserted that she interacted with the 4K teachers the same way she did with the rest of her staff: "I think just like everyone else, I don't know how else to say it. I'm in their classrooms, I observe kids, I say hello to the kids in the morning like everyone else, I talk to the parents." From Mrs. Calden's perspective, however, this was not the case. She felt that Dr. Taylor did not pay enough attention to 4K. This lack of involvement in 4K reflected a divide between 4K and the rest of the school. Although they were present in the building, 4K classes were not integrated into the life of Forest Grove. I elaborate on this assertion in the final section of this chapter.

When I asked Dr. Taylor whether the district was responsive to her needs for 4K, she laughed and responded, "I wouldn't go that far." This response was both surprising and unsurprising. As a public school principal, Dr. Taylor functioned as part of a large bureaucracy that could not always respond to the needs of individual principals or schools. Though she had some autonomy and control over what went on in her building, there were many areas where Dr. Taylor did not have a say, like the decision to implement 4K at Forest Grove. While it is not surprising the district would not always be able to respond to Dr. Taylor's needs, her experience

is worth noting because, given that the 4K policy was overseen by the school district, one might imagine that the school buildings should have had the most direct connection with the district and that the public schools' needs would be the ones the district responded to best. This was the case for many components of 4K, like professional development, but 4K also put pressure on school resources. For example, Dr. Taylor described how the school district did not provide additional funding for 4K students with special needs, which required her to create new special education environments for these children without access to additional resources. In addition, Dr. Taylor felt like she did not receive accurate information from the school district. Again, this was puzzling because I would have expected that of all the sites, the public school would have the most direct communication with school district officials.[47] Dr. Taylor provided the following example of a time when she felt that she did not have the information needed to support the 4K teachers:

> I sometimes feel like there's information that isn't accurately given to me. Like an example would be: Donna and Grace came to me with their log of parent outreach hours and they were like, "Here it is and you can submit it." And I said, "Why are you giving it to me now?" And she's like, "Well so you can submit it and put it in online." And I said, "I don't have any idea what you're talking about." And Grace said, "There's an audit and you have to have all of this ready." And I said, "I'm really sorry Grace, but I have no idea what you're talking about." So it took backtracking to find out, but I was never told about it. It's not unique to 4K but I think it's hard to support teachers adequately when you don't have- when you aren't informed. Even just a heads up before would be helpful. (May 2013 interview)

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[47] Of course, it is hard to know whether the school district did not provide Dr. Taylor with the information or if she filtered out this information as less relevant.

In addition to feeling uninformed, Dr. Taylor felt that there were areas where she could not support the 4K teachers because of agreements between the school district and the teachers' union. She gave the example of parent-teacher conferences held at the beginning of the school year. During the research year there was a big controversy over whether 4K teachers were supposed to hold these conferences, and they were ultimately told they could not. Dr. Taylor told me that she wished she could help the teachers, but she had no power to do so because it was a teachers' union issue.

> [With] those things it's hard because I can't say, "I want you to do it", and pay them, because it's a contractual issue and individual negotiation would violate the union contract. So just a lot of little logistical things that I know I could probably do to make things more comfortable but I can't do them because…I can't. (May 2013 interview)

As a middle manager, Dr. Taylor was often stuck; she wanted to help her teachers, but did not have the authority to do so. While researchers have demonstrated that principals play "a key role in the accumulated decisions that lead to implementation of education policy," their power is not monolithic; instead, principals' decision-making authority is constrained by "directives and rules from above" (Crowson & Porter-Gehrie, 1980, p. 45). At the same time, principals exercise considerable "informal authority" beyond the formally delegated responsibilities of the position (Crowson & Porter-Gehrie, 1980). Given her limited control over district decisions vis-à-vis 4K, it is easy to see why Dr. Taylor did not seem to take ownership for the program. At the same time, she *did* have the authority to make building-level decisions that had serious consequences for the 4K teachers' working conditions. For example, she had full control over how classroom space would be allocated in the school building and decided to put the 4K classrooms in the school basement, which physically isolated them from the rest of the

school. In the first year of 4K, Mrs. Calden's classroom was located in a basement storage closet even though there was a classroom on the main floor of the school building sitting empty. As I describe in detail later in the chapter, Mrs. Calden was eventually able to move upstairs, but had to return to the basement in subsequent years. For the 4K teachers, Dr. Taylor's decisions about the location of 4K indicated a lack of support for the program and was a physical instantiation of the isolation they experienced.

Teaching Staff

Forest Grove had a large staff that included regular education English language and DLI teachers, special education teachers, teachers for specials such as physical education, art, and library, and bilingual support staff for Spanish, Hmong, Tibetan, and Khmer, among many others. The staff was mostly female.[48] As I walked back to Mrs. Calden's class with her after the morning 4K students were picked up, we would pass a kindergarten classroom and I could see a group of teachers gathered around low tables eating their lunch. When I was with Mrs. Calden, we always ate our lunch alone in her classroom. Mrs. Preston, the other 4K teacher, did not join us because she was busy preparing for her afternoon teaching science. Mrs. Calden told me that she knew most of the other teachers in the building, but she did not have much contact with them anymore because the 4K schedule was different from the rest of the school. She did try to connect with other teachers for lunch on Mondays, when 4K was not in session.

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[48] I have the sense teachers were mostly white or Latina, but I do not have a good sense of who the other teachers were because I simply did not see them very much, unlike the other sites. With the exception of Mrs. Preston, Mrs. Calden did not interact very often with other teachers. This issue of 4K isolation is discussed later in this chapter.

Relationships and Hierarchies

Mrs. Calden described Dr. Taylor's leadership style and relationship with the teaching staff in relation to the other principals she worked with during the 15 years she taught at Forest Grove. To Mrs. Calden, Dr. Taylor's leadership style was somewhat heavy-handed. The teachers had little say when it came to school policies or procedures—these were typically finalized by the principal and then communicated to teachers via email.

> [Shaping] school policies? I would say it's a very low degree, a very low degree with this particular administrator. But I think before it was a lot of high degree and before that it was very nicely balanced. Right now I think we've gone from way too much control to now we have absolutely no say or no control. Things are set up and we- we do it. And it's just a different style of management. So that's hard for me. I like to have some say in it. (Mrs. Calden, June 2013 interview)

Although she had considerable autonomy when it came to classroom-level decisions, Mrs. Calden had little say in shaping school-level policies. A good example of this was the decision about where the 4K classrooms should be located. When Dr. Taylor relegated 4K to the school basement, there was little Mrs. Calden could do to change it.

Monthly staff meetings were another good example of how Dr. Taylor related to the teachers. Whereas monthly staff meetings used to be a forum for discussing issues that arose in the building, under Dr. Taylor they were essentially professional development workshops. This was particularly troubling for Mrs. Calden; not only did she no longer have a space to talk with colleagues about what was going on in the school, the professional development topics were seldom relevant to 4K.

Well, we're always included in things like staff meetings, but the staff meetings usually–

they've become more professional development now, and I feel like a lot of it just doesn't

really pertain to [4K]. Although the feeling is that we should be there so that we know

what's going on in other grades. (June 2013 interview)

Mrs. Calden attended meetings so she would know what was going on in the rest of the

school, but she never had a formal opportunity to share information about 4K with other teachers

in the building.

The staff meeting I attended had nothing to do with 4K directly. The purpose of the

meeting was to learn about a new handwriting method the school district was piloting. When we

arrived at the meeting, which was held in the school cafeteria, one of the facilitators from the

school district's central office was handing out packets to the teachers. When Mrs. Calden told

the facilitator she was a 4K teacher, the facilitator said there was no packet for 4K—she will

have to look on with someone else. A few minutes later the presentation began. It was dry and

didactic; the facilitator read powerpoint slides word for word while teachers thumbed through

their materials. The 4K teachers sat with the kindergarten teachers and looked at the kindergarten

materials. When teachers had questions about how exactly they were supposed to implement the

new approach, Dr. Taylor jumped in and supplied the answers. There was no discussion among

the teaching staff about how they might adapt the district curriculum to meet the specific needs

of their school, which was a concern raised by some of the teachers. Although Mrs. Calden said

that the content of this particular meeting was atypical—they usually focused on the Common

Core standards—she said the style of the meeting and its didactic nature was representative of

most staff meetings.

The other relationships that seemed to matter a lot to Mrs. Calden were those with her 4K colleague, Mrs. Preston, her educational assistant, Maestra Inez, and the special education paraprofessional who assisted her in the afternoons, Mr. Simmons. When Mrs. Preston began teaching 4K in 2012, Dr. Taylor assigned Mrs. Calden as her mentor because Mrs. Preston had never taught four-year-olds before. Though Mrs. Calden was happy to do this, she also looked forward to not having to mentor Mrs. Preston in the future.

As I observed the two teachers during their planning meetings, it became clear that they had different approaches to planning the curriculum. Mrs. Preston seemed to gravitate toward the types of activities that Dr. Taylor wanted the teachers *not* do to in 4K, like spending time on art projects that were cute but had no relevance to the curriculum. Mrs. Calden struggled with this, as well, and planning meetings were a bit of a tug-of-war of ideas, with Mrs. Preston suggesting something and Mrs. Calden trying to reframe the idea so that it would tie more closely to learning goals or standards. For example, at a planning meeting in late April, Mrs. Preston told Mrs. Calden that she wanted to do something to celebrate May Day.

Mrs. Preston: May Day is coming up. Do you do anything?

Mrs. Calden: I know you do.

Mrs. Preston: Nobody does except me.

Mrs. Calden: Well I don't know. Do you want to do something? If we do, how will we introduce it, and what is the objective? What do you have in mind? I don't do [anything for May Day], but that doesn't mean I won't. We can put art materials in the art area and say it's a custom.
Mrs. Preston explains her idea for making flowers out of tissues and pipe cleaners.

Mrs. Calden: But how would you introduce it?

Mrs. Preston does not answer this, and there is some discussion about the origins of May Day. Mrs. Preston explains the project again and Mrs. Calden asks about details of the project, like what materials they would need. Mrs. Preston gets some tissues and shows Mrs. Calden how to make the flowers. She says they would have to fold the tissues ahead

of time and get the children to attach the pipe cleaner. Mrs. Calden writes down the materials they would need and instructions for how to make the flower.

Mrs. Calden: We don't have to do green stems.

Mrs. Preston: But that's teaching them that stems are green.

Mrs. Calden: The project will have to be in a supervised area. I'm thinking about who I will put on that – probably Maestra Inez or a volunteer.

There is some more discussion about how to make the flowers; Mrs. Calden says they could dip the edges in food coloring.

Mrs. Calden: Is there a book that would go along with this? Something in Spanish that tells the story of May Day? (Field notes, 4/22/13)

In the end, Mrs. Calden decided she would just leave the materials out for a week so the children could make flowers if they wanted. Though she acquiesced to making the project available, the fact that she was not going to make the project a focal point of her instruction indicated that Mrs. Calden did not think it was particularly valuable in terms of children's learning. When she and I spoke later she said that she and Mrs. Preston had very different styles and that she sometimes struggled because Mrs. Preston got very excited about projects like the May Day flowers that Mrs. Calden did not find very meaningful. Although she liked having a 4K colleague in the building, because she felt she had to constantly redirect Mrs. Preston, acting as a mentor was burdensome for Mrs. Calden.

During 4K time, Mrs. Calden was supported by an educational assistant (EA), Inez. The children called her Maestra Inez; she was Latina and spoke some Spanish with the students. Maestra Inez and Mrs. Calden had a close relationship, and Mrs. Calden frequently told me that she did not know how she would be able to get everything done without her. Maestra Inez was an aide, not a co-teacher, but she did more than just supervise children. Mrs. Calden frequently enlisted Maestra Inez to assist her with formal assessments for progress reports, and Masetra

Inez also contributed to Mrs. Calden's ongoing informal assessment of the children. Mrs. Calden had a system of keeping running records, or anecdotal notes about what children were doing during the school day. She and Maestra Inez would write notes on post-its about things the children had done and said and then Mrs. Calden would use these for children's portfolios and progress reports. In addition to helping with assessments, Maestra Inez would also lead large-group meetings from time to time and was instrumental in Mrs. Calden's delivery of the Second Step curriculum, which focused on social-emotional skills. Maestra Inez and Mrs. Calden were not equals in the classroom, but it was evident that Mrs. Calden had an immense respect for Maestra Inez and valued her presence in the classroom.

In the afternoon Mrs. Calden also received support from Mr. Simmons, a special education paraprofessional. Mr. Simmons was in the room to support Grant, a boy with autism. As he worked with Grant, Mr. Simmons also interacted with the rest of the class and assisted with more general tasks in the classroom like handing out snack and making sure children were seated properly on the rug for large group meetings. Mr. Simmons and Mrs. Calden had a good relationship, though they were not close in the same way Mrs. Calden was with Maestra Inez. Mr. Simmons shared Mrs. Calden's love and gift for music, however, and would sing songs with the children from time to time, much to Mrs. Calden's delight. Mr. Simmons' presence did change the classroom dynamic somewhat; the combination of actors in the afternoon made that session a bit more boisterous and noisy than the morning session.

Maestra Inez and Mr. Simmons were the two people who were in Mrs. Calden's classroom the most, but her classroom often felt like Grand Central Station, with support staff and volunteers coming and going constantly throughout the day. Mrs. Calden liked the steady stream of people but also actively worked to teach the children to ignore the people coming and

going and focus on what they were doing.[49] Mrs. Calden still felt isolated, even through there were so many adults moving in and out of her classroom throughout the day, because, while she was receiving lots of support for her students, she did not have the professional and pedagogical support she longed for. More than anything, Mrs. Calden wanted her principal to be one of the adults who frequented her classroom, and she wanted opportunities to spend time with other teachers in her building.

Inside the 4K Classroom

4K Focal Teacher: Mrs. Calden

As the oldest of seven, Mrs. Calden had always taken care of children. She was inspired to become a teacher after running an in-home daycare for children from birth to age five for a decade. Mrs. Calden said the children she cared for inspired her to go back to school for a bachelor's degree and teaching license. At age 42, she began teaching kindergarten at Forest Grove. Mrs. Calden had been teaching kindergarten for 15 years when Dr. Taylor approached her about moving to 4K. She resisted the idea initially:

Honestly, when it came out last spring that we were going to have [4K], I poo pooed the whole idea. I was like, I don't want to go backwards, I really like kindergarten five, and I like first grade and second grade, and I really don't think that I- I wouldn't even think of 4K. And so you can imagine how surprised I was when my principal came to me and she said, at the end of the school year, she said, "I'd really like you to take the 4K." And I was like, no, I don't think so. No… No and I don't want to give up [kindergarten]. So we talked more and she told me about the supplies, the furniture, all the new stuff that would

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[49] I talk about this more in Chapter 2, in the section about my role in the classroom.

be coming. And I said, "Oh, I don't know. Let me think about it some more." I mean it just didn't feel like this is where I wanted to be at all. (March 2012 interview)

Eventaully, Mrs. Calden agreed to teach 4K, and by the end of the first year of 4K, she had come to like 4K so much that she requested to teach 4K again the following year. With her many years of kindergarten teaching experience, Mrs. Calden conceptualized her role as a 4K teacher and the 4K curriculum in relation to kindergarten. For example, she initially felt she was not teaching her students much because the structure of 4K was so different from kindergarten; she missed being able to teach children how to read and do math, and she wished that she had 4K students for a full day, which would enable her to do more with them. At times, Mrs. Calden seemed to pine for her days as kindergarten teacher:

> As you can see from your observations, we don't spend a lot of time on the rug doing a lot of the literacy things. I would love to be able to spend more time doing that. If we had full day programs I know I would do that more 'cause I used to love to work with the shared reading and writing, the read alouds. I mean we can still do it, but we have to make special group time for that to happen. Like last week or the week before I spent time in the library working on *Five Little Ducks*. And that just felt like, oh gosh, this is what I used to do and I love doing this. The passion for it came right back out. (April 2013 interview)

Though she questioned its value initially, by the end of her first year teaching 4K, Mrs. Calden had come to see 4K as an important foundation; even though the learning looked different—with more play and less structured small group time than in kindergarten—her students *were* learning important concepts.

One of the biggest differences between 4K and kindergarten was the amount of play in 4K. Mrs. Calden said she came to appreciate the value of play through her experience teaching 4K. She viewed play as part of the learning process that helped prepare children for elementary school. One of Mrs. Calden's goals for 4K students—to develop social-emotional and language skills—was achieved through play:

> [I achieve my goals for students] through the workshops we do. I guess I really didn't realize just how important play was. I always knew it was important but now after being in 4K for almost two years now I have felt that the play really plays a big part. They have to talk. And they do, and it's set up so that they can do just that in every single workshop area….. So I guess I see these things just playing out in the workshops. (April 2013 interview)

In addition to the content—the skills and concepts children were learning—being different in 4K, Mrs. Calden viewed the work of teaching 4K as different from teaching kindergarten. For example, planning was different—in kindergarten Mrs. Calden needed a separate plan for each day of the week, but in 4K she developed one plan that would "carry" her through the entire week.

> Well, I would say it's probably not as intense as before. I get Mondays- Mondays are my day to make sure I get everything planned and prepped. So it's pretty intense on Mondays. I make sure I have all workshop areas, you know - filled with supplies, a plan in my head ready to go, a plan on paper ready to go. But that plan will take me the whole week. In [kindergarten] I felt a lot of times like it was kinda going day by day by day. I only had 15 children, I have 30 now. But before it just felt like - I don't know, it just seemed to take more time for me to differentiate things. Where with the 4K it just isn't as

hard, I guess. It's challenging in that there are 30 children, and I have to keep up 30

portfolios. But it just isn't as stressful, I guess. (March 2012 interview)

The differences between 4K and kindergarten reflect the play-based nature of Mrs. Calden's classroom; while she did some direct instruction with her 4K students, the bulk of the 4K session was spent in workshops as it was in the other focal sites. Mrs. Calden's role in the classroom shifted when she began teaching 4K—instead of facilitating small group instruction like in kindergarten, her time was spent moving through workshops, talking to children about their play.

Even though she had Mondays off to plan and described 4K as less intense than kindergarten, Mrs. Calden still spent a considerable amount of time outside her contracted hours working on school-related tasks. This was particularly true when she was compiling the children's portfolios and progress reports:

Oh my- I try not to count [how many hours I spend working outside of school]. I'm afraid it'd be too depressing! You know, it gets really really intense – probably…five to six times a year. So out of the nine months, let's say six of the months are that where I have to do a lot of out of, off of contract, at home work. Because they won't get done. I mean I have 34 students and next year it could be 36, because we will be capped at 18. This year it was 17– both classes had 17. You have to have some time to get that data, and to think. I mean I just have to process it and get it down. Oh man, just this weekend I spent all day Sunday, which was probably 7:30 'til 6:30. Now I did stop for an hour in between, because my eyes couldn't do it anymore. And I went downstairs and did some baking for an hour. So I mean add that up and that's my day. (June 2013 interview)

Time spent completing progress reports was one of the defining features of Mrs. Calden's experience as a 4K teacher. The other aspect of Mrs. Calden's work that significantly shaped her

experience was the fact that the 4K program is not well-integrated into Forest Grove. Mrs. Calden was physically and professionally isolated from the rest of the school. In the first year of 4K, her classroom was located in a storage closet in the school basement. After a long struggle with Dr. Taylor, she was able to move into an unoccupied kindergarten classroom on the first floor in January. Dr. Taylor was clear that if she wanted to move, the school would not contribute any resources to helping her, so Mrs. Calden enlisted friends and family to help with the move over winter break.

Even with her classroom centrally located in the school building, Mrs. Calden felt isolated from her colleagues and daily life at Forest Grove. Because of how the 4K day was broken up, Mrs. Calden was unable to spend much time with other teachers in the building on a daily basis. The result was a profound sense of isolation: "It is frustrating to be in a building and feel like you're not really a part of it. You're there, you're taking up space. Kinda like…you gotta be some place, so there you are" (Mrs. Calden, June 2013 interview).

Mrs. Calden felt like her work and 4K were invisible at her school and that it was her duty to help other staff members recognize the importance of 4K and how it was preparing children for elementary school. Though Dr. Taylor said she engaged with 4K teachers the same way she did with other staff members, Mrs. Calden did not feel this was the case. She was frustrated that Dr. Taylor did not visit her room as much as she did when she was teaching kindergarten. She wishes Dr. Taylor would spend more time in 4K so that she would better understand it.

> We're gonna be in our little world- our 4K world, and it's going to be in that spot and
>
> that's our world. … It's not that we don't invite [the principal to visit]. We do invite, but
>
> other than a quick sweep through, that's all we get. It's very hard. And I'm hearing that

it's very typical from other 4K teachers in the district. It's just really– I don't know if plates are just so full, schools are just so full, that they just don't have the time for that particular thing. But, boy, there's so much that goes on in 4K to prepare them for 5K that we need to be seen and heard a little bit more. I mean, I don't know, I guess that's just my thinking. And I don't know what to do to change it, other than invite. You know, "Come on down and see this." (June 2013 interview)

Rather than giving Mrs. Calden a greater sense of autonomy, her principal's absence indicated a lack of interest in 4K and her work and left Mrs. Calden feeling like her work was not valued.

