Education - SAGE

★ Compared head-to-head against school vouchers, the SAGE approach is far more effective at boosting student achievement in schools serving low-income communities.

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Summary

- **The Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program has been proven to boost student achievement in schools serving low-income communities.**
- **SAGE is a statewide Wisconsin program that reduces the student-teacher ratio to 15 students per teacher in grades K-3.**
- **SAGE is successful because it does more than lower class size—it mandates comprehensive reform.**
- **Participating school districts are required to strengthen academic curricula, implement professional development programs and accountability measures for staff, and keep school buildings open longer hours to accommodate before and after-school programs.**
- **Annual evaluations show SAGE students outperform students from comparable schools.**
- **Compared head-to-head against school vouchers, SAGE is far more effective in improving student achievement.**

The Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program has been proven to boost student achievement in schools serving low-income communities.

Established in 1995, SAGE is a statewide Wisconsin program that reduces the student-teacher ratio to 15 students for every teacher in kindergarten through third grade, and implements a package of school-based reforms.

SAGE is successful because it does more than lower class size—it mandates comprehensive reform.

Under SAGE, participating school districts sign contracts with the state that require:

■ A rigorous academic curriculum designed to improve student achievement.

■ An extension of school hours to accommodate before and after-school enrichment programs.

■ Collaboration with community organizations to make educational, recreational and social service programs available in the school.

■ Orientation programs for all newly-hired professional staff to facilitate their transition into the school district.

■ Each teacher and administrator to submit to the school board a professional development plan that focuses on how he or she will help improve student academic achievement.

■ An evaluation process for professional staff members that identifies individual strengths and weaknesses, clearly describes areas in need of improvement, provides opportunities to learn and improve, and systematically documents performance in accordance with the plan.

■ Dismissal of professional staff members whose failure to learn and improve has been documented over a two-year period.

The School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has conducted rigorous evaluations of SAGE.

These annual evaluations measure the academic achievement of the SAGE schools against comparison schools. Students are tested in reading, language arts, and math.[1]

Annual evaluations show SAGE students outperform students from comparable schools.

In the 2000-01 school year for example, African-American third-graders in SAGE schools scored higher than African-American students in comparable schools. In fact, SAGE students outperformed comparable students on every subject tested, including language arts, math and reading. Further, comparing third-grade test scores to first grade pretest scores, SAGE students showed significantly greater improvement than their counterparts.

Compared head-to-head against school vouchers, SAGE easily comes out on top.

Milwaukee began its voucher program in 1990, and SAGE was enacted in 1995. A multi-year study by the University of Wisconsin-Madison revealed that SAGE students showed improved test scores, while Milwaukee voucher students performed no better than comparable Milwaukee Public Schools students in any year of the program to date.

Reducing classroom size improves the quality of teaching.

Based on a study of teaching practices, reducing class size results in: fewer discipline problems and therefore more instructional time; more individualization of instruction to students; more frequent hands-on activities; and greater teacher satisfaction with their jobs.[2]

Reducing classroom size in early grades is proven to have significant long-term educational benefits.

The Student / Teacher Ratio (STAR) Project, the most significant long-term study on the benefits of reducing class size in early education, involved more than 3,000 K-3 students in select rural, suburban, urban and inner-city Tennessee schools from 1985-89. This $12 million study revealed that students in small classes consistently scored higher on achievement and basic skills tests. And inner-city, predominantly minority children in small classes outscored their counterparts in larger classes. This success continued through high school.

Endnotes

[1] Data from these evaluations from 1996 through 2001 are presented in "Class Size Reduction in Wisconsin: A Fresh look at the Data," Education Policy Studies Laboratory, Arizona State University, September 2003, www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/SAGE.

[2] "SAGE Advice: Research on Teaching in Reduced-Size Classes," Education Policy Studies Laboratory, Arizona State University, January 2003.

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Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Act

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE

This Act shall be called the "[STATE] Student Achievement Guarantee in Education Act."

SECTION 2. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GUARANTEE IN EDUCATION (SAGE)

After section XXX, the following new section XXX shall be inserted:

(A) DEFINITIONS—in this section:

1. "Class size" means the number of pupils assigned to a regular classroom teacher on the 3rd Friday of September.

2. "Low income" means the measure of low income that is used by the school district under 20 USC 2723.

3. "Department" means the [State Department of Education].

