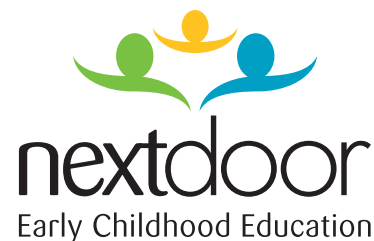


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GOVERNOR EVERS HEAD START TOUR STOPS AT NEXT DOOR MILWAUKEE

The Governor was eager to learn about our programming for children and families, the impact of the federal funding freeze and the Child Care Counts program.

Next Door – a leading provider of high-quality early childhood education in Milwaukee – welcomed Governor Tony Evers to our Capitol Drive location Thursday, February 13. He came as part of a state-wide tour of Head Start agencies to learn more about our critical work as a Head Start program provider for just over 1,000 children a year from birth to age five.

Joining the Governor on this visit were Secretary Jeff Pertl of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and Wisconsin State Representative Supreme Moore Omokunde.

Governor Evers and his colleagues had the opportunity to directly interact with our children, teachers, staff, volunteers and leadership and see firsthand how Next Door works to build strong foundations for our children to prepare them for success in school and life.

Our special guests spent the morning observing our work in action during visits to classrooms, our library, gross motor play spaces, our Kids Kitchen and STEAM lab. They also had the opportunity to visit with children and families in our home-based education program who were on-site for a family engagement event. Next Door is home to the largest Head Start home visiting program in our state.

In discussions with our leadership – including President Heather Mehring Grams and William Hill who oversees all of our programming – the Governor expressed particular interest in recent challenges facing Head Start agencies, stemming from a federal funding freeze that has since been lifted. Our leadership informed the Governor that Next Door was shut out of access to its federal grant funding for more than two weeks. Next Door shared with the Governor how we were still able to deliver our high-quality programming and services during this period and that access to funding has since been restored.

Also discussed was the state's Child Care Counts program, which provides key funding to early childhood organizations that supports the ability to recruit and retain qualified and critical staff, as well as support high-quality programming for the children in our care. Next Door has primarily used this funding to support our staff's total compensation and benefits – an area we are focused on increasing, given the extremely important work performed by our team every day. It's essential that we have a high-quality workforce in this important line of work we do.

Our leadership informed the Governor of additional topics that impact our children's quality of life, such as the lead crisis in Milwaukee, lack of access to medical home providers, and a critical need for funding to support our children with exceptional learning needs and challenges. Working with the community to address these issues is imperative in delivering on our mission to help set children up for short and long-term success in school and life.

Next Door believes every child deserves a strong start – no matter what.

Photos of the Governor's visit can be found here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1XEMJrWjkdX7rcKwy8X2g3_d0hmAackk6?usp=sharing

Visit www.NextDoorMKE.org to learn more about our work and impact in early childhood education.

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