At Forest Grove, the 4K program was peripheral to the rest of the elementary school; though Mrs. Calden was included in meetings and trainings, she did not feel like she and her students were really part of things. For example, Mrs. Calden often had to remind people in the building that she and her students were there. The elementary grades put on several music performances over the course of the school year but the 4K classes were not invited to participate, nor were they invited to attend. When Mrs. Calden learned that an event was happening, she spoke with one of the secretaries in the front office to obtain the relevant details so that she could bring her students. In spite of the fact that 4K seemed to be overlooked when it came to events that occurred during the school day, all 4K families were invited to the many potlucks and family events that happened at Forest Grove over the course of the school year.

Mrs. Calden's feelings of isolation were mitigated somewhat in her second year teaching 4K, when another 4K section was added. This meant that Mrs. Calden had a 4K colleague to work with and this led to a more positive experience than her first year. However, news that her classroom would be moved to the basement again in 2013 reinvigorated Mrs. Calden's feeling that 4K was not a priority in her building. In spite of this, Mrs. Calden was somewhat optimistic

that her new basement classroom would not be as bad as the first year, mostly because the other 4K classroom would be across the hall from her and because the new room did have a few small windows near the ceiling. She was also able to negotiate with Dr. Taylor so that the 4K classes could use the gym and cafeteria from time to time, which she felt would make up for the smaller classrooms that had little natural light.

Mrs. Calden also planned to use her lack of visibility strategically in her final year at Forest Grove (She planned to retire at the end of the 2013-14 school year.) She explained that she wished she could have more parents come in to volunteer during the school day, but that this was generally frowned upon by her principal. Mrs. Calden planned to bring parents in anyway, saying that she could be a little more "sassy" in her last year at the school.

I know one thing I'd really like to do and it probably will cause some strong feelings on behalf of the principal in that I would like to have parents come into my room more. For volunteering- just have them in. That doesn't seem, from what I've heard, that that's going to go over too well. We've had a lot of children who, um, have had a lot of meltdowns. I mean serious meltdowns. There have been some children who have had some traumatic experiences in their very young lives. … I've got a feeling that the thinking is we want to keep parents from seeing that and hearing that. … But anyway, I'd like to have the parents come in more, and I think there's this fear that they will see and hear a lot more than maybe should be seen. I could be wrong, but when I brought it up it was like, well we need to be careful because there are confidentiality issues, and parents shouldn't be taking this out into the neighborhood, into the parks and talking about this child and that child. ... But I'm thinking if I bring in parents more, they might have more questions and they might have more things they want to know about and maybe that will

bring our principal down to our level – I don't know. Maybe it will totally backfire! So I

don't know. (June 2013 interview)

The location of 4K in the school building sent a powerful message to Mrs. Calden about the

value her principal placed on the program. Being relegated to the basement was also symbolic of

how Mrs. Calden's status was diminished when she moved "down" to 4K from kindergarten, a

point I return to in Chapter 9.

In spite of her frustrations with her principal and the physical location of 4K at Forest

Grove, Mrs. Calden sincerely enjoyed the children in her class. Even when she had to learn to

adapt to different needs which she had not encountered in the past, Mrs. Calden saw this as a

learning opportunity, rather than a point of frustration.

This year I had more special needs children. This year I had a little guy with autism. And

I've never had a child with that degree of issue. So I learned so much, and I love him so,

so much. He's just taught me so much about life. I think all of the children, having met

the little guy with the hearing aids. I've never had that kind of disability in my room

before. Just learning how those particular children persist and how they- how they make

it in a world [where] the odds are not in their favor. And to have my little girl from China

who came in with not a bit of English and how she is now speaking two to three words,

sometimes even a full sentence; she communicates beautifully. And how at first she just

had to do her best with gestures and body language. Gosh, I mean, I've had students in

the past who have come in with no language. But this little girl – wow! She's remained

bright and happy, never shed a tear. (June 2013 interview)

As much as she enjoyed getting to know the children in her class, Mrs. Calden also liked

interacting with their parents. I would like to think that Mrs. Calden helped ease parents'

transition into the public school as much as she did children's. She was approachable, clearly valued building relationships with families, and had good rapport with her students' families. In my observations I saw Mrs. Calden go out of her way to make parents feel at ease and to let them know that their children were okay.

> Well, I first of all love meeting with parents. I have no problem, I don't feel at all ill at ease. I feel- I just feel like that's an area I have some expertise in because I'm a parent as well and I had a family daycare in my home for a few years. … I just like to get to know the parents because I can see them in their children and I can understand why children would do things or say things the way they do. In the morning and the afternoon, those children who do not come in on buses – it's a chance just to say a quick hello. At least just to see if things are going okay. And if things aren't going okay they can tell me right then and there- "It has been a rough morning." And then they can tell me why. And then I can take the child and go in. … I love the parent piece. Absolutely love it. … I feel real comfortable [with the parents] and some of the parents are so– they have such a great sense of humor, and you can tell that they're not afraid to tease or you know, to say what's actually right on their mind. And if their child's having a bad day, I can really say, "Hey, I remember these days" and then I can always have a sense of good humor and say something to make them feel a bit lighter about the whole saying goodbye when my child is upset. It's not the same for the kids coming in on the bus…so I miss the parent contact there. … So that's harder but those parents have been good about sending an email. Sometimes the email's here before the bus and they'll say "So and so is coming in this morning and he forgot his backpack" or "He forgot his snack, and I know he's going to

be upset". So I can go outside and say right away, "It's okay, you can do it tomorrow," or that kind of thing. (June 2013 interview)

The 4K Curriculum: "I take it from the children"

Like other public school sites, Forest Grove was required to adopt the Creative Curriculum for 4K.[50] Within this framework, Mrs. Calden determined the direction of the curriculum based on the children's interests and benchmarks associated with the Creative Curriculum's related Teaching Strategies Gold assessment (Dodge et al., 2002).

> We use the Gold assessment a lot. What have we in the different areas- we have all the different areas and know the areas and objectives we have to fill. So I think we look at those and say, "Oh we haven't done this one yet." Or, "We've done this one but don't have a real clear picture on what they're doing." And sometimes it's something that the children have said they want to study. Or it might be something we're really interested in that we want to see what the kids do with it, find out what they know, and then build on it. …Yeah, I guess we just kinda do that, use the Gold assessment as our driving force. (Mrs. Calden Calden, April 2013 interview)

In Mrs. Calden's classroom, learning activities were loosely structured around a theme like "planets," "fables," or "seeds". If she got stuck trying to come up with a theme, there were some "study starters" Mrs. Calden could use, but she said she usually got enough ideas from the children that she did not need to consult these. Although themes were woven though what the children are doing for a week or two, they did not dominate classroom activity, nor were they typically evident from the classroom environment. The dramatic play area occasionally changed

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[50] See Chapter 5for an overview of the Creative Curriculum and the Teaching Strategies Gold assessment.

to match the theme, but typically the only evidence of the theme were the books teachers read aloud to the class and one or two teacher-directed art projects related to the weekly theme.

Mrs. Calden's classroom, like Mrs. Calden herself, exuded an air of calm. Instead of using the harsh fluorescent overhead lights, Mrs. Calden had installed several lamps around the room, which cast a warm glow over the day's activities. The focal point of the classroom was a bright blue rug and a rocking chair. Children would sit on the perimeter of the rug for large group meetings. Next to the rug area were four rectangular tables with child-size chairs. Mrs. Calden's classroom was divided into different areas, called workshops: dramatic play, blocks, library, writing, art, computer, games and puzzles, and math. Although Mrs. Calden changed some of the materials in the workshops over the course of the school year, they mostly stayed the same with the exception of the dramatic play area. The dramatic play area was most often set up as a house but it also morphed into a shoe store, a doctor's office, and a restaurant. After snack and a large group meeting at the start of the 4K session, children spent about an hour and half in workshops. They were able to move freely in and out of workshops as long as the total number of children allowed in the area was not exceeded. Each workshop had a maximum, and students were required to put their name ticket on the workshop sign to indicate where they were playing. When the dramatic play area was transformed into something special, like a restaurant or doctor's office, Mrs. Calden dictated who could play in the area on a given day so that everyone had a turn.

During workshop time, Mrs. Calden was almost always engaged with an individual or a small group of children. She circulated through the workshops asking children about what they were doing. In the middle of the year, Mrs. Calden spent a lot of time in the block and

housekeeping areas, asking children to write down their plans for play before they began

playing.[51] The following vignette illustrates how she did this:

> *It is time for children to choose their workshops for the morning. Mrs. Calden reminds them that the café is open, but she will tell them who will play there today; they're trying to make sure everyone gets a turn. After dismissing children from the rug, she joins those who have been assigned to the café. She spends the next thirty minutes there, discussing the different roles they might take on—waiter, cook, customers. Mrs. Calden scaffolds the children's play, interrupting from time to time to ask the children to think about what a waiter might do next or to ask what customers should be doing while they're waiting for their meal. When they finish acting out a scene, Mrs. Calden guides the children to choose new roles and act it out again.*
> *When she is satisfied that play is going smoothly, Mrs. Calden moves over to the housekeeping area. She asks the children what they are playing, and whether they wrote down their plans. The children explain that they are pretending to be a family going to Florida. Keisha hastily finishes writing her plan for play, and shows it to Mrs. Calden, who asks if she can write the word "family" on the paper. Keisha writes confidently, using invented spelling. Mrs. Calden praises Keisha and tells her that she can put her plan in her mailbox and start to play.* (Field notes, 4/5/13)

Mrs. Calden said she had children write their plans for play "to get them to think about what

they're doing…I have found it just really organizes their thinking and the play becomes the more

mature play. It's not the immature play anymore" (April 2013 interview). Encouraging children

to talk about their play was how Mrs. Calden achieved her goal of helping children develop the

language and communication skills she believed were critical to school success.

Mrs. Calden also spent a lot of time working with small groups of children on teacher-

directed activities like creating ABC books and writing in journals. In the months before

progress reports were due, workshop time was devoted to assessing individual children's math

and early literacy skills. Mrs. Calden pulled children out of workshops one by one to complete

didactic assessments in which children were asked to demonstrate specific skills and

competencies. This vignette illustrates what a math assessment looked like:

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[51] Though she was not using the High Scope approach, the "plan for play" that Mrs. Calden asked children to complete before starting to play in the block or housekeeping areas is reminiscent of this (http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=182). "Play plans" is also a strategy employed by the Tools of the Mind curriculum (http://www.toolsofthemind.org/curriculum/preschool/).

Mrs. Calden sits on the rug with Baraka. She has a tray of small plastic discs. One side of each plastic disc is red and the other side is yellow. Mrs. Calden lines up the discs in a color pattern – red, yellow, red, yellow. She asks Baraka to read the pattern to her. He counts the number of discs in the line. Mrs. Calden asks him to remember the calendar pattern they've been talking about – mitten hat mitten hat. She asks him to read the pattern on the discs and he says "Mitten, hat, mitten, hat." Mrs. Calden asks if that's the pattern, and Baraka says "red, yellow, red…" When he gets to the end, Mrs. Calden asks what comes next. He is able to tell which color comes next in the pattern. After he does this, Mrs. Calden asks Baraka to make the same pattern underneath the pattern she made.

Fiona interrupts and asks Mrs. Calden to sharpen a colored pencil for her. Mrs. Calden says "not now." Later when Mrs. Calden finds Fiona and says she can sharpen the pencil now, Fiona say she's solved the problem. While Mrs. Calden talks to Fiona, Baraka works on his pattern. When he successfully completes the pattern, Mrs. Calden says now he can make a pattern and she'll copy him.

Lily interrupts and asks for a piece of string. Mrs. Calden C says, "Not now" and turns back to Baraka. Baraka's pattern is yellow, yellow, red, yellow, yellow, red. He's pretty much done it, but there is one segment of the pattern that goes red, yellow, red, red. Mrs. Calden points out the mistake and asks Baraka how he can fix it. It takes a few moments and some prompting by Mrs. Calden, but he eventually says that he needs to turn one of the reds over to make another yellow. After he does this, Mrs. Calden asks him to read the pattern to her again and then tell her what comes next. He does this successfully and Mrs. Calden tells him he can go back to the dramatic play area. Mrs. Calden stays on the rug and writes some notes before standing up and walking around the classroom for a few minutes. (Field notes, 1/17/13)

Although she devoted a lot of time to assessing children's academic learning, Mrs. Calden said that her main goal for children in the 4K year was to develop social-emotional skills. A large component of this was learning how to be part of a group, which Mrs. Calden conceptualized as learning to respect others and developing ways to communicate. Mrs. Calden's participation in children's play was one way that she achieved this goal of fostering social-emotional development. The other way she did this is by using Second Step, a scripted curriculum focused on social-emotional development, which all public school 4K sites were required to use.

[The Creative Curriculum] has hardly anything for social emotional, which is the most important thing for the 4K. So [the Second Step] curriculum has been very helpful in just

having different strategies to use with the kids as we talk through conflicts, as we talk

through, oh just all kinds of things that worry four-year-olds. So, the curriculum is very

helpful. (March 2012 interview)

Second Step was part of the daily routine in Mrs. Calden's 4K classroom; she and her

educational assistant, Inez, used puppets to model problem-solving and communication. The

children responded well to these dramatic portrayals of challenging situations; over the course of

the year, they began to adopt the language of the curriculum as they talked about their feelings.

For example, at snack time one morning, Nancy told Maestra Inez that she "had a feeling" as a

result of something that Keisha said. Maestra Inez helped Nancy identify the feeling—sadness—

and Nancy spoke to Keisha, calmly explaining what had made her feel sad.

Mrs. Calden's use of Second Step reflected the way she scaffolded children's interactions

and participation in daily routines. Life in Mrs. Calden's 4K classroom was structured and

predictable; children were expected to move through the classroom in particular ways that were

modeled for them on a daily basis. Mrs. Calden urged children toward independence, but showed

them exactly how she wanted things to be done. For example, after the morning snack Mrs.

Calden took the children down the hallway to use the bathroom. Each day, she or one of her

students modeled how to get up from the table, push in their chair, throw away their trash, and

stand in line. Mrs. Calden's emphasis was on having this happen in a quiet and orderly way.

> *Mrs. Calden turns the lights off and the children start singing a clean-up song almost instantaneously. When they are finished, she says, "Look at your space only. Is your space cleaned up?" Mrs. Calden calls kids one by one to throw away their garbage and line up. Nellie runs to the line and Mrs. Calden asks her to try again, saying, "Oh no no, show me how you walk." Mrs. Calden asks the class, "What did we say yesterday when we left the table? Raise your hand." She calls on Kennedy, who says, "First I push my chair in. then I throw away my garbage. Then I walk to the line." Mrs. Calden says to Nellie, "I saw you do the first two, but then you ran to the line. Why do we walk?" Nellie responds, "'Cuz you can trip and fall." Mrs. Calden says, "One word: safe. Can you say that?" All of the children repeat the word "safe". They continue to line up. There are*

numbers on the floor that indicate where the children are supposed to line up. The person of the day stands in the very front of the line, closest to the door, but the rest of the class lines up from the back of the line to the front. When everyone is in line, Mrs. Calden says, "Now we're going to the bathroom. We want to be…" The children finish her sentence in unison: "Quick, quiet, clean." (Field notes, December 6, 2013)

Mrs. Calden emphasized order in her classroom, and praised students when they were able to line up or take their seats on the carpet in an orderly manner. Children were reprimanded when they did not follow the routines and structures in place, but Mrs. Calden always did this in a measured way, without raising her voice. There was no set discipline system; when conflicts arose, Mrs. Calden or Inez prompted children to resolve them using what they learned from the Second Step curriculum. If a child acted out repeatedly during a large group meeting or workshop time, Mrs. Calden talked to him and then had him sit separately from the group for a few minutes. Much of the need for discipline was preempted, however, by the explicit instruction on how children were to move through the classroom and daily routines.

4K at Forest Grove: An Uneasy Fit

The 4K program was an uneasy fit at Forest Grove—it meant different things for different people, and the contradictions often created tension. Whereas Mrs. Calden came to view 4K as an important foundation for elementary school, in terms of academics, social-emotional skills, and socialization, Dr. Taylor saw 4K as a program she did not ask for, and one that required her to stretch already scarce resources even more.

A Strain on Resources

Though Dr. Taylor believed that 4K was important, she did not express ownership for 4K at her school, describing it as a "district program placed in schools" rather than integral to the

mission of her school. When asked how Forest Grove became a 4K site, Dr. Taylor explained she did not have a say in the matter; the school district did a space analysis and determined that her school would host a 4K classroom. In spite of this, Dr. Taylor said her school was uniquely positioned to host 4K:

> We do a lot because we're a K-2 building- I think we do a lot of stuff that's very probably more supportive in some sense of a bunch of little kids coming. So in the sense of how kids move through the building, who's where, and where we have stops of people and all that, I think that helps (May 2013 interview).

At the same time, Dr. Taylor was frustrated by the logistics of the program. First was the issue of space. She realized that Mrs. Calden was upset about having her classroom in the basement, but she was also trying to balance competing priorities as she allocated real estate in the building. In the end, she put the needs of kindergarteners who were in the building full time over the four-year-olds who were only in the building for part of the week.

> At some point I can't put children that are here five days a week all day and are larger in smaller classrooms. Even though [the 4K children] are there, too. So I think that's kind of an issue to some degree (May 2013 interview).

> Another issue was that being a 4K site meant Dr. Taylor had to figure out how to serve

more children without any additional resources. As 4K brought more children with special needs to the school, she had to figure out how to meet their needs without a concomitant increase in financial support from the school district.

> I don't have the staffing to be able to make that many more [special education] environments. The other thing is that younger children in general need a little more supervision and guidance anyway, just because of their age. So when you add to that

children with special needs, I think the amount of guidance, depending on their disability, it's kinda magnified a little bit. Initially, because they don't know the routines and all those kinds of things. So I think that has been very difficult, around our special education allocation. To be honest, it's stretched us really a lot. And so, you know that's been very challenging. Which is a budgetary issue, with impacts on the rest of everyone else. (Dr. Taylor, May 2013 interview)

Public elementary schools that hosted 4K classes were allocated additional teachers depending on how many sections they had, as well as materials for the classrooms, but they did not receive additional funds beyond that. As the quote from Dr. Taylor illustrates, this created budgetary stress for the school, which had to stretch the same amount of special education resources to meet the needs of more students.

"Colliding Worlds"[52]

4K at Forest Grove was also a place where two very different systems—early childhood and K-12—interesected in a new way. This had implications for Dr. Taylor, who had to figure out where 4K fit in her school's ecosystem, for Mrs. Calden, who had to negotiate a new professional identity, and for parents and children, who, in most cases, were making their first foray into public school. I have focused on the tension Dr. Taylor and Mrs. Calden each experienced as they struggled to make sense of how 4K fit into the school building; here I use the example of parent expectations to show how 4K in a public elementary school highlighted the differences between the early childhood and K-12 systems.

Dr. Taylor spoke of the particular difficulty of meeting the needs of 4K parents. The public elementary school was an entirely new system for many 4K parents, who, in her opinion,

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[52] (McCabe & Sipple, 2011)

did not always understand the rationale behind the school's policies. In Dr. Taylor's opinion, the issue was one of expectations and socialization; because their children were young, parents expected the school to respond to their needs in the way a private childcare setting might. Given their limited experience with public schools, they did not understand how it functioned or why it functioned differently from private childcare. Dr. Taylor explained:

> I would say the other thing that is true is that for several parents it's their first foray into a public school system. So if they have had a child in like childcare or other sorts of arrangements that were private, those tended to be more consumer-driven. In terms of, "This is what I want you to do with my child." Or small groups of five kids, things like that. And so the routines and systems that need to be in place in that kind of environment are different than the ones in a school. So things like, I had some parents very upset because out [in] front [of the school] we have little hand prints and the kids wait out there and then we come in. [The parents] felt like they should be able to wait inside if it was a little chilly. Those kind of little logistical things. And [they're] really having a hard time understanding why I'm not being- why that isn't possible…when I have 500 other kids coming in. It doesn't really function that way. I think part of that is just understanding systems. (May 2013 interview).

Although this may seem like a trivial issue, it illustrates how something that probably would not have been an issue in a childcare center, where parents typically drop children off in their classroom in the morning and have a chance to interact with teachers. This simple act became a source of tension between parents and Dr. Taylor because early childhood traditions and expectations came into contact with a system with very different ideas about how transitions like drop-off and pick up should be handled.

With the expansion of public preK has come questions about which environments are best-suited for four-year-olds (Barnett & Ackerman, 2011; McCartney et al., 2011). McCabe and Sipple (2011) describe the phenomenon of bringing preK in public schools as "colliding worlds" because it results in the joining of two very different systems with disparate ideas about key components of education like curriculum, teacher credentials, and pedagogy. At Forest Grove, the colliding worlds of early childhood education and K-12 created tension between 4K parents and the school administration. From Dr. Taylor's perspective, parents did not understand why the public school functioned differently from private childcare. Thus, her task became one of socializing 4K parents into a K-12 world that was very different from the early childhood world with which they may have had more experience.

