

# Co-Sponsor and Support HB4879 (Wilhelmi)

*To reimburse school districts for the transportation of preschool children*

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## **Background:**

The movement toward greater investments in early childhood services reflects important new insights into the way children learn and the early experiences that improve their odds of school success. However, transportation challenges pose a serious barrier to some children's preschool participation – and strain schools' finances and ability to maintain high-quality services.

## **The Problem:**

Currently, school districts – fighting for every dollar they can get to maintain strong programs – cannot be reimbursed for the costs of transporting 3- and 4-year-olds to their preschool services. Without this dedicated source of funding for early childhood transportation, schools must either:

- Tap a portion of their Early Childhood Block Grant funding – thus reducing the resources that otherwise would be used to maintain or improve preschool programs' access and quality for children's maximum learning benefit; or
- Subsidize their preschool transportation needs using other funds.

In recent years, budgetary constraints – including rapidly fluctuating gas prices and the high costs of vehicle maintenance – have caused numerous school districts to reduce or even eliminate transportation services to preschool programs altogether. Often, the young children who suffer most are those who face the greatest challenges and would benefit from the services the most – particularly children in rural and suburban communities.

## **The Solution:**

HB4879 would enable school districts to be reimbursed through ISBE's normal transportation-funding formula for the cost of transporting students to their early childhood programs – as long as those children are riding buses at the same time as older, currently reimbursable students. Thus, at least partial reimbursement for transportation would begin at preschool rather than only kindergarten, treating our youngest students more like K-12 students. This change would allow more school districts to use their Early Childhood Block Grant funds as they were intended: to support core educational services.

This bill is an important step in helping schools to afford and maintain transportation services for their youngest learners – and removing some of the barriers that prevent young children and their families from accessing high-quality preschool programs.

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*April 2010*