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Pre-K Teachers Receive Gratitude Bonus from Kalamazoo County Ready 4s After Being Left out of Michigan K-12 Hazard Pay

100 Kalamazoo County teachers to receive funds from local nonprofit

KALAMAZOO, MI — With recent funding from Kalamazoo Community Foundation’s Community Urgent Relief Fund, local nonprofit [Kalamazoo County Ready 4s](#) will be assisting their 50 program partners with a one-time Gratitude Bonus, providing critical funds to Pre-K teachers and assistant teachers. Financial support ranges from \$250-\$500 for each educator.

The program, modeled after the State’s K-12 Hazard Pay will be instrumental for our local teachers, who are amongst the lowest paid professionals - in the bottom 3-5% of the national wage scale.

“Our early childhood programs provide an invaluable service to this community and our local economy depends on their viability. We hope that this Gratitude Bonus will highlight our appreciation of the pre-K teachers and the critical work they do as well as signal our commitment to continuing to help solve the problem of teacher retention,” said Kristyn Buhl-Lepisto, Executive Director of Kalamazoo County Ready 4s.

Since the onset of the shutdown in March, early childhood teachers have been continuously working to support our community’s youngest learners all while desperately trying to stay in business. While the State of Michigan recognized the sacrifice of K-12 teachers during the pandemic by offering a Hazard Pay bonus, pre-Kindergarten educators were initially left out. Governor Whitmer signed Public Act 257 of 2020, which did include Head Start and the state’s Great Start to Readiness Program teachers, however, private pre-K teachers, which make up most of Kalamazoo’s pre-K care, were not recognized to receive financial support.

The funding was made possible with grant making support from United Way of the Battle Creek and Kalamazoo Region. “We are thrilled to support hazard pay for very deserving early childhood staff. We are keenly aware they are underpaid and have remained critical during this pandemic, as always,” said Martha Gonzalez, Vice President of Community Investment for Kalamazoo County Community Foundation.

The pandemic has crystalized what many have been saying for years: that the work of early childhood teachers is essential.

Upon learning of the Gratitude Bonus, one pre-K teacher said, “This is the first time all year I don’t feel forgotten.”

“This initiative is not just a feel-good. It fits in to the central goals of KC Ready 4s: keeping a viable early childhood sector in Kalamazoo County and maintaining quality teachers.” - KCR4s Board member and economist from the Upjohn Institute, Tim Bartik

“It was disappointing that Pre-K teachers were not initially factored into the state hazard pay; but what Kalamazoo County Pre-K put together was an incredible way for our community to show we have not forgotten them; we value them.” -KC Ready 4s Board member and Galesburg-Augusta Superintendent, Wendy Somers

To learn more about Kalamazoo County Ready 4s, visit the website www.kcready4s.org.

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About Kalamazoo County Ready 4s

Kalamazoo County Ready 4s (KC Ready 4s) envisions a community where all children enter kindergarten ready to succeed, regardless of family circumstance. Equity and education are the best path towards this goal, and guide the work with over 55 pre-kindergarten providers and the thousands of children in KC Ready 4s' supported classrooms each year. Since 2011, KC Ready 4s has provided over \$4 million in tuition assistance to nearly 1,600 eligible families in Kalamazoo County. The mission of KC Ready 4s is to advance fully accessible, high-quality pre-kindergarten education for every 3- and 4-year-old in Kalamazoo County through collaborative leadership with public and private community partners.

To learn more about Kalamazoo County Ready 4s or to make a donation, please visit www.kcready4s.org.