Conclusion

The story of 4K at Forest Grove points to the fact that although the district adopted a "4K as school" model, integrating an early childhood program into an elementary school was not a simple "add 4K and stir" equation. Although the school district provided resources aimed at facilitating this integration—professional development workshops, parent outreach materials—it did not address some of the most basic issues like how to accommodate four-year-olds with special needs, what it meant for parents to send their children to an early childhood program in an elementary school building, or how an administrator could support the new program. As a result, 4K did not fit well at Forest Grove, challenging the notion that integrating preK and the K-12 system is a straightforward policy solution to enduring problems like the achievement gap and uneven access to quality early learning programs. In addition, although Mrs. Calden's 4K classroom felt very much like an early childhood classroom in terms of the environment and

schedule of activities, Mrs. Calden's background as a kindergarten teacher played an influential role in how she enacted 4K policy; she was very attuned to standards and assessment. In this situation—an elementary school environment and an administrator who is not particularly supportive of 4K—it would be easy for 4K to become "schooled", or to resemble the elementary grades more than ECE.

Chapter 8: Bright Start Childcare Center

In this chapter I introduce Bright Start Childcare Center (BSCC) and its 4K teacher, Megan Stevenson. I begin the chapter by describing the institutional context at Bright Start, including how the childcare center related to its parent corporation, which provides a framework for understanding Megan's 4K practice. Megan did not appear as stressed by the requirements of the 4K policy as the other two focal teachers because her working conditions were relatively poor prior to the start of 4K—she had little autonomy and her teaching was constrained by the corporation's scripted curriculum. In fact, Megan's status at BSCC improved when the center became a 4K site because she was able to use her position as the only person at the center qualified to teach 4K as leverage to negotiate for better working conditions. For administrators, the introduction of 4K at BSCC became a way to prove to the community that corporate childcare was just as good as non-profit childcare. Finally, the structure of the 4K program at BSCC, where programming for four-year-olds was divided into 4K and non-4K time, prioritized the time when children were in 4K over when they were not, which affected how resources were allocated and staffing decisions were made.

Institutional Context: "We've gotta make the money."

Located in one of Lakeville's poorer neighborhoods, Bright Start Childcare Center is sandwiched between a police station, a low-income apartment complex, and a strip mall that houses a McDonalds and a public library. The center is on a city bus route, making it easily accessible to families who rely on public transportation. The one-story building is nondescript—large and boxy—but the playground out front and the BSCC logo on the school bus in the parking lot make it clear that this is a childcare center. The center is surrounded by a chain link

fence and the entrance to BSCC is always locked; families and staff members have individual access codes that they key in at the front door. Just beyond the entrance, the director or assistant director typically sits behind a desk, greeting children as they arrive. After checking in on a computer at the front desk—this logs attendance hours for billing—parents and children proceed to the classrooms for drop off.

There is a family resource area in the lobby with several rocking chairs and a few shelves filled with parenting books and pamphlets about local services for families. The entryway boasts displays that change from time to time—pictures of children in their classrooms, corporation-produced advertisements for the Bright Start summer program, information about a special cooking class that children can enroll in. Though it seems that the administrators think of the lobby as a space where families might gather, parents and children typically bypass this area quickly; the classrooms are where parents linger, if at all, talking to teachers and each other. Children's schedules were varied and most arrived between 6am and 9am. Some parents looked like they were headed to work, dressed in business attire or donning a badge indicating they worked at a school or a local health clinic. On most days, at least a handful of parents arrived in pajamas; perhaps they had just finished third shift, did not start work until later in the day, or did not work at all.

With child-sized fixtures, cubbies replete with extra clothes, and stacks of cots tucked away in the corner, BSCC's classrooms looked and felt like most childcare centers. There were child-sized tables and chairs, brightly colored rugs, and areas of the room devoted to dramatic play, blocks, and books. Children's artwork hung on the walls alongside printed curricular materials from the corporation. In the 4K classroom, each area of the classroom—blocks, library, dramatic play—had a sign that explained to adults what concepts and skills children learned

while playing there. Large bookcases separated the areas from each other, and the shelves were crammed with plastic bins containing a variety of materials.

The Corporate Model

To make sense of 4K at BSCC, it is necessary to understand how the center relates to its parent corporation. Bright Start Corporation has been operating child care centers for over 40 years. As a result of a series of mergers, the corporation now operates about 2500 centers across the country. Each Bright Start center is its own entity, but must adhere to corporate policies and use the Bright Start curriculum. Many BSCC policies are aligned with NAEYC accreditation standards. Teachers are hired locally, but administrators are hired by district managers who, in turn, report to regional managers. Local centers purchase supplies through corporate headquarters.

Bright Start's corporate ethos is educational childcare. Its homepage boasts, "Everything we do is designed for learning"; "[Bright Start] is a convenient, safe and affordable childcare and early childhood education solution"; and "We never miss an opportunity to educate". The corporation's philosophy of education focuses on fostering children's development across the social, emotional, physical and cognitive domains, emphasizing the integration of these domains. This philosophy was woven through the corporation's curriculum, which I describe in detail below.

Program

BSCC served children from six weeks to 12 years of age. The center was licensed to serve a total of 130 children but because of variable schedules only about 70 children were in the

center on a given day. The center was open from 6am to 6pm year round. During the school year, full day programming was available for children through the age of five; there was an after school program for school-age children during the school year and a full day program for school-age children during the summer. BSCC did not provide transportation to preK families, but it did transport school-age children from nearby elementary schools to the center for after school care. In addition to teachers and assistants, the staff included a director, assistant director, and a cook. Children were provided breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack at the center, all prepared on site.[53]

4K Program. During the research year there was one 4K classroom at BSCC. Megan Stevenson was the 4K teacher, and she taught a morning and an afternoon session. Each 4K session was three hours long, and 4K was offered Tuesday through Friday. Monday was a "non-4K day" and Megan was with one group of children all day on Mondays. Megan described non-4K days as more "daycare-esque" than 4K days. The 4K versus non-4K distinction was an interesting one, and is a point I return to later in this chapter. Megan's teaching responsibilities extended beyond the 4K day; she typically supervised children for an hour before 4K began and for several hours afterward. Table 4 illustrates the daily 4K schedule at BSCC. The morning and afternoon schedules were identical, so I include only the morning schedule here, in order to show how much time was allocated to different activities.

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[53] Morning 4K students ate breakfast at the center and afternoon students were provided with an afternoon snack.

Table 4. BSCC 4K Schedule[54]

Time	Activity
8:30-9:00am	Breakfast (provided by BSCC)[55]
9:00-9:15am	Book
9:15-9:20am	Morning Meeting
9:20-10:20am	Investigative Time
10:20-10:25am	Clean Up
10:25-10:40am	Calendar
10:40-10:50am	Bathroom
10:50-11:15am	Outside
11:15-11:40am	Departure Meeting

The morning 4K class was bigger than the afternoon class with about 18 students and 7 students, respectively.[56] The dramatically different class sizes gave mornings and afternoons in Megan's classroom a distinctively different feel; mornings were busy and noisy, with lots of behavior management interventions, but the afternoons were almost languid. The pace was slower and Megan seemed more relaxed. In order to maintain state licensing ratios, Megan was assisted by Tami in the morning. Most of the 4K students were enrolled at BSCC full time, but a handful came only for 4K. At the end of the morning session, five children were picked up by their parents and the rest went to an empty classroom next door with Tami to eat lunch, nap, and play. Megan had a 30 minute break for lunch between the two sessions and then picked up three of the afternoon 4K students from a classroom down the hall. At noon, four more students were dropped off by their parents for the afternoon 4K session. Children who only attended BSCC for 4K did not have to pay anything for the program. The other families had to pay for wraparound care, but the corporation was able to provide them with a discount because of the 4K reimbursement from the school district.

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[54] Activity names were taken from the schedule posted in the classroom. Timing of activities comes from my observations and notes.

[55] In the afternoon session, 4K students received a snack provided by BSCC.

[56] I say "about" here because there was some fluctuation over the course of the year. Several children stopped attending for various reasons and a few children joined the afternoon class.

Demographics

There are several Bright Start centers in the Lakeville area, all located in different neighborhoods. The center where I conducted this research served a racially and ethnically diverse population. Most children were from low-income families and lived in the surrounding neighborhood—about 85-95% of families at BSCC received a state childcare subsidy. Megan's 4K classes reflected this diversity, for the most part. Because of unstable work and family situations, children did not always attend consistently, which made determining staffing needs challenging for administrators. During the months I spent at Bright Start there were several efforts to have parents articulate and stick to a schedule. Maura Evans, BSCC's director, explained:

> We serve a very inconsistent clientele. Sometimes it's out of their control and sometimes it's within their control. I would say the one thing we've worked on in the six years I've been here is working with parents in building that relationship plus also encouraging that consistency for their children. And getting that, you know, us being the consistent place for a very inconsistent child. It's been very difficult. I always tell people – it used to not be unusual for someone to not show up for a month and then show up like they haven't been gone. That doesn't happen anymore because now they know that we want them to be consistent, we want what's best for their child, and that is what's truly best for them. Some we're still working with but they don't come and go kind of as much as they used to. (February 2013 interview)

In addition to posing a problem for administrators trying to determine staffing needs, families' inconsistent schedules had a negative impact on teachers' schedules, which were always tentative. Teachers were sent home early or were required to stay late depending on when

children were picked up at the end of the day. Rather than guarantee teachers a specific number of hours each week, corporate policy was to send teachers home as early as possible as long as teacher-child ratio requirements were met.[57]

Administration

Maura Evans was the director of Bright Start at the start of the research period. About halfway through the year, Maura became director at a different Bright Start location closer to her home and assistant director Jeremy Jones was promoted to director. Maura had been working in early childhood for over 20 years. She worked for another corporation before starting with Bright Start, where she started off as a teacher and then moved up to assistant director and finally director. At the time of research, she had been at BSCC for about ten years—six years as assistant director and four years as director. Maura did not have a bachelor's degree but had an administrative credential and had taken a smattering of courses in early childhood development. She hoped to go back to school to finish her degree but found it difficult to fit school in with her busy and sometimes unpredictable work schedule. Maura was very loyal to Bright Start, though she admitted that the corporate model had its drawbacks.

> I think with corporations, even though it may be the same curriculum, the same policies
>
> and procedures, it really is people implementing all of it that really make the centers.
>
> Unfortunately being part of a large corporation, if you do a good job, you can have a
>
> really good word of mouth out there. And if you don't do so good and people don't like
>
> you, you can really do some damage out there. … You can make other people look bad.

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[57] Inconsistent attendance may have also affected teachers' plans and classroom practice, but this was not something teachers talked about. Megan's 4K class was pretty consistent overall, and she did not mention inconsistent schedules as an issue that affected her classroom practice.

Not only do we have to do a good job for our center, but we have to do a good job for all

of the brand. (February 2013 interview)

Maura's concern about Bright Start's brand was integral to how 4K was conceptualized at BSCC. Later in this chapter I discuss how Maura saw 4K as a way to legitimize the quality of for-profit childcare centers, which she believed were perceived to be of lower quality than non-profit centers.

According to Megan, Maura embodied a corporate child care mentality; though she cared about the children and families at the center, her main focus was the bottom line.

Maura makes comments like she very much still views kids as income, as dollar signs –

the more enrollment the better, versus quality. She's a lot more quantity because that's

the pressure she gets from the corporation. The district manager gives her that pressure

and that's the pressure she gets from her boss: We've gotta make the money. (May 2013

interview)

In contrast, Megan believed Jeremy, the new director, was less concerned with keeping the center's budget balanced, and more willing to make investments in materials and resources that enabled teachers to implement quality programming. Megan noted that morale at BSCC had improved since Maura left and Jeremy took over as director.

Bluntly speaking, since Maura left [things have] gotten a lot better. We got raises this

year so that helped a lot of people feel more positive. Community-wise in our building,

there's a lot better communication and [people call in sick less frequently], even though

there are still certain people who call in all the time. Morale has gotten a lot better.

Jeremy tries really hard to be communicative and tell people about things. He's much

more laid back about things, which helps people a lot. (May 2013 interview)

Morale was low because being a teacher at BSCC was difficult, a point I elaborate on below.

Even though Jeremy was viewed as less focused on the bottom line than Maura, talk of profits and revenues was still pervasive. This was likely due to the corporate structure and pressure administrators experienced to produce a profit. At a staff meeting in May, Jeremy shared this news:

> You all know that our district manager was here last week. Our center was number two in the region for productivity, net revenue, retention rate, and enrollment. (Clapping) It's the first time we've been in the top three, and it's a direct reflection on you guys. The families are happy with the services they're getting, thanks to you guys. (Field notes, 5/20/13)

The language of business seemed to be deployed more at BSCC than at the non-profit centers I visited. For example, Maura described how the corporation was promoting an emphasis on customer engagement that year:

> This year the customer engagement—our engagement with our families plus the engagement that our teachers have—is a really big focus with the company. They want everybody to be happy. (February 2013 interview)

Like many aspects of BSCC, the focus on customer engagement was a corporate initiative that local centers were obligated to implement, and neither administrators nor teachers had much control over their working conditions because so much of what they did was dictated by the corporation.

Unlike others in the Lakeville early childhood community, Maura and Jeremy were not particularly involved in district-wide meetings related to 4K. Maura had been part of the large group that planned the 4K program, but it seemed that she no longer attended coordination

committee meetings. This may have had to do with her work schedule. Like teachers at BSCC, Maura's hours changed from day to day. She usually worked from 7am-4pm or from 9am-6pm, but it really varied: "It depends on if someone calls in sick or how the center is doing, what the needs of the center are. I base my schedule on the needs of center." Although she was the director, Maura also often had to spend several hours each day in classrooms, filling in for teachers who called in sick. The same was true for the assistant director.[58] This meant that administrative duties were pushed aside until later in the day. It is easy to see how these circumstances may have conspired to keep Maura from attending 4K meetings held in the early afternoon. The person this likely affected most was Megan, who felt she had to take it upon herself to get information about 4K. She explained:

> Well [information about 4K] is supposed to come from Maura, but I was finding out
> though my [PD] class, which was full of other 4K teachers, that there were things that
> everyone should know but weren't really being passed on to me. So I contacted whoever
> sends out the emails and now I'm on the 4K newsletters. … I got myself on that list so I
> find out a lot from that. (May 2013 interview)

While Maura was supportive of 4K at BSCC, Megan felt like she was on her own when it came to learning about and navigating the policy.

Even though she was no longer very involved in 4K at the district level, Maura had clear opinions about the policy. While she supported 4K, she did not like the fact that classrooms were located in public school buildings and believed that community sites were simply better places for four-year-olds. Maura thought about this in terms of transitions—if families needed wraparound care, children were better off in a 4K program where they could stay in one building

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[58] This situation was not unique to Bright Start. When I was the assistant director at a childcare center, I frequently had to fill in for teachers so that classrooms would be in ratio, according to state licensing requirements. The director of my center did the same.

for the whole day rather than having to transition from one place to another. Though 4K students at BSCC transitioned between rooms over the course of the day, they were able to stay at the center for a total of ten hours, eliminating the need to move from school to a childcare center.

> I personally think 4K needs to be in centers and not in public school. I think [the children are] too little! And that's probably one of the other reasons I fought to have it here, is just because I think they're too little. I think all the transition back and forth for two and a half hours is too much for them. It's too many transitions for them in their lives as it is. (February 2013 interview)

Maura's desire to have 4K exclusively in community sites echoed other directors' sentiments, but for a different reason. Because BSCC served children whose parents worked full time, she was concerned about children transitioning between multiple institutions over the course of the day. While they disliked the idea of 4K in the public schools for other reasons, this simply was not a concern for directors whose 4K families did not require wraparound care.

Although the model LPS used to implement 4K was not Maura's ideal, she noted that becoming a 4K site was important to her because it sent a signal to parents and the community that corporate childcare centers were just as good as non-profit centers, a point I elaborate on in the final section of this chapter. Maura did not believe that the 4K policy had increased the quality of her program; instead, being 4K led people to *recognize* the quality of her program. Like other ECE center administrators I spoke with, Maura insisted that 4K had not changed her program much, and that they had always provided an educational program like 4K, just with a different title.

One of the changes Maura did associate with 4K was improved family engagement as a result of the school district's efforts to help 4K teachers meet the required 87.5 hours of family

engagement. The district helped 4K sites meet this requirement by providing them with packets to send home with each 4K students each month. The packets included a calendar with an activity for each day of the month, as well as other materials and suggestions for activities that parents could do to support children's learning and development. Maura explained that these packets were one of the benefits of being a 4K site; BSCC would not be able to afford to provide this type of family engagement without district support:

> I would say that with the take-homes that family engagement has become stronger. We've done more of that. And I think it's helped parents with things they can do at home with their children. So I think in that benefit that has changed. …It is not something that I think we could do on our own. I mean, we could, but I definitely think that is a benefit. (February 2013 interview)

While Maura felt supported by the school district and that 4K had helped to raise the status of BSCC, she also felt marginalized by the policy. When 4K began, Maura was having trouble filling the 4K slots she had been allocated. In spite of this, the district opened up a 4K classroom at an elementary school right around the corner.

> I did have difficulty because they opened up Fieldson Elementary 4K after it was kind of a second thought, after they hadn't even filled my center. So I'll be honest I was kind of vocal, asking "Wait a minute, why are you opening up another school when you haven't even filled our slots?" (February 2013 interview)

In the second year of 4K, BSCC had doubled its 4K enrollment, and Maura felt good about the center's ability to attract 4K families. The incident Maura described, however, was an example of how the school district-community site partnership often broke down or became a site of tension, a phenomenon I analyze further in Chapter 9.

Teaching Staff

The teaching staff at BSCC was a relatively diverse group of women in terms of age, race, and ethnicity. Though the administrators and many of the teachers were white, a large percentage of teachers were also racial and ethnic minorities. Megan, the 4K focal teacher, was white, and her assistant, Tami, was African American. There were two teachers in every BSCC classroom—a head teacher and an assistant teacher, titles that signified different roles and responsibilities. In the 4K room, this meant that Megan was responsible for planning lessons and activities and during the school day she led large- and small-group activities. Tami's role was to supervise children and to enforce Megan's system of discipline.

Like other state-licensed group child care centers in Wisconsin, the minimum qualification for teachers was two courses in child development. Per state licensing regulations, teachers also had to complete a set number of professional development hours per year (Department of Children and Families, 2009). At the time of research, the 4K teacher, Megan, was the only staff member (including administrators) with a bachelors degree and a teaching license and therefore the only one qualified to teach 4K.

Working conditions at BSCC were far from ideal. Teachers' pay was inadequate and their hours were inconsistent—labor hours were constantly monitored so that teachers did not exceed their scheduled time for the week. As children went home at the end of the day, teachers were asked to leave even if it was before their shift had been scheduled to end, so that the center could save on labor costs. Teachers were also asked to work beyond their scheduled hours if other teachers called in sick. While teachers almost never worked more than the total number of hours

they were scheduled to work each week, the number of hours they worked each day could potentially vary dramatically, and they often did not get all of the hours they were promised. [59]

As is the trend in the childcare sector, low pay and poor working conditions contributed to high turnover (Ackerman, 2006; Kagan et al., 2008). The lack of consistency in staffing was brought into focus by Megan's response to the question I posed at the end of the school year. When I asked what had gone well that year, I had expected to hear about an aspect of the curriculum or a pedagogical approach she had tried, which is what I had heard from teachers at other sites. Instead, Megan told me that she initially had a different assistant at the beginning of the school year, but that person had left to work in a public school. Megan said that the transition from that person to Tami had gone well because it had happened relatively quickly, so she did not have to have lots of different people bouncing in and out of the room while administrators looked for a replacement.

Relationships and Hierarchies

There was a very clear hierarchical structure at Bright Start, much more so than at the other ECE center, Friendship. Teachers reported to administrators who, in turn, had to answer to district and regional managers. Teachers had few opportunities to voice their opinion about institutional policies that affected their work because these policies came from corporate headquarters, through a series of middle managers. Administrators at Bright Start centers had their hands tied, to an extent—they were the middle person between the corporation and the teachers. Staff meetings provided a window into this bureaucracy.

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[59] Any hours a staff member worked beyond their scheduled hours was considered overtime, and it was corporate policy not to pay overtime.

At BSCC, staff meetings were a time for administrators to relay information from the corporation or to review corporate policies. Meeting appeared to happen inconsistently. The one I attended in May was originally scheduled for March, but had been postponed for a variety of reasons. The topic of the meeting was emergency procedures. Over the course of an hour, Jeremy read a 30-page emergency procedures booklet to the staff, verbatim. Afterward, the teachers each had to sign a form acknowledging they were aware of the policies. The mood was light and there was some joking around, but when teachers raised questions or concerns about aspects of the policy, Jeremy was unable to provide answers beyond what was written in the packet.