(B) ELIGIBILITY

1. The school board of any school district in which a school in the previous school year had an enrollment of at least 50 percent [could use a lower percentage] low-income students is eligible to participate in the program.

2. If, in any year, eligible school districts apply for more achievement guarantee contracts than are possible within the budget appropriated for this purpose, the Department shall determine which school board to contract with based on the number of low-income pupils in kindergarten and grade one enrolled in the schools, and on the balance of rural and urban school districts currently participating in the program.

3. A selected school district shall enter into an achievement guarantee contract on behalf of up to 10 schools [could use a lower number or phase in over time].

(C) CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS

An achievement guarantee contract shall require the school board to do all of the following in each participating school:

1. Class size—Reduce each class size to 15 in the following manner:

   a. In the first year of participation, in at least kindergarten and grade one.
   b. In the second year of participation, in at least kindergarten and grades one and two.
   c. In the third year of participation, in at least kindergarten and grades one, two and three.

2. Education and human services—

   a. Keep school buildings open to accommodate before school and after-school enrichment programs.
   b. Collaborate with community organizations to make educational and recreational opportunities, as well as a variety of community and social services, available in the school to all school district residents.

3. Curriculum—

a. Provide a rigorous academic curriculum designed to improve pupil academic achievement.
b. In consultation with the Department, and with the participation of the school's professional staff and school district residents, review the school's current curriculum to determine how well it promotes pupil academic achievement.
c. If necessary, outline any changes to the curriculum to improve pupil academic achievement.

4. Staff development and accountability—

a. Develop a one-year program for all newly hired professional staff that helps them make the transition from their previous employment or school to their current employment.
b. Provide time for employees to collaborate and plan.
c. Require that each teacher and administrator submit to the school board a professional development plan that focuses on how he or she will help improve student academic achievement. The plan shall include a method by which the staff member will receive evaluations on the success of his or her efforts from a variety of sources.
d. Regularly review staff development plans to determine whether they are effective in helping to improve pupil academic achievement.
e. Establish an evaluation process for professional staff that does all of the following:
(1) Identifies individual strengths and weaknesses.
(2) Clearly describes areas in need of improvement.
(3) Includes a support plan that provides opportunities to learn and improve.
(4) Systematically documents performance in accordance with the plan.
(5) Allows professional staff members to comment on and contribute to revisions in the evaluation process.
(6) Provides for the dismissal of professional staff members whose failure to learn and improve has been documented over a two-year period.

(D) IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT—Each achievement guarantee contract shall include all of the following:

1. A description of how each school will implement each of the elements under subsection (C), including any alternative class configurations for specific educational activities that may be used to meet the class size requirements.

2. A description of the method that the school district will use to evaluate the academic achievement of the students enrolled in the school.

3. A description of each school's performance objectives for the academic achievement of the students enrolled in the school and the means that will be used to evaluate success in attaining the objectives. Performance objectives shall include all of the following:

a. Where applicable, improvement in scores of tests administered to students under [applicable state law].
b. The attainment of any educational goals adopted by the school board.
c. Professional development objectives.

4. A description of the methods by which the school involves students, parents or guardians of students, and other school district residents in decisions affecting the school.

5. A description of any statute or rule that is waived under [state law] if the waiver is related to the contract.

6. A description of the means by which the Department will monitor compliance with the terms of the contract.

(E) ANNUAL REVIEW AND NONCOMPLIANCE

1. At the end of each school year, the Department may terminate a contract if a school board has failed to fully implement the provisions under subsection (C).

2. Annually, by June 30, a committee consisting of the [state superintendent, the chairpersons of the education committees in the senate and house] and the individual chiefly responsible for the evaluation under subsection (H) shall review the progress made by each participating school. The committee may recommend that the Department terminate a contract if the committee determines that the school board has violated the contract or if the school has made insufficient progress toward achieving its performance objectives. The Department may terminate the contract if it agrees with the committee's recommendation.

(F) STATE AID

1. From appropriations specifically designated for this purpose, the Department shall pay to each participating school district $2,000 multiplied by the number of low-income students enrolled in grades K-3 in each participating school covered by achievement guarantee contracts.

2. The Department shall cease payments under this section to any school district if the school board withdraws from the contract before it expires.

(G) RULES

The Department shall promulgate rules to implement and administer the payment of state aid under this section.

(H) EVALUATION

The Department shall arrange for an annual independent evaluation of the program under this section.

SECTION 3. EFFECTIVE DATE—This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2004.