> *Jeremy: Okay, we'll start. This meeting is about emergency evacuation and procedures. We should have done it in March but because of the management turnover we're doing it now. In general, what you need to know is if there's [a threat] outside the building, stay inside. If there's something inside, get out. It's important to know these things so we can share the information with families; we've had some families ask. You don't have to memorize the information but you need to make sure you know where it is in case something happens or you need to explain the procedures to parents if they ask. Okay, I'm going to read through the whole packet. It was written by Bright Start, but it aligns with local standards.*
>
> *Jeremy begins to read the packet. He basically reads it word for word, with an aside thrown in here and there. When he reads about a bomb threat, the teachers giggle. Someone asks: If there's a bomb, why do we want to stay inside?*
>
> *Jeremy: I don't really know, but a bomb threat may be a way to get people outside. (Field notes, 5/20/13)*

Megan confirmed that this was fairly typical of BSCC staff meetings:

We usually do some variation of [what you observed]. … [T]hat's pretty much what professional development days are, too. Usually we'll get packets and review on these or whatever they want us to review. I'd say it is fairly typical. Ten minutes of basic center concerns and then [review] a policy or something we need to talk about. … [F]or staff meetings we've never been asked for input. … [I]t's pretty much just being told about [a policy or something]. And then it's a little quiz at the end to, you know, check quote

unquote your understanding of the knowledge you just got. There may be some small group chatting, but not usually. (July 2013 interview)

Although teachers had little autonomy when it came to institutional policies, there was a corporate rhetoric that suggested otherwise. During my time at BSCC there were several signs posted in the restroom the teachers used that encouraged staff to provide their feedback and input to make the corporation run more smoothly. One such poster, created by the corporation, featured a picture of a microphone accompanied by the text:

> *Be heard!*
> *There's strength in numbers.*
> *You can do a lot with five digits. There's the obvious: add, subtract, multiply, and divide. Then there are the things you can do with those things: Science, Physics, Computers, Spaceships, Happiness.*
>
> *Yes, happiness was meant to go up there. When you choose a number, any number, you're helping us to understand how to make this place better. Which impacts our students in a more positive and meaningful way. And when happiness and positivity abound, things run smoother. And when things are running smoothly, learning becomes fun. And fun? Fun is just happiness [plus] action. Which can be one part of what we like to call meaningful moments.*
>
> *And meaningful moments? They count for a lot.[60]*

This poster was striking because it conveyed a cheerfulness and sense of staff ownership and investment in the center and corporation that I never felt or observed at Bright Start. This corporate rhetoric of responsiveness—that teachers' input could change the way things were done—did not reflect teachers' realities. Teachers like Megan did not feel empowered to share their opinions; they did not believe their voices were likely to be heard by the corporation.

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[60] This poster did not make a whole lot of sense to me when I saw it. I found out that it was promoting a survey for BSCC employees, which asked them to rank various aspects of their experience working for the corporation. Even knowing that, the text is rather confusing.

Furthermore, Megan believed that the corporation's efforts were misplaced, noting that it spent a lot of money on attractive posters and publications yet could not provide adequate compensation for its employees.

We always get these random– The other day we got this, I mean it was a cute little packet [or] pamphlet-type thing and it talked about the new curriculum coming out in the fall that's supposed to be so much better. … And then they're worried about four minutes of overtime for one person. If they were going to try to skim off the top, there are a lot more things they could [worry about]. (July 2013 interview)

For teachers and administrators, working at Bright Start came with significant constraints. The combination of low wages, difficult working conditions, and limited ability to influence decision-making makes it easy to see why BSCC had a difficult time retaining teachers and administrators.

Inside the 4K Classroom

4K focal teacher: Megan Stevenson

The research year was Megan's second year teaching 4K at BSCC, though she had been working for the corporation in some capacity since high school. Megan, a white woman in her mid-twenties, said she had always wanted to teach young children; she liked four-year-olds in particular because they were "still young enough that everything is still new and exciting to them, but they're old enough to be able to do a lot of really cool things" (May 2013 interview). After earning her bachelor's degree in early childhood education at a University of Wisconsin system campus, Megan was a long-term substitute teacher in a 4K classroom in northern Wisconsin. When she moved back to Lakeville, she worked in the four-year-old classroom at

Bright Start for a year. The following year she left BSCC to teach 4K in a nearby school district because Lakeville did not yet have a 4K program. When Lakeville 4K started in 2011, Megan returned to BSCC, but with the goal of eventually obtaining a position in the Lakeville public schools.

Megan's demeanor and way of interacting with the children in her class was distinctly different from the other focal teachers in my study. Her tone of voice was never sing-song and she was not particularly motherly. Instead, Megan was blunt and her tone was sarcastic. For example, one day when the winter weather was particularly bad, the children were seated on the rug for morning meeting and the following scene transpired:

> *The children ask Megan if they're going to go outside today. She says no, she changed the schedule. The kids call out, "No fair!" and Megan replies flatly, "Life's not fair sometimes."* (Field notes, 2/14/13)

Megan's use of directives rather than reasoning in her interactions with children was representative of teacher-child interactions at BSCC and reflects differences researchers have found in language use and interaction style between middle- and working-class parents and children (Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2003) as well as differences in teacher-student interaction across different class contexts (Anyon, 1980). I should note that Megan *did* engage in the kinds of open-ended conversations and reasoning associated with middle-class classroom interactions. However, these interactions occurred in an atmosphere that was predominantly working-class both in terms of teaching staff and clientele.

Although she would not be described as touchy-feely, it was clear that Megan cared very deeply for her students and worked hard to build strong relationships with them and their families. The children liked Megan, and though their relationship was informal at times—one of her students often addressed her "Hey, Meg…"—they listened and responded well to her.

Megan's relationships with her students were bolstered by her strong connection to their families. She had an easy way of interacting with children's families that seemed to make everyone feel comfortable and at home in her classroom. Though they were a racially and economically diverse group, Megan had no trouble finding points of connection; she seemed to be a real support for families who may not have had strong networks to rely on for information about school and related concerns.[61]

Megan's conversations with parents were varied, ranging from serious discussions about family or education-related issues to simply joking around. The following examples represent typical interactions:

> *As Megan and I are walking down the hall to Tara's room, we run into Phillip and his mom. Phillip's mom tells Megan that she was having a bad day yesterday and decided to get a few new tattoos. She has been getting a tattoo for each of her children with their name and birth date. She explains that she does not like the way the one she got done yesterday turned out. It is supposed to look like an ankle bracelet, with two of her children's names linking together around her ankle, but they put it on the inside of her ankle and it is hard to see. She tells Megan that she thinks the tattoo artist will fix it and she may get one of the names on her wrist instead, but he's going to charge her for it. She's pretty distraught about the whole thing. Megan listens intently, asks questions, and empathizes.* (Field notes, 4/5/13)

> *Dash comes in with his dad. Megan greets them both and asks Dash's dad how it's going. He says, "Thank you in advance for whatever adventures…" and Megan finishes his sentence, "today will bring." The two laugh.* (Field notes, 4/5/13)

Megan made time for parents; on one of the first days I observed in her classroom, she met with a parent who had been unable to come to parent-teacher conferences earlier in the week but who had concerns about her son's learning. Megan spent her only break of the day with this mother, putting her at ease and recommending potential resources.

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[61] It should be noted here that Megan was part of a group of 4K teachers participating in a professional development class focused on mathematics in preK and home-school relationships. She had identified and applied to this on her own—it was not something required by the school district or BSCC.

In addition to reaching out to families, Megan brought children's home lives into the classroom in a way that felt very natural. Along with "Child of the Week" activities that provided an opportunity for students and teachers to get to know each other better (Megan and her Tami also participated as "Child of the Week" at the end of the school year), each person in the classroom had a laminated book about themselves in the classroom library. The children often thumbed through these books, looking at photographs of their classmates and teachers. The books served as a the starting point for interactions that enabled students and teachers to learn more about each others' home lives. Megan knew a lot about the children in her class—that Zeke had a gerbil and Colt spent several nights each week with his grandmother—and the children were equally interested in Megan's life. They were eager to hear stories about Megan's husband and pet and implored her to share details of recent escapades.

Megan's goal for children during the 4K year was to develop social-emotional and cognitive skills:

> I'm just hoping they can solve a problem on their own. Problem solving is so important – you problem solve in math, in reading, in everything. I just want them to be able to solve their problem and function as a constructive member of society. Yes, I still really want them to have the academic skills, but the social skills are really what comes first to me. And then they'll pick up the academics as we go. So that's what I would really like. (May 2013 interview)

In my observations, I saw her working toward these goals by giving children time and space to work out disagreements on their own. Though she was very present in the classroom, aware of what was going on at all times, Megan was not quick to intervene when children had an altercation. Megan expected the children to be independent, and encouraged them to solve their

own problems, often responding to children who told on their classmates with, "Be a problem solver." Megan's emphasis on children being "problem solvers" was not accompanied by any support or modeling for how this might be done. When children could not work out their problems on their own, there was a discipline system that they had to answer to, which I detail in the next section of this chapter.

Though she seemed to genuinely enjoy her students, Megan was frustrated with her working conditions. Megan's laid-back personality meant she rarely exhibited outward signs of stress about her job. Sarcastic comments about the corporation were a common refrain, however, and Megan was eager to find a position in the public schools, either in Lakeville or a surrounding district. In the summer after the research period, Megan taught summer school in Lakeville. She continued working part time at BSCC over the summer and was able to negotiate a higher hourly wage for the fall by telling her director that she had been offered a position in the public schools. Most recently, I heard that Megan works as a substitute teacher in LPS on Mondays and teaches 4K at Bright Start the rest of the week. She was able to negotiate this when Jeremy left and a new director took over by essentially telling the new director that this was the arrangement she had always had. The director, who did not know any better, acquiesced.

The Curriculum: "I take about 40% from the curriculum."

Megan used the prekindergarten curriculum developed by Bright Start Corporation with her 4K students. Megan described it as similar to the Creative Curriculum (Dodge et al., 2002), focused on learning through play. A major difference between the Creative Curriculum and the Bright Start curriculum, however, was that the Bright Start curriculum was scripted. The curriculum's teacher's manual walked teachers through each part of every day, providing scripts

to follow as they facilitated daily routines and theme-based activities. Critics of scripted curricula have argued that this approach diminishes teachers' creativity and leads to a narrowing of the curriculum. When a scripted curriculum is used, teachers' work is seen as technical rather than professional and teachers and teachers' job satisfaction is diminished (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Milner, 2013). Researchers who study the use of scripted curriculum at the primary and secondary level have asserted its use may also disproportionately affect non-white, low-income students whose teachers have lower levels of training and experience (Milner, 2013).

A striking example of the scriptedness of Bright Start curriculum was the daily calendar routine. Teachers were instructed to facilitate calendar time in the same manner every day. The same script was included in the curriculum each day, with only the day of the week changed:

> What Day Is It? Calendar Activity
> Using the [Bright Start] calendar, point out the day's date and say the number. For example, say **"Today is March 3rd. It is Thursday."** Point to the word *Thursday* on the calendar and ask the children to say the word. Ask children, **"What day will it be tomorrow?"** Help them by pointing to the next day on the calendar (Friday) and by saying the days in order, **"Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. That's right; tomorrow will be Friday."**[62]

Similarly, each day's plan included a script for the "Who's Here Today? Name Activity", the "Daily Weather Forecast", and the "What We'll Do Today Discussion", among others. Another activity, "Map Discussion", which was scheduled for Friday during the first week of the Transportation unit, had a full page script for teachers to follow. It began like this:

> Show children the maps you have displayed and ask them to share what they know about maps. **"This is a map of our center and this is a map of our city. What is a map used for?"** Allow time for children to share what they know about maps. Then explain to the children, **"Maps show people where places are and how to get to those places. Maps tell us directions to travel and distances between different places."**[63]

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[62] Boldface emphasis is in the original.
[63] While Megan used many of the activities provided by the curriculum, I never saw her following the script.

The Bright Start 4K curriculum was theme-based, with the scope and sequence of themes set in advance. Each theme came with posters to hang on the classroom walls and lesson plans teachers were required to post outside their classroom doors. The lesson plan was predetermined and outlined what children would do in four areas over the course of two weeks: 1) literacy and library; 2) math and blocks; 3) science and sensory; 4) creative exploration. The teacher's manual told teachers which materials to put in each area of the room during each thematic unit. Beyond this, teachers were responsible for developing and posting an "enhancement plan", a series of add-on activities the children would participate in that week.

Although the curriculum was prescribed, Megan had some flexibility; she did not have to do all of the activities suggested for the thematic units. In fact, Megan chose not to do many of the activities because she did not feel they were appropriate for her students.

> Well, the curriculum comes in a book where it has a literacy activity and a math activity and a carpet activity for every day. But some of it is a little – like a lot of it the kids aren't ready for. Like technically right now they should be getting little word packets that have ten sight words per week, and we should be sitting down reading these words. But a lot of these kids, they know like five letters, so how are you going to learn a sight word when you don't know… So, it kinda depends on what realistically is [possible for the kids]. Or they'll have a carpet activity where they want everyone to sit for a half hour long activity, and it's just not going to happen. Otherwise, some of it can be a little repetitive. So I try to throw funner, I'll say funner, things in there that…will help them. (May 2013 interview)

Megan used her professional expertise, knowledge of her students, and district progress report benchmarks to decide which elements of the curriculum to use and which to modify or reject

altogether. She explained that about 40% of the activities she did in class came from the curriculum; the other 60% were ones she made up herself.

> [During small groups] I'll call the kids over to do some sort of activity, which is usually determined by the curriculum, but lately it's been like 40% determined by the curriculum and then whatever else I want to throw in there. (May 2013 interview)

All of the teachers in the building were required to follow a scripted curriculum specific to the age group with which they worked. Though I was unable to observe other teachers' enactment of the scripted curriculum, I imagine that Megan might have had more facility with working around the curriculum because she had a higher level of training than her coworkers.

Even with a scripted curriculum, Megan had some flexibility because her work was monitored very little by her supervisors. She could not recall a time that she had been observed by an administrator, and noted that as long as she stuck to the timeline dictated by Bright Start and posted her lesson plans outside her classroom, she could pretty much do whatever she thought was appropriate. This is one of the few aspects of her job where Megan was able to exercise some autonomy. Still, this flexibility had its limits. Even when Megan thought that a theme would not resonate with her students, she had no choice but to cover it.

> We have a theme this summer: the Wild Wild West. It's something that we did last year during the summer that is so completely– the kids have no idea what the Wild Wild West is. It's so abstract to them. It's a theme that I would never in my life choose to do with four- and five-year-olds. So there's things like that that I wouldn't choose to do. But you kinda have to at least try your best [because] it's what they give you. They give you the enrichment plan and the lesson plan you have to hang on the board, so you don't really have a choice. So then it's harder to at least make it relate a little bit to the Bright Start

curriculum, the things that you wanted to do. I wish we didn't have to do things that don't really mean anything to [the kids]. Besides that, the activities are usually pretty well-intended and at the pace that they need to learn. (July 2013 interview)

Megan was also required to spend two weeks—no more and no less—on each theme. She wished the curriculum was not so rigid, because it prevented her from building on her students' interests.

I really wish, because the curriculum is two week periods, that if the kids are really interested in something, like they're really interested in bugs and spiders, I wish I could expand it and if we wanted to take a month to learn about it, that we could. That's something I wish I could do. It's nice to have new things to learn about every two weeks, but sometimes there are things I wish I could spend more time on. So that's something I wish I could do that I'm limited because of the curriculum. (July 2013 interview)

In addition to dictating themes and timeframes, the curriculum had structural elements that had to be completed on a regular basis. One example of this was the lesson and enrichment plans that I already mentioned, which had to be posted outside the classroom door. Another example was the 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper that accompanied every bulletin board display in the classroom. After the children completed a project or activity, Megan would hang their work or pictures of them doing an activity on a bulletin board. Next to the display hung a form (with the Bright Start trademark) with the following sections for teachers to fill in: Name of the activity, Learning objective, Materials used, and Outcome of the activity. The bulletin board displays Megan created were aesthetically pleasing, but I quickly realized that the write-ups were essentially all the same. The title of the activity and the materials used sections changed, but the other two remained the same regardless of the activity. Whether the activity was "Cube building

and measuring" or "Times with tools and machines", the learning objective was always "To use a variety of materials to create a work of art" and the learning outcome was always:

> The children had a blast making their creations! They were excited to do a project with their friends and had lost [sic] of conversations about the similarities and differences of their art work. They also increased their fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination through the use of the materials.

> More than anything, requirements like these activity sheets seemed to be areas where, if teachers went through the motions, no one actually cared what was said or done. As long as Megan posted the activity sheets, she was considered to be following the curriculum; no one, including the parents for whom they were probably intended, actually looked at them. Megan described these pre-printed materials as a proxy for determining who was implementing the curriculum: "It's evident in classrooms who's doing the curriculum and who's not. You can just kinda see what's going on and what's not in terms of areas and things that are posted" (July 2013 interview).

Daily Life in 4K

Megan's 4K classroom was warm and inviting. Morning sun streamed in through large windows at the far end of the classroom. Most of the classroom space was devoted to learning centers—writing, math, art, dramatic play, blocks, listening, and library—where children spent the bulk of the 4K session playing. These areas were full of materials, many supplied by BSCC but others brought in from home by Megan. A colorful rug with letters, numbers, and color names printed in English and Spanish defined the area where the class gathered for large group meetings and a white board on an easel displayed a daily greeting. Each child had an assigned

seat on the rug. The room had several large bulletin boards that displayed children's work and the library area had comfy mats where the children could relax and read.

During the 4K session, children followed a set routine, which was posted on a schedule board. The morning 4K session began with breakfast provided by the center. The meal was served family style, with children seated around two rectangular tables along with either Megan or Tami. Children who did not want breakfast read books in the library area. After clearing their breakfast dishes, children could read books in the library area or do activities on the rug. Each morning Megan set out two different activities that most often focused on mathematical concepts. After finishing her own breakfast, Megan joined children on the rug. During this time she often took notes about how the children were engaging with the games she set out. The rest of the 4K session consisted of a large group meeting, choice time, and outside time. There was a final, shorter, group meeting after the children came in from the playground.

Children spent most of the 4K session playing in learning centers. After the morning group meeting, Megan called on children one by one to choose a center. Children were required to indicate their choice by moving their nametag to that center, but they could move freely between centers, as long as they did not exceed the maximum number allowed in each center at one time. The dramatic play center often changed with the theme, and theme-related materials were placed in other centers as well.

There was little adult intervention while children were playing, except to discipline or support problem-solving. Megan spent much of center time with small groups of children who were completing a project or activity related to the week's theme. Children did not have a choice when it came to small group time; they had to complete the activity when Megan called them over to the table. This is what a typical small group time looked like:

Megan asks the two children seated at the table to each find another person who wants to do the project. They get up from the table and hurry around the room, asking others if they want to do the project. Dana gets Tamra to come over, but Levi returns to the table and says, "I can't get no one." Megan asks, "Did you ask Colin? He always likes to do projects." Levi asks Colin, who says yes. When Levi comes back to the table, Megan says, "Ta-da." There are four kids at the table now: Levi, Dana, Tamra, and Colin. Megan asks Kevin if he wants to do the project. He says no and Megan says she'll call him to do it later. Colin asks Colt if he wants to do the project, and he comes over to the table.

When everyone is seated, Megan hands a piece of large white paper to each child and tells them that at the bottom of the paper it says, "My favorite kind of transportation." She says they're going to use markers to draw their favorite type of transportation. As the children draw, Megan asks them what they're drawing. She encourages them to add details to their pictures. She prompts Tamra to add clouds behind her hot air balloon, for example. After drawing his picture, Levi asks Megan, "How do you write 'Hi, this is me, and I'm in a hot air balloon'?" Megan writes this on a piece of paper and Levi copies it on his paper.

Colt tells Megan that a cheetah is his favorite form of transportation. Megan says, "You can't ride a cheetah to get from one place to another. Try something else." Megan prompts Tamra to add more detail to her hot air balloon, suggesting that balloons are never just plain—they have different colors and designs. As the chidlren finish their pictures and tell Megan what they drew, she writes the name of the transportation type on a sentence strip so they can write it on their papers. It seems like hot air balloon is a popular mode of transport among this group. Megan also takes pictures of the kids and their work as they draw and write.

When Levi finishes his project he tells Megan, "No one will understand my picture." Megan replies, "The words will tell them what it means." (Field notes, 2/28/13)

After all the children completed the small group activity, Megan would circulate around the room to see what children were doing and was often invited to play with a particular group. There was typically more time for this in the afternoon than in the morning. During play, Megan followed the children's lead; they told Megan what they were playing and how they wanted her to participate, and she followed along. This excerpt from my field notes describes a scene that transpired over the course of 40 minutes during the afternoon 4K session:

The children in the housekeeping area ask Megan to play with them. They are pretending to be a family. Megan joins the children. She puts clothes on a baby doll and says she's going to a restaurant with Zeke. She asks "Did you pack my baby some extra clothes?" and Zeke puts some clothes in a bag. Yael comes over and asks what they're doing and Megan says, "I'm having a date with my baby."

Megan tells Zeke that if the baby cries she's going to give the baby to him. She says, "You should know what to do when the baby cries because you have a baby at home." Yael decides she's going to go to the restaurant with Megan. The two sit at the table. Megan asks who's going to cook for them. Bryana comes over and someone says she's the best cook. Bryana takes drink orders but forgets to take Zeke's order. Megan says, "That wasn't very good service." When Bryana brings the drinks out, Zeke pretends to drink from Megan's cup. Megan complains to Bryana that she needs a new cup because Zeke's mouth was on her cup.

Zeke announces he's the dog now. Yael says she's going to go back to the house to get the dog. Megan says, "You have to take care of the dog because I can't take care of a dog and a baby." Zeke comes over, pretending to be a dog. Megan asks if he's hungry and Zeke the dog nods. She gives him some food and he pretends to eat.

Megan, who has been organizing pretend money in her purse, announces that she's sorted out all her money so she knows now how much money they can spend at the restaurant. There is some talk about the dog, and for a moment he goes "out" to go "potty". The children at the table have conversations about what dogs can or can't do. When Zeke climbs on the small couch in the housekeeping area, Megan exclaims, "You're letting the dog on the furniture? That's a spoiled dog."

Zeke announces that has "turned into a peoples again." He does some push-ups and says, "I'm a strong people." Megan asks how many he can do. He doesn't respond and Megan says, "I'm going to make you count every day until you can do it."

Kyle gets dropped off. Megan greets him and tells the kids she'll be right back – says she's has to write Kyle in. Kyle is relatively new. Today is the first day I've seen him in class. When Megan comes back to the housekeeping area, she says, "Okay, I'm back from work. Where are my babies?" She tells Zeke he needs to change the baby's diaper, saying "Daddies can do it." Zeke takes the baby over to the couch and pretends to change the diaper then says he's going to work. Megan replies, "You're always working. When are you gonna spend time with your family?" Then Megan asks Zeke if he wants her to tie his shoes. He says, "Dads don't tie shoes." A moment later Zeke tells Megan he's going to be an "army guy." Megan says, "Hopefully you won't be enlisted. Zeke says, "I won't die."

More activity transpires, and after a few moments, Zeke says, "Excuse me, there's a lotta monsters outside." Megan says, "You better protect your family. You have a beautiful wife and three quiet children and a babysitter to take care of."

Zeke: There's a little bit of monsters. This many (he holds up his fingers).

Megan: How many?

Zeke: Three.

Zeke miscounts and Megan has him count again- one, two, three, four. A moment later, Zeke says, "Ms. Megan, I'm dead."Megan exclaims, "You're dead? You told me you weren't gonna die! You left me here with three babies. Save him, babysitter!"

> *Bryanna gets to work saving Zeke. Megan covers the babies for their nap and says, "I'm gonna nap, too." She lays down on the rug. Bryanna covers Megan with a blanket and Megan pretends to sleep, snoring loudly.*

Zeke: Ms. Megan, moms don't snore.

Megan: Why not?

Zeke: Just dads [snore].

> *Megan tells Zeke to be quiet because he woke her up. Zeke pretends to sleep but lies down with his eyes open.*

Megan: You're creeping me out with your eyes open.

Zeke: That's what happens when someone is killed. Their eyes stay open.

Megan: Where did you hear that?

Zeke: From my movie theater. (Field notes, 4/24/13)

As this example illustrates, when Megan played with the children, she really played. She was unfazed by sudden plot twists and mostly let the children take the lead. While she did introduce new ideas into the play and address skills—in the case of the vignette, ideas about counting and determining what you can afford to spend at a restaurant—she did not try to control the play. When she engaged in children's play, Megan seemed to genuinely enjoy herself and the children.

Behavior management. Even after a short amount of time in Megan's classroom, it would be hard not to notice her discipline system. At all times during the day, children were "on" green, yellow, or red. Children started the day with a green circle velcroed to their cubby box. If they misbehaved, they progressed from green to yellow, and then red. No one wanted to be on red. When a child misbehaved, he or she would either be moved immediately to yellow or receive a warning about moving to yellow. Once a child was on yellow, the next infraction might result in their moving to red. Good behavior could undo this; while it was impossible to move

from red back to green, children could move from red to yellow and then yellow to green as they demonstrated good behavior. Megan explained that the system worked well for her:

> I got the idea because a kid that came here last year came from a different Bright Start on the [other side of town] and her teacher used that. And I was kinda looking for some sort of something– I'd been looking at ideas and she mentioned it and she said it worked really good for her kid. So I thought I'd give it a try. And it really, it works quite well. I mean they love that they're on green, some parents even do it at home. Green is your every day basic day, yellow is a few reminders and red is way a lot of reminders. And they can always earn it back. They can go from red to yellow but they can never go from red to green. So they can try to earn it back through their good choices, but, I mean it kinda helps them keep regulated a little bit. (May 2013 interview)

Many children in Megan's class were always on green and almost never have to be told that they might be moved to yellow. For a handful of students, however, the threat of moving to yellow or red was constant and warnings from Megan and other teachers were a common refrain. These children—white and non-white boys—appeared to need constant monitoring by teachers and their classmates. Frequent discipline seemed to be a self-perpetuating cycle, with discipline begetting discipline because children viewed as rule-breakers received fewer second chances and were often suspected to be orchestrators of mischief. As they were being disciplined, these children were also learning important lessons about how they would be perceived in elementary school, particularly since their record from 4K would follow them to kindergarten.

4K at Bright Start: "We're all doing the same thing for children"

In this section I explain how teachers and administrators at Bright Start conceptualized 4K and how this was reflected in Megan's practice. I explain how becoming a 4K site was envisioned by Maura as a way to assert the quality of care provided by BSCC, how being a 4K teacher provided Megan with some elements of professional status that she was not otherwise afforded, and how the distinction between 4K and "non-4K" days translated into distinctly different classroom practices for Megan.

4K = Status

Maura wanted BSCC to be a 4K site because she felt that corporate childcare centers were not taken seriously, and that 4K could be mechanism to elevate Bright Start's status.

> How did I decide [to be a 4K site]? Well, I knew [4K] was going through. I actually served on 4K board so I did have a hand in some decisions with the 4K. Part of the reason we decided to do it is I knew it was coming. Sometimes with large corporations and for-profit centers, sometimes we get that–I don't know–that name, so to speak, that we're not as good as the rest of them. So I thought the only way we can prove that is by being in there. And getting our name out there and showing people: profit, non-profit –it doesn't matter what you're doing, we're all doing the same thing for children. (Maura, February 2013 interview)

Being a 4K site was a way to prove that corporate childcare centers had high quality programs, just like non-profit centers. Although BSCC was accredited by the city of Lakeville and received five out of five stars in Wisconsin's quality rating system, YoungStar, both markers of quality programming, Maura felt the need to assert that BSCC provided high quality care. Though she

said becoming a 4K site did not change what the center had already been doing in terms of education and care, Maura believed that 4K provided the center with more credibility, which led to increased enrollment.

> [4K has] definitely helped our enrollment plus the fact that it's definitely shown people, too, that what we do is really important and that we're actually pretty good at it. I think at one time maybe this center they would have thought that we didn't know what we were doing—[that we were] just babysitting—but now with the 4K program it's shown that we are really good. (February 2013 interview)

One of the significant shifts in enrollment that came with 4K was an increase in the center's population of children from middle-class families. Though many of these children attended BSCC only for the 4K session, Maura saw this as a positive development because it brought more funding to the center through the district per pupil reimbursement. The middle-class families presumably did not pose the same problem of inconsistency as the working-class families, and enrolling these children meant that BSCC had to rely less on state childcare subsidies to cover their operating expenses. This may also have been one of the few examples of the 4K program increasing the diversity of a program.[64]

Although Maura associated 4K with quality, she was quick to clarify that becoming a 4K site did not increase the quality of her center—it was already high-quality. She explained that with the exception of increased family engagement, BSCC simply continued to do what it had already been doing prior to the start of 4K.

> Probably there is a lot of [support from the district for 4K]. Unfortunately, we probably don't take advantage of it as much. The family engagement part- they've really helped us with that. But otherwise we've been doing preschool programs for so long that really we-

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[64]I return to the issue of equity and access in Chapter 10.

it's something that we've always done. So it was just an added benefit to be in conjunction with the school district and I feel that- I just don't think that we need a whole lot [of support from the district] because we've already been doing it. (February 2013 interview)

The perception was that district support was something *other* centers were likely to need; BSCC was doing just fine on its own.

Just as was the case for Maura from an administrative perspective, for Megan, the 4K policy and being a 4K teacher (as opposed to a regular teacher at BSCC) meant access to some perks that she would not have had otherwise. As a 4K teacher, and the only one at BSCC qualified to teach 4K, Megan's needs were prioritized over others'. For example, like other teachers, Megan was supposed to have an hour of planning time each week. Though most teachers could not rely on actually getting this planning time, when Jeremy took over as director he made Megan's planning time a priority. Actually getting the hour break was not a foregone conclusion—if too many teachers had called in sick there might be no one to cover Megan's break—but there was an effort to ensure Megan had the time to plan for 4K. Similarly, Megan was allowed to leave the center to attend several of the school district professional development sessions and was paid for this time. Although she attended very few PD sessions—two out of eight—being paid for time away from the center was an anomaly at a place so focused on labor hours and profits.

Finally, 4K came to be something Megan could leverage in negotiations with her administrators. With a bachelor's degree and a teaching license, Megan was qualified to teach 4K at public school sites in Lakeville and other districts, which would come with better pay and benefits. Megan used this to her advantage when, after teaching summer school in LPS, she

asked for and received a raise by telling Jeremy she had been offered a public school 4K position. Although BSCC was not Megan's ideal work environment, she was able to use her status as a 4K teacher strategically to improve her working conditions.

4K ≠ Non-4K

Although Megan asserted that her work and BSCC's programming for four-year-olds had not changed significantly when 4K began, she did distinguish between 4K and "non-4K" days. Because 4K was offered Tuesday through Friday, Mondays were non-4K days. Structurally, Mondays were different from the rest of the week. On 4K days, Megan had two distinct groups of students—one in the morning and one in the afternoon—with a break for lunch in between. On Mondays, however, time was more fluid and activities less structured. Megan's students stayed with her for the whole day, so she supervised lunch and naptime as well as afternoon play.

On 4K days Megan facilitated a series of activities for children; even while children played independently in learning centers, Megan worked with small groups on specific projects or activities. In contrast, while children played on Mondays, Megan was engaged in planning and preparing for the week ahead. When I asked Megan to explain the difference between 4K and non-4K days, she said:

> Way less kids, way less structured [on non-4K days]. It's very much a play time or an areas time where they can still have their routine but I can try to get things done because normally if I wasn't here I wouldn't have kids, so I just try to get stuff done while maintaining the group. We'll still have the same routine, but it's a lot less curriculum based. It's a lot more free choice. (May 2013 interview)

On non-4K days Megan's work resembled care work more than teaching (Ackerman, 2006); she was less engaged with the children and took on more of a supervisory role. The goal on non-4K days seemed to be to maintain the status quo; as long as children were happy and no one was getting hurt, Megan could be free to prepare for the rest of her week. In contrast, 4K days had a set routine, structured activities derived from the curriculum, and more focused teacher-student interaction during large and small group activities.

Though it was not parenting, per se, the difference between 4K and non-4K days related to the distinctions Lareau (2003) makes between organization of daily life in middle- and working-class families. The middle-class model, or "Concerted Cultivation" is characterized by parents who "actively [foster] and [assess] child's talent, opinions, and skills" and by "multiple child leisure activities orchestrated by adults". In contrast, the working-class model, which Lareau summarizes as "Accomplishment of Natural Growth", is defined by parents who allow their children more room to grow independently and by more time spent "hanging out" (2003, p. 31). Perhaps it was the fact that she did not have enough release time to prepare for 4K or that, like others, she perceived 4K as "real school" and daycare as something else, but Megan came to embody these class distinctions. These distinctions parallel the historic divide between education and care, in which programs and teachers associated with education have been afforded higher status than those associated with care because teachers are presumed to be fostering learning, rather than simply babysitting (Rose, 2010). The difference between 4K and non-4K days also indicates that the 4K policy in Lakeville "succeeded" at fostering middle-class norms during 4K hours, which coincided at BSCC with the times that middle-class kids were most likely to be at the center.

The status difference between 4K and non-4K was reinforced at the institutional level by decisions made about what morning session 4K children would do after the 4K session ended. The room this group went to after 4K made it seem like the time after 4K was an afterthought; the room was bland and mostly empty with the exception of a climbing structure that seemed designed for younger children, a few books and toys, tables and chairs, and cots for naptime. Megan explained: "I wish there were more toys next door that were developmentally appropriate – it's just kind of an old empty room. There's not a lot in there. A lot of poor choices are made in there. I don't know if it's the teachers or the materials they have or a combination of both" (May 2013 interview).

Conclusion

Although Maura and Megan did not agree with every aspect of the 4K policy, becoming a 4K site was generally positive for BSCC and for Megan's position in the center. The 4K program brought additional resources to the center, attracted more middle-class families, and provided Megan with the leverage she needed to improve her working conditions slightly. For students who attended BSCC full time, 4K created a shift in daily routines—non-4K time was distinctly different from 4K time.

Although it appeared to be fairly seamlessly integrated into the center, 4K created new hierarchies within BSCC that led to the marginalization of non-4K time and teachers. The 4K v. non-4K binary positioned 4K as educative and non-4K as daycare, which reinforced the notion that 4K was "real school" and the rest was just babysitting. The idea that childcare does not have an educative function was precisely the stereotype that Maura was working against. Thus, while becoming a 4K site may have proved to the public that corporate childcare centers are high-

quality, too, what happened inside the centers walls only reinforced historical assumptions about

the form and function of childcare.

PART IV: COMPARISONS

Chapter 9: What 4K Policy did in Lakeville

As I discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, when Lakeville's 4K policy went into effect, it brought together two previously separate systems—ECE and K-12—with effects for both individuals and institutions. By bringing childcare centers and preschools under the umbrella of the school district, the policy held the promise of increased professionalization for community partner site 4K teachers in terms of salary and status. Teachers who were able to find 4K positions in the school district would be paid more than teachers in community-based childcare settings, and there was also an expectation that 4K teachers at community partner sites would receive a salary increase as a result of the infusion of school district funds to childcare centers. At the institutional level, some hoped that because it was affiliated with the school district, 4K at community sites would be seen as "real school," something different than what childcare centers offered before.[65] For community site teachers, this would mean that even if they were doing more or less what they had done before 4K began, being part of 4K might lend credibility to their work if people realized that teaching four-year-olds required specialized knowledge and skills.

As the first two years of 4K unfolded, it became clear that the policy was not going to be a panacea to community site teachers' problems and that the effects of the policy on institutions were not always positive. Teachers soon learned that holding the same credential did not guarantee equality in working conditions, professional development opportunities, or wages and benefits. Instead, the 4K policy illuminated and reinforced some existing inequalities and hierarchies, and created new ones. In some cases the policy also created the *perception* of inequality, which was just as powerful as actual inequalities. Teachers' experiences with the 4K

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[65] Two of the 4K teachers I interviewed mentioned that parents viewed 4K as "real school" more than they had the four-year-old program that preceded it. This was despite the fact that the teachers did not see a big difference between what they were doing in 4K and what they did prior to the policy.

policy were not just a result of individual differences or personalities. Instead, they must be understood structurally; teachers' work and interaction with the policy was situated within institutional structures that created particular opportunities and constraints for policy implementation. Specifically, the 4K policy reshaped institutions' economic and socio-educational landscapes, leaving administrators struggling to figure out how resources should be allocated and how 4K policy should be enacted at their site.

In the sections that follow, I demonstrate how teachers and administrators experienced this phenomenon across and within institutions. First, I provide some context about the impact of 4K on the teachers and institutions that implemented the policy.

Opportunities for Advancement through 4K

Because the supply of potential public school teachers in Lakeville far outstripped demand, many teachers like Linda and Megan who had the credentials to teach in the public schools wound up working in preschools or child care centers.[66] Though they may have enjoyed this work, these teachers talked about themselves as being in a holding pattern, biding their time until they were able to get a position in the school district. These teachers strived to access the public schools for practical purposes—the salary and benefits were better—and because being a public school teacher came with a bit more status and respect.

The 4K policy appeared to open up two new opportunities for childcare teachers with the credentials required to be a 4K teacher. First, there would be new jobs created in public schools. Second, there was the possibility that, because of the infusion of funds from the school district to

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[66] I have heard that the school district received anywhere from 300 to 400 applicants for every open position.

community 4K sites, 4K teachers might receive a pay increase.[67] Unfortunately, neither of these changes occurred for Linda or Megan.

Although adding 4K classrooms to public elementary schools created 43 new teaching positions in Lakeville School District, many were filled internally. At the extreme, there was talk of high school teachers being moved "down" to 4K. Other cases were not so dramatic, but still involved teachers with little or no early childhood training being plunked into a 4K classroom. At Forest Grove, Mrs. Calden was moved from kindergarten to 4K and Mrs. Preston, who had no experience with four-year-olds, taught 4K in the morning and elementary school science in the afternoon. With funding for public schools being cut in the name of balancing state and city budgets, reassigning teachers was a work-around that made sense for the school district, but not for community site teachers who had been hoping that 4K would be their entrée to public school teaching or for policymakers and stakeholders assuming 4K teachers would have ECE experience.

This approach to staffing the 4K program conflicted with ideas about best practice in the early childhood community, where notions of quality are tied to teachers' knowledge of child development and their ability to enact DAP (Copple & Bredekamp, 2010). It also highlights divergent perspectives on what it means to be qualified; reflective of national trends, the school district's hiring practices for 4K reinforced a preference for formal credentials over experience in early childhood education. The perception from community site teachers and administrators was that just because public school teachers had the proper credentials, did not mean they were qualified for the job. For example, Helen Moyers, a City of Lakeville childcare official told me:

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[67] The school district did not mandate what 4K reimbursement funds should be used for, but there was speculation that centers might use it to pay teachers more.

Childcare people…know what is developmentally appropriate. … So they have worked very hard to look at their own curriculums and the WMELS, to make sure those are connected. Personally, I'm not so sure [those two things are connected] for teachers in [the public schools]. (January 2012 interview)

Yet, the district's approach to staffing 4K was a practical solution that addressed the new demand for 4K teachers while responding to fiscal realities. This example is a reminder that policy always enters into ongoing political, social, and economic relations. Given the across-the-board budget cuts experienced by public schools at the time the policy was introduced, it makes sense that people were trying to preserve jobs for people who had already proven themselves in the school district, even if they were not qualified to teach 4K. The reality that many of the 4K teachers in public school sites did not have prior ECE experience, however, compounded fears that 4K would become "schooled"; if the only point of reference these teachers had was the elementary grades (or worse, high school), it was unlikely they would have the ability or willingness to implement a play-based approach.

For most community site 4K teachers, the anticipated pay increase did not materialize either. The school district provided community 4K sites with a per-pupil reimbursement of about $3,500 per year[68] and maintained a "hands-off" approach when it came to community sites' business practices; community sites administrators had flexibility to decide how to use the reimbursement. At some of the sites, administrators were able to use the reimbursement to provide 4K teachers with a much-needed raise. This was not the case for the majority of community partner sites, however. Friendship Preschool, for example, was just barely covering its costs with the 4K reimbursement and other sites felt pressure to provide a discount to 4K

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[68] This reimbursement rate applied to sites that supplied their own teacher (Model III). In Model II programs, where the district supplied a teacher, the reimbursement was lower: a little more than $2,000 per student and LPS paid the teacher salary. There were only two Model II programs in Lakeville; the majority were Model III.

parents rather than increase teacher salaries.[69] As a result, when 4K began, teachers like Megan and Linda assumed new roles with new titles and somewhat different responsibilities, but their pay remained constant.

Hierarchies and Inequality across Institutions: Public School v. Community Site 4K

Just because 4K brought together the worlds of childcare and K-12 did not mean that historical divisions between the two were erased and forgotten. Childcare has long been burdened by the assumption that while teachers in schools educate children, childcare workers are glorified babysitters.

> The belief that any activity related to the caring aspect of young children is different from real teaching—and thus significant skills or educational background are unnecessary—is not merely an unarticulated historical attitude. …When examining current attitudes toward the skills needed to be an effective childcare worker…it would seem as if this historical view still applies. Despite the passage of almost 150 years, "a job in child care is [still] seen as an extension of women's familial role of rearing children" (Whitebook et al., 1990, p. 3, as cited in Ackerman, 2006, p. 99)

Teachers were well aware of this stratification and longed for greater respect:

> And even though I shouldn't let this bother me, it's like– "You're a teacher and you work at a nursery school." Teachers themselves don't get a whole lotta respect and a preschool teacher is even worse. (Linda Jenkins, May 2013 interview)

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[69] See Chapter 5 for more on this. There was a lot of commotion about the cost of 4K in the first few years. Parents were told it was free, and the 2.5 hours per day of 4K were free, but the equation was very complicated in community partner sites that offered wraparound care. In most of these sites, children are considered "full time" if they are at the center for five or more hours per day. Because many children attend childcare for eight to ten hours per day, the centers still charged a full time rate to families enrolled in 4K. As a result, parents were upset that they did not get a discount because the 4K time was supposed to be free.

I think that…acknowledging that we teach four-year-olds and it's not just daycare is a really important statement. And I like that our community and our district has acknowledged that. (Administrator at Little Explorers Preschool, November 2011 interview)[70]

4K might have been an opportunity for 4K community site teachers and administrators to elevate the status of childcare centers and teachers; instead, the inequalities that pervaded the system reinforced this historical stratification.

"I'm not saying we have to be equal…but I'd like a little more equity." The structural differences between being a teacher in a public elementary school and a teacher in a childcare center have been well-documented. Childcare teachers tend to earn less, receive fewer benefits if any, and have fewer opportunities for advancement, realties that lead to high rates of turnover in childcare centers (Ackerman, 2006; Kagan et al., 2008; Whitebook et al., 1998).[71] The 4K policy created a new category of teachers drawn from both of these worlds. These teachers shared a title—4K teacher—but the policy did little to address the structural differences between childcare and the K-12 system. The policy was designed to fit better with a public school model, perhaps not surprisingly, since the school district played a major role in designing the policy and overseeing its implementation. The alignment of the policy with the K-12 system, however, resulted in the marginalization of 4K community site teachers, who had all of the responsibilities of 4K but none of the benefits.

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[70] As I noted in Chapter 2, some of the data in my analysis comes from the pilot study. Little Explorers Preschool was a private non-profit childcare center for children from six weeks to five years that hosted two afternoon 4K sessions. The center also offered wraparound care, so most 4K students attended full time.

[71] This is not to say that being a public school teacher is without its issues, just that public school teachers are generally doing better than childcare teachers when it comes to salary, benefits, and other working conditions.

Sociologists who study organizations use the term visibility of inequality to refer to "the degree of awareness of inequalities" (Acker, 2006, p. 452). In different organizations, and at different levels within an organization's hierarchy, inequalities related to race, class, or gender are more or less visible. The degree to which inequality is visible is also related to a person's position within the organization—the inequality seen and experienced by an entry-level worker may be invisible to an upper-level manager. In the 4K teachers' case, existing inequalities were exacerbated and new ones created as a result of how the program was structured. It was not a case of overt or even implicit discrimination, but a byproduct of bringing together two previously distinct, and historically unequal, systems to implement 4K policy.

As they reflected on the experience of enacting 4K policy, teachers and administrators spoke of inequalities they experienced on a personal and an institutional level. At the personal level, community site teachers highlighted issues related to pay and benefits, demands on their time, and access to professional development opportunities. At the institutional level, teachers and administrators struggled to meet policy requirements such as those related to substitute teachers and administering assessments, which were created with the K-12 system, not childcare centers, in mind. As teachers and administrators confronted inequalities, hierarchies became visible. Community site 4K teachers perceived that public school 4K teachers had a higher status than they did because their work was more professionalized in terms of salary, working conditions, and resources, and the school district wielded more power than community site administrators. In the sections that follow I describe how this happened.

*Salary and benefits***.** Childcare workers have historically earned less than public school teachers (Ackerman, 2006; Kagan et al., 2008) and this was certainly true in Lakeville. The 4K policy made this inequality visible because it created a new constituency of 4K teachers with the

same professional qualifications but whose salaries were vastly different. Linda noted: "And then there's a slightly more personal side to [my concerns]: the discrepancy between pay. We get paid, unfortunately, a lot less than the public school teachers" (January 2012 interview).

During the research year, community site teachers Megan and Linda earned $14.28 and $19 per hour, respectively, while Mrs. Calden's public school salary was $52,000 per year.[72] Linda and Megan's salaries were likely higher than most childcare teachers; the annual mean wage for Wisconsin childcare workers in 2013 was $20,520-$22,550, which works out to about $11.50 an hour (United States Department of Labor, 2013c). Still, they were earning far less than Mrs. Calden and lacked comparable benefits. Though Megan had health insurance, Linda did not, and neither had access to an employer-sponsored retirement plan.

Disparities in base pay were compounded by the fact that there was no clear pathway to earn more in the community sites. Whereas school district salaries are determined by a salary schedule based on credentials and years of experience, teachers at the community sites had no guarantee that their experience or credentials would lead to a raise.[73] From Megan's description, the situation at Bright Start was grim: "I make $14 an hour, $14.28 now with our 2% raise. We hadn't gotten raises in two or three years, so this was the 2% cost of living increase raise. Next year supposedly we're getting performance raises" (May 2013 interview). Linda spoke more specifically about the difference between the public schools and the community sites:

> One of my frustrations is [that Friendship doesn't] have any built in [system where] every
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> year you're here you get a raise. And I don't even understand how it all works, but in the
>
> public school every year you get a longevity raise or something. ... So if I walked in [the

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[72] Grace had been teaching in LPS for 15 years, so she was earning more than a teacher new to the district would. The base salary for LPS teachers was around $36,000 per nine-month academic year in 2013-14, which is roughly $25/hour.

[73] Of course, the economic and political climate of the past several years have shown that such agreements are not sacrosanct. What is important here is that community site teachers perceived them as such.

Friendship] today with, [with] the same qualifications, do I get the same [salary] as I do

since I've been here 6 years? (May 2013 interview)

The answer to Linda's question is quite possibly yes. Her co-teacher Melissa, who was in her first year at Friendship, was making the same hourly wage as Linda during the research year.

Linda's frustration over her pay situation was compounded by the fact that she had little opportunity for advancement. There was no chance for promotion at Friendship, and upgrading her credentials would require money that Linda did not have. Like many childcare workers in the U.S. (Ackerman, 2006), Linda was stuck:

You know, I was looking into going back to school, but it's so expensive. … Something [I heard on the radio was] that somewhere in Indiana, I [think], for teachers in preschool settings like this, they know that they don't get paid as much but they do give them like $3,000 per year for education. We have a small education fund [at Friendship], but one class is $2,500. So it feels like a Catch-22. I earn less and I don't get any tuition reimbursement, so what do I do? So for now, I guess I will stay here. And you know, I like it here- it's not like there's anything bad. It's just, you know– there's no retirement, there's no benefits. And it's kinda scary when I think about [it]. I can't really see being 65 years old, crawling under the loft, sitting on the train with the kids. (May 2013 interview)

Megan, in her mid-twenties, was not as concerned with retirement benefits and upgrading her credentials as Linda, who was approaching her mid-forties. When there was a change in leadership during the research year, Megan was asked to apply for the assistant director position. She did not pursue the opportunity because she preferred spending time with children to being a "paper pusher." Megan wanted to be paid more, but only if it meant doing something she

enjoyed. For Megan, salary was an expression of the value of her work; being paid less than her public school colleagues was a problem because it indicated to Megan that her work was not valued as much as theirs.

> Just because I do equally as much work and I'm spending way more time with kids than your basic school district employee, but I'm less valued per se. It's very different in community-based programs versus the school district. (May 2013 interview)

In the next section I turn to an issue Megan raised in the quote above—time spent with kids—in a discussion of demands on 4K teachers' time.

   Demands on teachers' time. Through their interactions with public school 4K teachers, both Linda and Megan became aware of differences between public school and community site teachers' daily schedules. Their concerns related not to the number of hours worked, but what was required of them during their contracted hours. Not only were community site teachers paid less than public school 4K teachers, they had less release time, or paid time when they were not responsible for children. 4K in the public schools operated four days per week, and most teachers taught a morning and an afternoon session. Between the two sessions was a forty minute break, of which thirty minutes was a "duty-free lunch."[74] Public school 4K teachers did not teach on Mondays, which were reserved for parent outreach and professional development. Though all 4K sites provided the same 437 hours of 4K per year, teachers in community sites typically had responsibilities caring for children in wraparound care.

   For example, during her 40-hour work week, Megan's only time "without kids" was her daily half-hour lunch break and her hour-long planning break on Mondays. Megan arrived in the morning at 7:30 and supervised a group of three- and four-year-olds as they were dropped off by

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[74] In reality, the time between the AM and PM session was spent tidying up the room and getting ready for the afternoon session. Mrs. Calden typically took about ten minutes for lunch between sessions.

their parents. She then transitioned to her classroom with her 4K students from 8:30am until 11:30am. From 11:30am until 12pm she went down to the BSCC basement to eat lunch. In the afternoon she taught another three-hour 4K session and then supervised children from 3pm until the time she went home.

There was no set end time for Megan's day because although she may have been scheduled to leave at 5:00 or 5:30pm, when she was able to leave varied from day to day based on when children were picked up and which teachers had called in sick that day. Megan imagined this would not happen in the public schools:

> [If I were a public school teacher] the hours and stuff wouldn't be better if I chose to stay 'til 6pm, but it would be me choosing to stay and work on things versus getting kids back [after 4K had ended]. It would be more time to work, more planning time. … [In the public schools] there's not constant kids. (July 2013 interview)

Prior to 4K, Megan would have been with children all day, but she would have been able to plan lessons and prepare materials while the children were napping. When she began teaching two 4K sessions, four days per week, she only supervised naptime once a week. Less nap supervision meant Megan had less time to plan lessons and activities.[75] Megan explained that the schedule limited her ability to plan activities that would really benefit her students, such as parent nights:

> Something I really wanted to do [this year] that I didn't have time for was doing theme nights, like a math or literacy night, to give parents ideas for connecting school to home. Because lots of parents want to but they don't have the resources or they aren't confident

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[75] This is particularly interesting because the change in Megan's responsibilities could be seen as a step toward greater professionalization; in 4K she spent more time teaching and less time on tasks that someone without her credentials could do. At the same time, taking away naptime meant that Megan lost time for planning the lessons and activities that were integral to her work as a professional.

in what to do. I wanted to do something like have some pizza and have some games out—something that they would make and take. But my loss of naptime this year really threw me off with time to plan things. … It's hard for me because I like to incorporate a lot of things and do what I feel to be a really good job and I didn't get as much of that in this year. And that's one of the things that bothers me about the whole 4K in a daycare situation, that it's not balanced too well. So that bothered me a lot this year. (July 2013 interview)

Megan believed her ability to do her job well was limited by the fact that she did not have adequate release time, and that this was in part due to the fact that 4K was not a good fit in a site like hers. Megan did have a regularly scheduled planning time each Monday, but this was not guaranteed:

People like to call in [sick] a lot on Mondays, so…I'd say at least once a month I don't get my planning break. Like today Tami had to go somewhere else [and I didn't get my break]. … [The new director has] been giving me a good chunk, from like 9:00 to 10:45am. (May 2013 interview)

Linda also spoke of discrepancies between her schedule and the public school teachers', noting "The LPS schools don't have kids on Monday. Wouldn't it be nice if we could have a whole day to get together and talk?"[76] Although she imagined that having a day off each week would be a good opportunity to share ideas with other teachers, Linda's situation was quite different from Megan's. Her hours were guaranteed; though she did not have to punch a clock,

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[76] Although the community site 4K teachers envied the public school teachers' Mondays "off," there was a lot of concern in the public schools about the intensity of 4K teachers' work. The teacher's union representative I spoke with told me that survey results showed an "overwhelming concern on the part of the other staff, not the 4k staff, but the other staff with the job of the 4K teacher. Because…Tuesday through Friday they are with kids. *Forever*. And don't have adequate breaks and it's really apparent how hard their work day is."

she was paid from 8:15am to 1pm each day and could be certain that the children would be gone by 1pm. The first half hour of her day was also paid time to prepare the room.

Although the 4K day in public schools had a different rhythm than the elementary grades, 4K teachers' schedules provided them with more breaks and planning time than teachers like Megan, who were responsible for both 4K and the childcare part of the day. This frustrated teachers in community sites, who felt that although they had the same qualifications as the public school teachers, they did more work for less pay and respect.

Access to professional development opportunities. 4K teachers in community sites also felt marginalized by scheduling that seemed to ignore the fact that community site schedules were very different from public school schedules. Public school 4K teachers were required to attend a district-provided professional development (PD) workshop offered once per month. PD workshops were held at 1pm on Mondays, the day allocated to public school 4K teachers for planning and parent outreach. Community site 4K teachers were welcome but not required to attend the PD sessions. For teachers like Megan, who were responsible for supervising children all day, attending PD was nearly impossible.

> Well [the PD sessions] happen once a month, so I'd say maybe there was a total of seven or eight of them [this year] and I've been to two, which is better than last year. [Last year] I went to zero. So I mean, [the new director has] been a little more accommodating about it but it's hard because they're during bus runs and nap time, so it's kinda a difficult time and I've only been able to go to a couple. (July 2013 interview)

Because she worked part-time, Linda was able to attend most PD sessions. She went on her own, however, and was not paid for the time. Linda went in part because she saw herself as a "perpetual student," and in part to keep her finger on the school district pulse; she wanted to

know what the district was saying and doing. Although she felt lucky to be able to attend the PD sessions because few community site teachers were able to, she thought that school district should make PD more accessible.

> Well one sort of related [concern is] professional development. In the school district, you know, they don't have kids on Mondays, and so the 4K teachers do that. Now because I only work mornings, I've gone to all but one of their afternoon 4K meetings. But I think that's something to keep in mind, you know, I mean both the district and us in the future. When you're working at a community site full time you can't attend those. (January 2012 interview)

This issue of access to district-sponsored PD sessions illustrates that although childcare sites and the public schools were ostensibly part of the same system for 4K, they were still very separate. It also highlights the fact that many elements of the 4K policy were designed with public schools, not community sites, in mind, which meant that community sites constantly had to adapt in order to meet the requirements of 4K. I describe this in greater detail next.

> *Meeting 4K requirements.* As they struggled to meet some of the requirements of 4K, it became clear to community site teachers and administrators that 4K was set up to align with the K-12 system and not childcare centers. Megan referred to this as a "disconnect":

Bethany: So what's the greatest source of frustration for you as a 4K teacher?

Megan: There's like a huge disconnect. I mean there is and people higher up say there isn't, but there is.

Bethany: Between the district and community sites?

Megan: Mhmm. Yeah. (July 2013 interview)

Here I describe two phenomena that illustrate this discrepancy: the struggle with finding substitute teachers and implementing a new assessment, the PreK Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS).

"'Cause, you know, people need off sometimes…" The seemingly straightforward requirement that 4K classes be taught by a certified teacher became more complex when it came to finding substitute teachers. It did not seem that community sites had trouble finding someone certified to teach 4K—there were plenty of certified teachers who were looking for jobs within and outside of Wisconsin. One director said that 4K had actually helped her attract a licensed teacher to her childcare center:

> We hired someone who moved here from Illinois. So that was a good thing that we were able to attract a qualified, degreed teacher. Of course, the pay was still not maybe what she had hoped it would be, but that was a good thing [overall]. (Administrator at Little Explorers Preschool, January 2012 interview)

The problem was what would happen if the 4K teacher got sick or wanted to take a personal day. Because regular childcare teachers were not required to have a bachelor's degree or teaching license, community sites typically had few teachers in the building qualified to teach 4K. At Bright Start, Megan was the only one in the building with a bachelor's degree and a teaching credential. If she was absent on a 4K day, the center would have to find a substitute teacher who met the requirements for 4K. Megan explained that this would likely pose a problem, so she hoped she would not need a day off while 4K was in session.

Megan: Yes, I'm the only one here with a teaching license.

Bethany: So what happens if you're out?

Megan: They have called [someone from another Bright Start center]. She has a teaching degree. As long as you've got a bachelor's degree I think you're okay to sub. There's someone from that center, but word on the street is she's having a baby like any day. So hopefully until June I'll be healthy. Otherwise I don't know – there's gotta be someone in the Bright Start network. … We don't have access to [school district subs]. (May 2013 interview)

In theory, the community sites *did* have access to the school district substitute teacher pool. However, when the school district contacted their substitute teachers to ask if anyone would be willing to sub at a 4K community site, only one person responded positively. The issue was that community sites were not able to pay substitutes the school district rate, making it a less attractive opportunity for substitute teachers.[77] Furthermore, Linda thought that having school district subs in the building would be problematic, even if the site could afford it.

At the beginning of the year we got something from the district saying that they asked their subs, and only one sub volunteered and said that they would be interested in doing it. So I think for the most part, I mean we really don't [have substitute teachers]. And then the issue would be, too, who pays them? Does the district? Do we? Do we pay them district salary? Which wouldn't really be fair if they were subbing because, face it, the teachers here would really be the main teacher and, you know, why should the sub who's not really doing anything be paid more than me? So it's a big issue, and I don't know how they could resolve that. (January 2012 interview)

Though they could not afford to hire school district subs, the situation at Friendship was a bit better than Bright Start because they had more licensed teachers. Linda and Melissa both had a kindergarten teaching license, so if one of them was absent they did not have to worry about

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[77] LPS substitute teachers earned $147 per day, plus health insurance and benefits.

finding a sub with appropriate credentials; only one teacher in the room needed to have the appropriate teaching license.[78]

> Melissa and I are lucky, because we're both licensed teachers, so it's not an issue if one of us is out. At Friendship there's what we call a resource teacher, and she's on full time. So when somebody needs a sub she's kinda the automatic sub. And so she can step in for either Melissa or I because we're licensed, so there's always a licensed teacher. But in the other 4K classroom, only one of the teachers is actually licensed, so if she's out, finding a sub is tricky. (January 2012 interview)

One of the solutions Denise found to this problem was to ask parents who were qualified to step in and either volunteer their time or be paid at a lower rate than school district substitute teachers. This was possible because of the families that attended Friendship, who were well-educated and in a financial situation that gave them the flexibility to have only one parent in the workforce while their children were young.

When the issue of finding substitute teachers was raised at the March 4K Coordination Committee meeting, a district official told community site administrators that the district could not make substitutes teachers work at the community sites because "childcare 4K sites are not technically LPS sites". The official proposed a work-around: the centers could apply for emergency sub permits for their site, which meant that as long as someone had a bachelor's degree they could substitute for the 4K teacher of record. This permit would be good for three years. At this point, Denise asked, "So can an assistant teacher ask for an emergency sub license and then if the teacher of record is out, the assistant teacher can sub and be the teacher of record?" The district official replied, "Yes, because the emergency is defined as your center not being able to get subs." (Field notes, 3/4/13)

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[78] Like 4K teachers, substitute teachers in 4K had to have a teaching certification that included kindergarten.

Although they found a partial solution in the end, the issue of accessing substitute teachers is just one example of how the 4K policy was unable to address the fact that implementing 4K posed unique challenges for community sites that were not experienced by the public schools. The second example, which I explain below, does not have to do with a mandate that came specifically from LPS, but it highlights the disconnect between the school district and the community sites as well as some school district officials' limited understanding of community sites and what it was like to implement 4K in these settings. As they made decisions about 4K, school district officials, particularly the Director of Early Learning, tended to use the public schools as their frame of reference, largely ignoring the fact that it might be particularly challenging for community sites to meet the requirements of new mandates.

"You will need a support team." In late April 2013, rumors began to circulate that the Governor's proposed budget included language that would mandate the use of PALS in 4K statewide. The Wisconsin DPI provided the following description of PALS on its website:

> The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening is a research based screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring tool. Wisconsin teachers use PALS to identify students at risk of developing reading difficulties, diagnose students' knowledge of literacy fundamentals, monitor progress, and plan instruction that targets students' needs. Student data collected from PALS provides a direct means of matching literacy instruction to specific literacy needs. (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014b)

PALS had been required for kindergarten since the 2012-13 school year, and the prospect of the screener becoming a requirement for 4K caused a wave of concern to ripple through the early

childhood community in Lakeville.[79] Teachers and administrators bristled at the prospect of having to assess children even more than they were already.

As concern about PALS spread, community site administrators decided to call the 4K Coordination Committee together to discuss the news and what it would mean for their programs.[80] At the meeting, Eric Stohler and Tracy Keebling, two upper level administrators from LPS, set the direction for the discussion, explaining that PALS was one of the assessments the school district had been piloting for 4K, anyway, and reassuring the directors and teachers present that the district was being proactive in its response to the mandate.

Administrators' and teachers' concerns about PALS were twofold. First, they questioned the need for yet another assessment in the name of data production and collection. In the middle of a discussion about whether parents could opt out of PALS, one administrator said, "I'm way back at 'What's the justification to change our programs to accommodate this?'" Stohler replied "It's helpful to identify students that may not be performing" to keep kids from "falling through the cracks" (Field notes, 5/6/13). Stohler also thought that the results of PALS would help DPI allocate extra funds to districts where more students were struggling. Teachers' and administrators' assertions that they did not need an assessment to tell them what they could learn about the children in their class through daily observation and interaction fell on deaf ears; school district officials kept circling back to the need for data and accountability.

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[79] PALS is now required for 4K through second grade students: "Wis. Stats. 118.016 requires an early literacy screener to be administered to all 4-year-old kindergarten to 1st grade students enrolled in public school districts and charter schools for the 2013-14 school year and beginning with the 2014-15 school year to expand this requirement to also include all 2nd grade students enrolled in public school districts and charter schools. The statute also requires each school to report the screening results to the parents or guardian of each student and to provide interventions or remedial reading services to each student that is identified as being at risk of reading difficulty." (http://www.palswisconsin.info/about_overview.shtml)

[80] Setting up the meeting was actually the cause of some controversy. Though Eric Stohler had been copied on all of the emails about setting up the meeting, he reprimanded the administrators who set it up, accusing them of going behind his back. He said they should have contacted him first so that he could set the meeting. There is a paper that needs to be written about the dynamics between the school district and the community site administrators; I cannot do it justice here.

During discussions about whether PALS was appropriate for 4K students, school district officials adopted a contradictory stance. On the one hand, they aligned themselves with the teachers and administrators, throwing their hands up as if to say that they could not believe this was happening either, but that they had no control over the Governor's budget. At the same time, Keebling basically told the group that regardless of what happened with the budget, the district had been leaning toward using the PALS for 4K anyway; LPS had spent the last year piloting different 4K assessment tools and had more or less decided to go with the PALS. Keebling told the assembled community site directors and teachers this after describing all of the shortcomings of the screener, including the fact that it had no adaptations for English Language Learners or students with special needs. She spoke at length before concluding, "Sometimes we have to do things that feel not good because we want data on all kids" (Field notes, 5/6/13)

The second concern of teachers and administrators was related to the logistics of administering the screener. PALS must be administered twice a year and all children in the 4K class have to be tested within a two-week window. Each assessment takes about 45 minutes, but the school district recommended breaking it up into 15 minute segments, so that the children would not have to sit for a long stretch of time. As Keebling explained how the public schools had managed the administration of PALS in kindergarten, it became clear that the school district representatives did not have a good understanding of the community sites.

> *Keebling explains that in the kindergarten classrooms they've had a team of people who are trained, and each person administers one part of the assessment. So one person would do letter recognition with all the kids and the other would do rhyming with all the kids, for example.*

> *Denise Sanderson: So they pull [the kids] out of the room?*

> *Keebling: Yes*

> *Denise: And who is doing this? Who is the "team" [you're talking about]?*

Keebling: The school psychologist and teaching coaches. Basically whoever the school has available.

Denise: And if the school has no "team"?

Keebling: Eric, can you answer that?

Stohler: You just have to think about who at the site can be trained.

Denise: We have all of our teachers with the kids all the time, so we would have to have a sub.

Stohler: Some schools have used subs.

Linda Jenkins: Are you gonna pay for the subs?

Eric: No, that's why we're talking about this early. Don't panic yet. We're being very proactive now.

Several minutes later…

Helen Moyers (City of Lakeville childcare representative): So how much time does it take to do the whole assessment?

Keebling: You have a two week window to assess all the kids in the classroom.

There is a collective sigh and then exasperated murmurs: "How long?" "Two weeks?!"

Keebling: You will need a support team. (Field notes, 5/6/13)

The school district was either unaware or unconcerned by the fact that the community 4K sites did not have the human or financial resources to assemble a "support team" to administer the PALS. Perhaps it was both.

In the end, the school district provided minimal support for PALS administration in community sites. When I followed up with Denise, she wrote:

No, [LPS] did not provide us with any support other than the training. One thing they do take care of is entering our students names into the PALS accounts (don't know if they do that for District teachers or not). We are responsible for administering the screener and

recording the scores online. We were not required to pay for the kits and they gave us the

recording sheets we'd need next month. This year in our part-day program I have

assembled a group of parent volunteers. Our classrooms each have two teachers. During

PALS one teacher will be out of the room doing the screening and the other will be in the

classroom with a parent "helper". (Denise Sanderson, personal communication, 9/26/14)

Not surprisingly, Denise found a creative way to make up for the school district's shortcomings.

This was only possible, however, because Denise runs a preschool supported by a group of

highly involved parents who have the flexibility to be classroom helpers from time to time.

At Bright Start, Megan told me that she was lucky because a 4K resource person on the

school district staff sent an email asking community site teachers if they needed help

administering PALS.[81] This staff member administered half of Megan's assessments. Megan was

able to do the rest because her director had another staff member come supervise the children in

her room. Megan said, "…I was the only one [at BSCC] qualified to do the testing. If not for a

woman [from the school district] I would never have gotten it done!" (personal communication,

10/3/14).

Although the public schools and community sites were implementing the same policy,

the school district operated under the assumption that implementing 4K in community sites was

just like implementing the program in the public schools.[82] This assumption glossed over the

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[81] From what I understand, this came from the individual and was not a school district response to community sites' struggle with administering the PALS.

[82] The school district was not only unresponsive to community sites. Mrs. Calden was frustrated that she could not get a straight answer from district officials, who she felt were always "passing the buck": So, um yeah I might be real tired right now but if I had to say what I'm maybe stressed out about it, I guess the [school district] sometimes. Just how I wish that people like Eric [Stohler] would really just do something. I don't know what they can do, but I just wish they could do more. That's the best way I can say it. Just do something, instead of telling me, "There's nothing I can do" and then passing the buck on up to the next person who says "There's nothing I can do." Or the person who keeps saying, "It's the budget. Talk to [Governor] Walker." I don't need to hear that! No one from [the school district] has told me that, but they do always [say], "I have x amount of dollars, this is all I can do." (Mrs. Calden, April 2013)

reality that these two entities had very different access to the resources they would need to adhere to 4K regulations. As the examples here illustrate, it was the community sites that were left scrambling to piece together a solution, with little assistance from the school district. It was not that the district did not provide any support[83], it was that community partner sites were *only* provided support and resources that were also provided to public school sites, and decisions about what supports were needed seemed to be based on public school teachers' needs, not the community sites' needs. These inequalities were a source of tension that permeated interactions between school district officials and community site teachers and administrators.

In this section I have demonstrated how the 4K policy reinforced a public school-childcare hierarchy by perpetuating inequalities for teachers and institutions in each of these systems. Existing differences between the public schools and childcare came to be viewed as inequalities because of the new space created by the 4K policy, while 4K practices also created new inequalities such as access to the resources needed to implement 4K policy requirements. Community site teachers felt their status and working conditions were substandard in comparison to public school teachers', and community site administrators struggled to meet 4K requirements that did not mesh well with the structure of their preschools and childcare centers. As time went on, community site teachers and administers had less space and time to express their professional beliefs related to 4K—in the second year of 4K it was the K-12 bureaucracy that essentially ran the show when it came to 4K.

School district officials like Eric Stohler reinforced the school district-childcare center hierarchy when they talked about the difference between 4K time and wraparound care. At a

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[83] Teachers and administrators in both public and community sites raved about the take-home packets that the school district provided to help teachers meet the required 87.5 hours of parent outreach annually. These packets were made available to all teachers in the district.

school board meeting, Stohler addressed the concerns of parents whose children were in 4K at childcare centers and also participated in wraparound care:

> *The second issue is confusion over 4K versus wraparound services. Parents who have children at centers where children also stay for care after the 4K program ends are unclear about the differences between the 4K programming and the rest of the day. LPS has issued a statement about this, as well. Stohler says that the statement clarifies that 4K is different because during this time programming should be geared toward meeting benchmarks in the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS), whereas the rest of the day may just entail kids being "watched".* (Field notes, 10/3/11)

By asserting that wraparound services were simply babysitting, Stohler reinforced the perception that 4K was "real school," while other programming for four-year-olds was not--an attitude that diminishes early childhood teachers' status as professionals.

The way 4K teachers talked about their work also reinforced the school-childcare hierarchy. For example, though she struggled with the appropriateness of the assessment, Linda noted that 4K progress reports lent credibility to the program by making it like "real school": "Now that 4K will become the norm, I think it's in some ways good to show 'this is real school it's not just preparing for real school'" (December 2012 interview). Other 4K teachers saw it from a developmental perspective; 4K had caused childcare to evolve from just babysitting to something more:

> When I started years ago, childcare was babysitting. And even for me, [it took a] few years to get over that [way of thinking] even though I saw what we were doing - we were planning lessons, we were working with them every day. So you would go home or outside and even my husband at that time was like, "This is not a real job." And now, I've been here so long, I definitely know it's a real job and we work very hard. But the whole thing, the whole thing of childcare has gone from babysitting to we're teaching, we're all teaching [now]. (Little Explorers 4K teacher, November 2011 interview)

In addition to reinforcing a public school-childcare hierarchy, the notion that 4K teaching was different than what had come before also led to the creation of hierarchies within institutions. In the sections that follow, I examine how becoming a 4K teacher shifted the status of the focal teachers relative to their colleagues.

Hierarchies and Inequalities within Institutions

Divisions existed not only between the school district and the childcare community; the policy also created new hierarchies within each of the focal teachers' institutions. Hierarchies within the teachers' institutions pre-dated the 4K policy, but the policy caused these to shift. Megan's status as a 4K teacher in a community center afforded her some extra perks, while Mrs. Calden's status as a 4K teacher in a public school was diminished. This was unsurprising, given that this hierarchy positions 4K at the top of childcare but at the bottom of the K-12 hierarchy. At Friendship, Denise worked to ensure equal treatment of 4K and non-4K teachers and through her efforts managed for the most part to avoid creating new hierarchies among teachers. I conclude this chapter by exploring these changes in teachers' experiences and status.

Bright Start Childcare Center. Megan had worked at BSCC for several years on and off prior to 4K. She experienced a bump in her status at the center when her title changed. Suddenly, her administrators were going out of their way to make sure she got her allocated planning time.

> I guess I get more planning time than a lot of other teachers. I'm usually first on the
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> planning time list, which is helpful because [the director] knows I don't get that naptime
>
> and he knows that there's a lot more involved with 4K. (July 2013 interview)

In addition to planning time, Megan was able to attend a few school district PD sessions and was paid for this time. For a site and corporation so concerned with labor hours, this was an unusual move.

As Megan's status as BSCC improved, a new hierarchy was created at the center, separating the 4K teacher from the non-4K teachers. Because her work was associated with education more than care, her time was prioritized above other teachers and she received special treatment.[84] Being the only one at BSCC qualified to teach 4K at the center probably also gave Megan the bargaining power she needed to negotiate for a raise; Megan was more valuable to BSCC because of her credentials.

Forest Grove Elementary School. Mrs. Calden's experience was the opposite of Megan's. When she moved from kindergarten to 4K, Mrs. Calden saw her status diminish. Though her status as a public school 4K teacher was higher than the community site 4K teachers, she suddenly found herself at the bottom of the K-12 ladder in her public elementary school. The location of Mrs. Calden's 4K classroom—in the basement, far from the other classes—was a physical instantiation of this phenomenon.

Mrs. Calden believed that 4K was important, and was determined that others in her building recognize this, but she felt powerless to change their perspectives on 4K—all she could do was invite people to visit and try to tell them why 4K mattered so much; she could not force the other teachers and her principal to spend time in her classroom. Mrs. Calden felt marginalized and overlooked in her building. Though she had to attend staff meetings and trainings that were not particularly relevant to 4K, she never had the opportunity to educate her colleagues about 4K. Her students were not allowed to participate in any "specials" (art, music,

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[84] This prioritization was relative, however. Recall that Megan was not guaranteed her planning time even if it was prioritized.

gym) during the school day or take part in school-wide performances. When events occurred during the school day, Mrs. Calden had to specifically seek out this information from one of the administrative assistants because she often did not receive notice of the event. Thus, for Mrs. Calden, even though she loved teaching 4K, it felt like a demotion that cut her off from the rest of the school. Her work seemed to be valued less than the work of the kindergarten through second grade teachers.

Friendship Preschool. The situation at Friendship was quite different than the other two schools. Aware of the potential for 4K to create divisions between 4K teachers and the rest of the teaching staff, Denise actively worked to prevent this from happening. She explained her efforts in terms of Friendship's strong institutional identity.

> You know, we're all Friendship teachers. That's where we start. We're all Friendship teachers. We're all here for the same purpose. The only difference really is that the 4K teachers are given additional time away from classrooms to do progress reports and entering [progress report data]. All the other expectations are exactly the same. There's no "us against them" or "they get this and we don't get that". I have not heard any of that at all. We're first and foremost the Friendship team, and that's where we start everything. When I make something available to the 4K teachers I make it available to the other teachers. (Denise Sanderson, January 2013 interview)

Denise not only tried to prevent potential inequalities among her own teaching staff, she also worked to rectify inequities between her teachers and the public school 4K teachers. For example, when the teachers became aware that LPS was planning to provide each public school 4K teacher with an iPad for completing students' developmental portfolios, Denise began to look for a grant that would enable her to buy iPads for all of her teachers. She also sought out

information about applications that would enable teachers to make portfolios electronically. Several teachers asked me how I was using the iPad for my research and inquired about useful applications for documentation.

It appeared that Denise's efforts to avoid creating distinctions between 4K and non-4K teachers at Friendship were successful. The only time I saw the distinction between the 4K and non-4K teachers come out was at a staff meeting when one of the non-4K teachers asked the 4K teachers to let them know the specific dates progress reports were due each year so that the rest of the teaching staff could be prepared for the massive amount of stress that would emanating from the 4K classrooms.

The result of this active effort to avoid creating hierarchies was that Friendship was the only research site in which 4K was not actively recast as school-related; non-4K teachers were still viewed as professionals, experience and child development expertise still counted for more than formal credentials, and the importance of approaches to teaching and assessment considered developmentally inappropriate was actively downplayed.[85]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the 4K policy made existing inequalities between public school and community site teachers visible and relevant. Community site 4K teachers' hopes for what the policy would mean for them professionally were not realized, and as the policy was implemented it became clear that it worked better, in many ways, for teachers in public schools. Because policy mandates were more closely aligned with the structure of the K-12 system, community sites struggled to adhere to them, particularly those related to substitute

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[85] Even when they disagreed with policy mandates, teachers and administrators complied. They did, however, register their concern with the school district and go to great lengths to ensure that requirements they did not agree with were not foregrounded in their practice or communication with parents.

teachers and the PALS screener. Real and perceived inequalities reinforced a historic public school v. childcare binary that the policy was not able to mitigate by bringing the two worlds together. Referring to 4K as "real school", which differentiated it from childcare, compounded the issue and paralleled the new hierarchies that emerged within institutions as distinctions were made between 4K, non-4K, and elementary school teachers. These unintended consequences of the 4K policy had real effects on teachers' job satisfaction, school district-community site relations, and the structure of early childhood education in Lakeville, with serious implications for the status of childcare teachers and children's early education experiences. I discuss these implications in the final chapter.

Chapter 10: Conclusions and Recommendations

The difference between the envisioned aims of a program and its actual effects does not refer to the purity of the program and the impurity of reality, but to different realities and heterogenous strategies. (Lemke, 2002, p. 56)

In this dissertation I have provided an analysis of how 4K policy in one Wisconsin school district, Lakeville, was implemented by three teachers in three different types of institutions: a private non-profit preschool, a private for-profit childcare center, and a public elementary school. By locating both the policy and the teachers' work within the context of the nationwide expansion of preK and Wisconsin's state 4K policy, I situated what happened at the local level in relation to broader discourses about preK policy and programming. By asking what 4K meant at each level of implementation—state, district, and local—I demonstrated that 4K policy held multiple, context-dependent meanings. Ethnographic research in three sites—Friendship Preschool, Forest Grove Elementary School, and Bright Start Childcare Center—revealed that 4K policy had effects in local schools and childcare centers that had nothing to do with state and district policy-makers' stated goals for 4K: improving kindergarten readiness and closing the achievement gap. Instead, by bringing together the two previously separate private early childhood and public K-12 systems, the 4K policy made existing inequalities visible and pertinent, created new hierarchies, and transformed relationships within and across institutions. I examine these and other issues related to the 4K policy in greater detail below and then reflect on their implications for preK policy creation and implementation. Up to this point I have mainly focused my attention on the effects of the policy for teachers and institutions, but in this section I also describe how the policy's impact on these actors shaped families' experiences with and access to the 4K program.

Finding a Common Language of Early Childhood Education

Because the policy was implemented in the public schools and ECE centers, it brought two very different systems together under the umbrella of 4K. Each was like a foreign country to the other, with its own language, culture, and currency. For the school district and public school principal, expectations were framed in terms of academic readiness, while community site teachers and administrators emphasized social-emotional development. Non-profit community sites valued deep knowledge of child development and experience more than a teaching license, but the public school system could only accommodate formal credentials as a proxy for quality teaching. In a national and state education context that faced increased pressure to prove program effectiveness, the school district's preferred currency was data that could be easily managed and compared across sites—as assessment demands increased, the district was ready to forgo developmental portfolios for assessments whose results could be quantified.

The coming together of the ECE and K-12 systems was rife with miscommunication and tension between 4K sites and the school district because the way the school district thought about 4K was based on a public school model, which did not align well with community site teachers' and directors' approach to early learning. Even in the public school site, where we might expect the 4K policy to work best, implementation was not a straightforward process because the school did not know how to handle this new population of children and the costs and benefits of the program worked against the broader interests of the school. 4K was not a perfect fit for any of the research sites, but for different reasons. In each case, there were aspects that worked well and ones that did not.

Friendship Preschool

4K made almost no financial sense for Friendship Preschool—the per pupil reimbursement did not cover actual program costs and the school had to shrink its programs for two- and three-year-olds so that it could guarantee a spot in 4K to all families. Friendship also did not have the resources to easily meet policy requirements for substitute teachers and administering PALS. At the same time, however, the preschool had a strong sense of history and a long institutional memory; it would take more than a policy to change how things were done at Friendship. Friendship did not need 4K to legitimate the quality of its program—administrators and teachers were confident that the school provided "some of the best play-based programming around", and they had never had trouble attracting families to their school.

While the preschool did not want to be left out of 4K and risk the possibility of losing four-year-olds to the public program, teachers' and administrators' confidence in their program meant that they were able to treat 4K as something that did not really affect their work. 4K did not permeate teachers' commitment to the school's philosophy and mission; it was viewed as something superficial—a new way to frame what they were already doing. Denise and the teachers met all policy requirements, but did so in a way that made it clear that the policy and the district did not represent what they valued in early childhood education. A good example of this was the dissemination of progress reports. Per district requirements, progress reports were sent out at the beginning of February. Friendship did not hold parent-teacher conferences until the end of that month, but rather than move the conferences to align with progress reports, Denise left it to parents to bring the progress report to their parent-teacher conference if they had questions they wanted answered. This was Denise's way of diminishing the importance of progress reports and proving that Friendship was not entirely beholden to the policy.

Forest Grove Elementary School

It would be easy to assume that Lakeville's 4K policy would fit best in a public school setting because it was administered by the district and aligned with a K-12 model. Perhaps it was seamlessly integrated into other elementary schools in the district, but this was not the case for Mrs. Calden. On the surface, Mrs. Calden had everything she needed to implement the policy well; she had a brand new set of materials and furniture provided by the school district, access to ongoing professional development, on-site support for children with special needs, and access to support staff that could help her with assessments. She made a decent salary with benefits and a pension. What Mrs. Calden did not have was a professional community steeped in the culture and traditions of early childhood education or an administrator invested in integrating 4K into the life of the school. Instead, Mrs. Calden and her 4K students were relegated to the basement, cut off from the school community. Mrs. Calden yearned to connect with other 4K teachers but found the school district's professional development workshops lacking. She felt that her work was not valued by others in her building and struggled to make 4K visible to them and to regain the status she had enjoyed as a kindergarten teacher. Finally, because 4K in public schools was not subject to ECE state licensing requirements or City of Lakeville accreditation standards, Mrs. Calden could not rely on the guidance or support that these regulating bodies provided the early childhood community. For example, Mrs. Calden could have up to 18 children in her 4K class, potentially without an educational assistant. In a community site, a class of 18 four-year-olds would require a teacher and an assistant in order to be in compliance with state licensing regulations. In addition, Mrs. Calden had no way to connect with community site ECE teachers, who may have provided the sort of professional community she was looking for.

Mrs. Calden was not the only one who struggled with the 4K policy. The school's principal found it difficult to accommodate 4K for a variety of reasons. Of particular concern was the fact that although 4K brought more children with special needs into the school building, principals did not receive additional resources to accommodate these children. Dr. Taylor also was not prepared (or willing) to alter school policies in order to accommodate 4K parents who expected the school to function more like a childcare center than a public school. As a result, parents had to be quickly socialized to adapt an elementary school mentality.

Bright Start Childcare Center

In some ways, BSCC was the best fit for the 4K policy. 4K helped the center shed some of the stigma associated with corporate childcare and it may have been one of the few community sites that experienced a shift in demographics as a result of 4K. Teachers and administrators were already used to top-down bureaucracy and decision-making, and school district mandates were simply an extension of that. In the 4K classroom, Megan was already used to finding ways to perform in ways the corporation demanded, so doing the same for the school district was not too different. On a personal and professional level, 4K was a boon to Megan, who quickly learned that she could use her status as a 4K teacher to her advantage when negotiating with her supervisors.

4K also provided a secure revenue stream for a center that served an inconsistent, low-income population. The policy may also have helped improve attendance and consistency, at least in the 4K program, because 4K families received a tuition discount for wraparound care. In addition, now that the four-year-old program was called 4K, BSCC parents took things like

parent-teacher conferences more seriously because they perceived the program as real school, as opposed to daycare.

At the same time, like other community sites, BSCC had to find ways to deal with the shortcomings of the policy. Megan hoped she would not have to call in sick on a 4K day because she did not know how the center would find a substitute who met the district's requirements. She was only able to administer PALS because she had assistance from a school district volunteer. The policy also created a divide between 4K and "non-4K," which led to new hierarchies among staff and decisions about the allocation of resources that privileged four-year-olds' experiences in 4K over what they did during non-4K time.

A System Divided

For all of the stress community 4K sites experienced as a result of their new relationship with the school district, in most cases being 4K was better than not being 4K. When 4K began, several elite nursery schools and Montessori schools had decided not to apply to be 4K sites because they did not want to compromise their mission and philosophy for the school district's vision of early childhood education. Several years later, these same schools, faced with the reality that their four-year-old enrollments were shrinking, became 4K sites. They were lucky to have the choice. Many ECE centers in Lakeville may never become 4K sites because they do not have the proper accreditation that elite schools tend to already have.

When 4K began, the City of Lakeville Childcare Division was flooded with new applications for accreditation from centers that wanted to be community partner sites. Helen Moyers explained that many of these sites would not meet the standards and that many would not want to: obtaining City of Lakeville or NAEYC accreditation was a time-consuming and

expensive process that would most likely require changes to staffing, infrastructure, and school governance procedures.[86] Not being accredited had ramifications for the institutions and the children they served. The accreditation requirement meant that many centers were shut out of 4K and would potentially lose their financial base—four-year-olds—as a result. In an industry where the margin was already thin, 4K had the potential to devastate an already-vulnerable group of small businesses. Many of these ECE centers were also the ones that served the city's low-income residents, which meant that many of the Lakeville's poorest families were still receiving the poorest-quality care. These families, of course, had the option of enrolling in a 4K program, but as I explain in the section below, access to 4K was not as universal as one might have imagined.

A Universal Program that was not Universally Accessible

Lakeville's 4K program was, in theory, universal—any four-year-old in the school district could enroll in any 4K program, regardless of whether it was located in a public elementary school or in a local childcare center or preschool. There were structural limitations to this—choices for families that required transportation or wraparound care were constrained,[87] and sites could only accommodate so many children—but 4K sites were supposed to accept any four-year-old who signed up. The 4K policy stated:

> Q: Do partnering centers have to accept any family that wishes to enroll for 4K?
> A: Acceptance at any site will be contingent on space parameters and enrollment requirements set by individual [ECE] centers. However, partnering [ECE] centers may not discriminate based upon sex, race, religion, national origin, ancestry, creed,

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[86] City accreditation requires that centers involve parents in decision-making, something Helen Moyers said the for-profit centers would never go for.
[87] According to the policy "If families do not require transportation, they may choose from any partnering site that has available space. If transportation is required, then students will be placed in the school serving that attendance area" (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, p. 1).

pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, or physical, mental, emotional or learning disability. (Lakeville Public Schools, 2014a, p. 1)

If 4K was truly universal, it would mean 4K sites might become more diverse. In particular, it might have made a relatively expensive program like Friendship's more accessible to low-income families. Linda's explanation of what happened in the first few years of 4K painted a picture of a different reality.

> [One concern I have about 4K is] equity. I mean, to come to Friendship- it's expensive. You can't come here—I mean, not that you *can't*—we do have scholarships and stuff, but for the most part we pretty much have a fairly affluent group. And even though now [with 4K], if you want to enroll you can, but- of course, our parents that have been here through the years get top priority. Which I completely understand, too, because if you've been sending your child here for several years, you would expect them to be able to continue as a four-year-old. But I worry [that we are] almost creating two separate systems: the children that are in the private centers like Friendship or some of the ones that have tended to be more affluent and the kids that aren't in those centers. And I don't want [4K] to be, you know, separate but equal. I know that's what we (at Friendship) said when we wanted to get involved in the LPS 4K: "Oh well hopefully it can help increase our diversity." But this year it hasn't happened, which is not to say it won't somewhere down the road. (January 2012 interview)

Friendship's situation, where 4K had not resulted in a significant influx of new families, was representative of broader patterns among the more prestigious and expensive preschools and childcare centers in Lakeville. At a meeting of directors who represented most of these institutions, someone asked whether anyone had enrolled new families because of 4K. None of the directors replied affirmatively.

This was partially by design and partially due the structure of 4K. As community partner sites were gearing up for the first year of 4K, there was a lot of concern over whether the school district would allocate community partner sites enough 4K seats to accommodate all of the children who would be moving up to 4K from their three-year-old programs. At Friendship there was talk of implementing a lottery system to select families for 4K spots; those selected in the lottery would attend 4K free of charge and the rest would have to pay tuition if they wanted to remain at Friendship. Much to everyone's relief, however, having enough space for everyone never became an issue and community partner sites were allocated enough 4K spots to accommodate the children who had already been enrolled in their program. The school district allowed community sites to give existing families priority for 4K enrollment, which meant that once all of those children had enrolled there were not many spots left for the general public. Thus, community sites began providing 4K, but for the same children who would have enrolled in their program anyway. The administrators I spoke with did not seem too concerned about this situation; their real worry had been the possibility that they might have to turn families away from 4K after they had attended their program for several years.

One possible explanation for why 4K did not do much to change the make-up of most community sites was that people who had been in childcare prior to 4K were familiar with the childcare centers and would stay there, but that others would choose school sites for 4K because "those institutions hold power that [the] neighborhood center doesn't" (Helen Moyers, City of Lakeville childcare official). This was certainly a plausible explanation, but it also obscured the fact that many families were de facto shut out of community sites. Access to elite community

sites was really only for those who had been able to afford tuition all along or those with the wherewithal to navigate the 4K system.[88]

Other districts in the state struggled with the reality that 4K did not necessarily change the racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic make-up of community sites. Helen Jenkins, a DPI official, related this example:

> I think the concept of having quality learning- early learning opportunities for all kids is the big thing in Wisconsin. Not at-risk separated out programs. Except that's part of the irony of even these community approaches, so I think it was Columbus, they have- and don't quote me on these numbers. I think it's Columbus, they have three programs, one is in a church private school, one is in Head Start, and one is in a childcare center. So they worked really hard, they got them all going, and then the 4K coordinator, after one day when she went and toured all of them, she called me, she was so upset, she said, "I just realized, I have totally racial and income segregated programs. Any kid of color and who's poor is in Head Start, and the rest of them are not. And Head Start doesn't want to change." And it's still like that.

Jenkins also referred to Lakeville specifically when she noted that the issue of access—whether real or perceived—was an ongoing issue with 4K implementation: "Okay, now I don't know this for a fact, but the perception in [Lakeville] is if you are low income, you get a crappy two and a half hour program in a district where you get bussed and nobody cares about your parents. If you're not low income, you can stay at [an elite preschool] all day long. Yeah, so those are big issues."

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[88] For example, enrolling in 4K at Friendship was two step process. Families had to register for 4K online or at their local public school *and* complete an enrollment application at the preschool.

Part of the problem in Lakeville was that the community partner 4K sites for the most part were not located in the city's low-income neighborhoods, so families that could not or did not want to drive across the city to bring their children to 4K were limited to their neighborhood elementary school. Families in this situation who also needed wraparound care might not have had access to 4K at all; they would have continued to fill the unaccredited childcare centers in Lakeville that were not eligible to become 4K sites, which meant that poor children would be concentrated in low-quality childcare settings while their wealthier peers (or the ones with the cultural and social capital to successfully navigate the 4K system) attended higher quality programs.

Prior to 4K, the EC landscape in Lakeville was divided. Data from 2008 showed that 53% of children in the city attended city accredited childcare programs, but that only 28% of children receiving state childcare subsidies were attending these programs. Poor children were already concentrated in low-quality centers and performing below their peers on kindergarten screeners. [89] Because of its structure, the 4K policy did not seem to be mitigating this. As Moyers pointed out midway through the first year of 4K, the school district "[had not met] their goals for serving low-income or minority populations [in 4K]". Instead, the policy exacerbated this stratification by providing new services for wealthier children, from which poor children were de facto excluded.

Successes

My analysis has painted a somewhat dismal picture of Lakeville's 4K program. Here I want to stress that 4K was not an entirely doom and gloom enterprise. The 4K students in all

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[89] Moyers told me that the City of Lakeville had done a study that looked at how children in accredited childcare centers versus non-accredited centers performed on kindergarten screeners, and found the children who attended accredited centers performed at higher levels.

three sites were spending 2.5 hours a day with teachers who cared deeply about them and did their best, within the constraints of their institution, to provide them with a rich early learning experience. Although teachers' instructional styles and approaches varied, children were learning skills, concepts, and dispositions that were likely to serve them well in kindergarten. For those who put much stock in quantitative data, there was evidence in year two that children who attended 4K were outperforming children who did not attend 4K on kindergarten screeners.

4K also provided an important, if incomplete, service for families. If they could figure out transportation and a plan for the remaining hours of the work day, 4K meant that they could receive several hours of free preK each day. Though it was not the case in all Lakeville 4K sites, families enrolled at Friendship paid nothing for 4K, and those at BSCC who used wraparound care in addition to 4K received a nice discount from the corporation. As Denise told me, "people's budgets are people's budgets"; the free program provided some financial relief for many families in the district.

4K provided an infusion of funds to the school district, some of which was passed on to community partner sites. For childcare centers with an "inconsistent clientele" like Bright Start, 4K funding made a difference; not only did it provide families with a financial break, it also increased the center's financial security. In addition to financial resources, 4K community partner sites' new relationship with the school district provided access to parent outreach resources and professional development opportunities for teachers. Although these were not unproblematic, as I have already described in detail, there was potential for capacity building through 4K.

Finally, 4K in Lakeville focused attention on the importance of ECE and opened up a space for discussion and debate about the aims and purposes of preK. Hopefully, in years to

come, there will be opportunities for all stakeholders to have their voices heard, and the community will be able work together to make the necessary changes to the 4K policy that will ensure it meets the needs of children and families in Lakeville.

Implications: Contribution to the Field and Policy Recommendations

In the final sections of this dissertation, I describe how this study contributes to our understanding of policy as practice and to the field of early childhood education. I also outline several policy recommendations based on my findings.

Contribution to the Field

This study highlights the importance of looking beyond ECE policy rhetoric to understand more deeply what preK policy means for the teachers who enact it and the children who participate in preK. By examining the complexities of teachers' enactment of Lakeville's 4K policy, I have demonstrated the importance and relevance of critical policy analysis; a "policy as practice" analytic lens enables us to see the variety of ways 4K policy was enacted not as cases of improper implementation (as fidelity of implementation studies might), but as the result of 4K teachers with different backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs about ECE attempting to enact a policy in very different types of institutions, with varying degrees of support from their administrators. This nuanced investigation of policy enactment also contributes to our understanding of how preK policy affects teachers and institutions. Much of the literature on public preK has examined how preK participation affects young children's social and cognitive outcomes. While also attending to children's experiences, this study focuses our attention on the variety of ways teachers and institutions interact with new policies; as such, it enhances our

understanding of how preK policy affects the very people tasked with implementing it and highlights some of the tension that results from bringing together ECE and K-12 for the provision of public preK.

Policy Recommendations

This dissertation has shown that policy is a blunt tool and that, in real life, the process through which education policies are implemented is far from linear. Instead, as it comes into contact with real people working in real schools, policy takes on new meaning and leads to unintended and unanticipated change. My findings have illuminated some of the challenges that come with implementing a one-size-fits-all policy across different systems (K-12 and ECE) and institutions. Diagnosing what is broken is the easy part; the challenge is figuring out how to fix it because there is no straightforward solution. If a policy like Lakeville's is to attain its goals of providing all families access to quality ECE and closing an enduring achievement gap, it must be more responsive to the needs of families, teachers, and institutions. Here I lay out three recommendations for creating stronger preK policies. Based on my findings, I argue policy-makers should carefully consider: 1) whether programs will reach the populations they intend to serve; 2) what preK means for teachers; and, 3) what creating a new system means for the institutions involved.

Does the policy help the population it is intended to serve? The example of 4K in Lakeville points to the fact that even programs designed to be universally accessible may not, in practice, reach all children. Policy-makers need a deep understanding of the local context, existing hierarchies, and community needs in which a preK program will be implemented, which can help them determine whether there are structural barriers to preK access that policy can help

mitigate. In addition, there must be mechanisms in place for getting information about preK to parents, so that accessing preK does not hinge on parents having the social and cultural capital to navigate the new system. Policy-makers must take issues of access seriously so that preK programs do not simply reinforce existing systems of privilege.

In addition to issues of access, it is critical to consider the potential negative implications of having children included in the public school system from a younger age. For example, in Lakeville, children's progress reports became part of their permanent record. With this required assessment that would follow children through their educational careers, 4K became a space to identify children—"smart" children, children with disabilities, "problem" children—with long-term effects. That children's 4K record would follow them into elementary school and beyond troubled Friendship administrator Denise Sanderson on several levels. First, she believed that parents would put too much stake in progress reports and become overly concerned about perfectly normal developmental variation:

> I just don't want parents to be thinking that their child is failing 4K or that our program is failing their child. Or that they're gonna go home and sit there and make their child zip their coat, zip their coat, zip their coat so that they get a four on the progress report. … Or make them sit down and do coloring books or workbooks or whatever because "I want them to get that four". (January 2012 interview)

Denise was not particularly concerned by children who received ones and twos on their progress report; she believed that development happened along a continuum, so if children had not mastered particular skills by February, perhaps they would by May or at some point during kindergarten. She was more concerned that her "socioeconomically advantaged" parents would

over think the significance of the progress report and worry that if their child did not receive all fours they would not get into college some day.

Although she downplayed the significant of progress reports and did not believe they were necessary or helpful, Denise *was* aware of the very real implications of these assessments becoming part of children's permanent records. For this reason, she cautioned her staff to take care when filling out the assessments and writing comments.

> [I told them], "Be careful what you write on that progress report, cause it's gonna be on his permanent record. … When you sit down to do these, be sure you're in a good mood. You know, if you've had a challenge with the child, it's not the day to hit a zinger on someone's progress report. It's just not fair. (December 2012 interview)

In reality, Friendship students' 4K progress reports were unlikely to have a negative impact on their academic careers. Most of the children came to 4K already able to demonstrate many of the skills assessed by the progress report; Linda Jenkins admitted that many of her students, who were all typically developing and predominantly white and affluent, were already earning fours on their mid-year progress reports. These children's 4K progress reports would indicate to their kindergarten teachers that they were well-prepared—"ready" for elementary school.

For some four-year-olds, however, a permanent record that begins in 4K may have a truly detrimental effect on their long-term educational outcomes and experiences in school. Children, especially children of color, who leave 4K with a label related to behavior, ability, or "risk" status may have a difficult time escaping it. There is strong evidence to suggest a "school to prison pipeline" exists; researchers have documented "the insidious relationship between what happens to African American males in school and their placement in the nation's penitentiaries"

(Rashid, 2009, p. 349). Rashid (2009) asserts that this now extends downward to preschool, a "preschool to prison pipeline" resulting from the predominance of African American boys in low-quality ECE settings who are disproportionately considered disruptive and referred for special education services. This population, which makes up only 18% of children enrolled in public preK, accounts for 42% of children suspended from such programs. In contrast, white children who make up 43% of the preK population represent only 26% of children suspended from preK programs (Samuels, 2014). This clearly shows that for some children, a permanent record that begins at age four may only compound negative experiences with school and further limit educational opportunities.

What does preK mean for teachers? Much of the rhetoric about preK focuses on what quality preK can do for children, and even society. In the preK literature and in the popular media, Heckman's assertions that there is a $7 return on investment for every $1 spent on early childhood programs to claims about the individual cognitive, social, and economic gains afforded by this pivotal year in a child's educational trajectory, have become a common refrain (Gormley & Phillips, 2005; Heckman, 2011). Amidst all this hype, there is a silence around the teachers whose work is carried out under the purview of preK policies and upon whom the burden of meeting society's high expectations for preK is placed. It would be incorrect to assert that the topic of teachers does not come up in the preK literature. It does, but almost always in relation to quality, with a focus on teacher credentials and low teacher-student ratios as integral components of preK quality (Barnett et al., 2013).

Teachers are more than a set of credentials, and if we put any stock in Spillane's (2004) assertion that "[i]f the only policy that matters is that which the client—America's children—receives, then what teachers do in their classroom is critical" (p. 114), then policy-makers must

think carefully about how to ensure that teachers have both the resources and the working conditions that enable them to provide high quality programming for children. This is critical because teachers' working conditions affect their interactions with children, shaping what children learn and experience in the classroom (Kagan et al., 2008). If we are concerned with what children experience in preK, we must be concerned with the well-being of teachers in a career that has been described as "inherently dissatisfying" as a result of "restricted decision making, lack of goal consensus and long work hours" (Kagan et al., 2008, pp. 38–39). This is even more the case, historically, in childcare settings.

PreK policy-makers should attend not only to teachers' qualifications, but also focus on creating the conditions that can make preK teaching an attractive option that people view as a career, rather than a stepping stone to something more prestigious. As a starting point, this means thinking carefully about and correcting for pay discrepancies among childcare and public school teachers. One school district in Wisconsin does this by mandating that childcare centers pay 4K teachers at least 90% of a public school teachers' salary. The issue of 4K teacher pay is complicated, however, by the fact that Wisconsin 4K programs are often housed in childcare centers. Thus, if 4K teachers' pay is increased, a new discrepancy between 4K and non-4K teachers at childcare centers is created. This is a complex situation with no straightforward solution, except that policy must consider local conditions; rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, policymakers must examine how a new preK policy will affect the existing ECE infrastructure in order to develop a program that creates positive working conditions for preK teachers while not creating new inequalities and hierarchies in childcare settings.

Improving preK teachers' working conditions is more than a financial issue, however; teachers must be supported by their administrators, have access to a strong professional network

and opportunities for advancement, and feel that their work and professional expertise is valued by their institution.

What does building a new system mean for the institutions involved? When preK is provided in both public schools and community sites, as it was in Lakeville, it brings together two very different systems with different goals, priorities, and resources. In Lakeville, the policy was designed with a public school setting in mind; community sites did not have the resources to implement certain aspects of the policy and elements of the policy that were intended to provide support for teachers, like the professional development workshops, did not account for scheduling realities in community sites. The result was a constant back-and-forth between the school district and community sites as the community sites struggled to educate the school district about what daily life in these settings was like. A policy implemented the way Lakeville's was requires a school district that understands the ECE system and how childcare centers and preschools operate. At the same time, the "add 4K and stir" approach did not work well for public school teachers or administrators, who were faced with the task of trying to fit 4K into a system whose ideas about what education should look like did not align with early childhood philosophies and traditions. PreK policy must ensure that preK teachers in public schools have the resources to be effective ECE teachers in buildings that are not designed for this population of children.

In addition, it is critical that policy-makers understand how a new preK policy will interact with a state's or school district's existing ECE infrastructure and how it will reshape the ECE landscape. As the case of Lakeville illustrated, even when preK is provided though ECE centers, institutions and families are left out. Policy-makers must figure out how to address the needs of these important stakeholders rather than assume preK will benefit everyone. If one of

the goals of state preK is to improve access to quality programming for families that could not previously afford it, then it is critical to ensure that new preK programs do not further marginalize these families and create new stratification in the ECE system.

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Appendix A: Lakeville 4K Progress Report
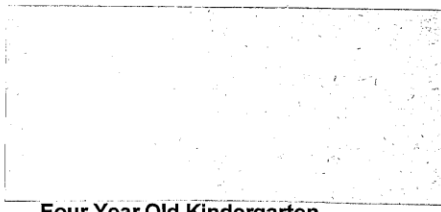
Student _____

Teacher _____

Year __2012-2013__ School _____

Principal _____

Four Year Old Kindergarten
Progress Report

Progress Guide
4 Exceeds Expectations
4* Modified Curriculum
3 Meets Expectations
3* Modified Curriculum
2 Beginning
2* Modified Curriculum
1 Not Yet
1* Modified Curriculum
NA: Not applicable this quarter

Social and Emotional Development

General Comments:

Q2	Q4	
		Engages in social interaction and play with peers
		Recognizes feelings of others; often responds with basic comfort or empathy
		Displays age-appropriate self-control
		Calms self with adult support
		Manages classroom rules, routines and transitions with occasional reminders
		Identifies, communicates, and negotiates conflict situations with support
		Exhibits positive self-concept and confidence

Health and Physical Development

General Comments:

Q2	Q4	
		Manages self-help skills with occasional adult support
		Manipulates a variety of materials and small objects
		Controls a writing tool to create some simple shapes
		Moves with purpose and coordination
		Demonstrates balance and strength

Approaches to Learning

General Comments:

Q2	Q4	
		Persists with self-initiated activities, seeks support as needed
		Engages in imaginative play and inventive thinking
		Explores various creative self-expression: music, art, movement, etc.

Language Development and Communication

General Comments:

Q2	Q4	
		Responds appropriately to simple statements, questions and stories
		Expresses wants, needs, ideas, or feelings using simple, complete sentences
		Recognizes that print carries a message

Four Year Old Kindergarten
Progress Report   Student _____

Language Development and Communication *(continued)*

General Comments:

Q2	Q4	
		Retells a familiar story in sequence
		Recognizes_____letters (Q4 Goal: 10)
		Makes some letter sound connections
		Rhymes words
		Writes scribbles or letter-like forms to represent words/ideas
		Writes first name (may be inconsistent in letter formation or order)

Cognition and General Knowledge

General Comments:

Q2	Q4	
		Asks questions, seeks information, and/or tests ideas to satisfy curiosity
		Sorts and/or describes objects by size, shape, color, or use
		Uses and responds to positional words to indicate space and location
		Recognizes, duplicates, extends, and creates simple patterns
		Consistently counts to 20 or more
		Consistently counts 10 or more objects with one to one correspondence
		Recognizes and names numerals 0-10