

July 23, 2014

Legislative Council Study Committee on SAGE

**Department of Public Instruction Testimony  
On the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Program**

On behalf of State Superintendent Tony Evers I want to thank Chairman Olsen and members of the study committee for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding the SAGE program. My name is Jennifer Kammerud and I am a Policy Initiatives Advisor at the Department of Public Instruction and with me today is Shelley Greller, who oversees the SAGE program as part of her responsibilities as the Assistant Director of our Title I and School Support Team.

The department was asked to prepare for you today a presentation covering the history of the SAGE program and review issues related to funding and flexibility for the program. Legislative Council staff wrote an excellent brief for today describing the SAGE program and its evolution over the years so we will quickly review the elements of the program before adding to the information Legislative Council has already provided.

*A Brief History*

SAGE was established in the 1996-97 school year to improve student achievement through the implementation of four specific school improvement strategies. They were:

1. class sizes of no more than 15:1 or 30:2 in grades K-3;
2. increased collaboration between schools and their communities;
3. implementation of a rigorous curriculum; and
4. improved professional development and staff-evaluation practices.

The program was originally narrowly targeted to school districts that had at least one school with low-income levels over 50 percent. Eligible schools participated in the program by signing a five-year contract with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Under the program schools receive a per pupil allocation for each eligible low-income student in a participating grade (K-3). Currently that allocation is \$2,250 in statute, but that amount has been prorated since the 2008-09 school year. The prorated amount during the last school year was \$2,027.25

The program has changed significantly since its inception. At one point all schools were allowed to enter into the program regardless of income levels in the school which led to a vast expansion of the program.

### Flexibility

SAGE has strict programmatic requirements. As such, it has not been uncommon for school districts to seek flexibility. School districts have been awarded significant flexibility over the years related to class sizes and grades covered.

**DPI provided waivers from 2006 to 2009** covering various aspects of the program. The department granted 90 percent, or 217, of the waivers requested from the 240 schools seeking flexibility.

The majority of waivers granted required full compliance in Kindergarten and first grade but allowed schools to exceed class sizes except in the areas of reading and language arts and math in grades 2 and 3. Under these waivers, the department generally required for grades 2 and 3, a minimum of a 90 minute block of uninterrupted time for instruction in reading and language arts and a 60 minute block of uninterrupted time for instruction in mathematics in groups of 15 or less on a daily basis.

Waivers granted to school districts were made under the condition that they represented temporary flexibility to schools as they worked to meet the SAGE class size requirement.

**The pupil to teacher ratio was raised** from 15 to 1 to 18 to 1 in 2009 Wisconsin Act 301. This ratio currently exceeds the average student to teacher ratio in the state which was 15.2 to 1 in 2012-13.

**Participation in SAGE for grades 2 and 3 was made optional** for schools participating in the program. Since SAGE schools were granted flexibility in grades 2 and 3 under 2011 Wisconsin Act 105, four schools representing 3 second grade classrooms and 5 third grade classrooms have taken advantage of it. The average enrollment in these classrooms is almost 21 students.

### Funding

Schools originally were given up to \$2,000 per low-income child. Statutes were changed, however, to provide up to \$2,250 for each eligible low-income K-3 child. The department bases reimbursements off of low-income student counts based on the third Friday enrollment.

As stated earlier, the \$2,250 amount has been prorated since the 2008-09 school year; this year the pro-rated amount was \$2,027.25. For your information we have attached a history of the state payments since 2002 and last year's payments by school district.

Funding for SAGE has also impacted the debate over the constitutionality of Wisconsin's school finance system. In 2000, the State Supreme Court found the Wisconsin school finance system constitutional in *Vincent v. Voight*, so long as the legislature provided sufficient resources to ensure that all students are offered an equal opportunity for a sound, basic education. The Court specifically enumerated three classes of students to which the state had a special obligation for ensuring equitable opportunities: students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students and English language learners. SAGE is one of the few state programs that targets funding to economically disadvantaged students.

“...An equal opportunity for a sound basic education acknowledges that students and districts are not fungible and takes into account districts with disproportionate numbers of disabled students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with limited English language skills. So long as the legislature is providing sufficient resources so that school districts offer students the equal opportunity for a sound basic education as required by the constitution, the state school finance system will pass constitutional muster.”

### The Research

The research on SAGE has shown a clear impact on students while they are in SAGE classrooms. The Legislative Council Brief described this research at length. The lasting effects of SAGE, however, have been difficult to discern given the numerous changes to the program over the years.

The most recent analysis of the SAGE program is being conducted by the UW-Madison Value-Added Research Center and is still being completed, but it is using the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) to compare the growth of academic performance of students in SAGE and non-SAGE schools. This study utilizes each student's growth in reading and mathematics scores from the fall to spring of the school year. Some of the preliminary findings (i.e. estimations) include:

- A positive effect on MAP growth in reading during school years 2010-11 to 2012-13.
- A positive effect in 2012-13 on MAP growth for reading in kindergarten through second grade and mathematics in kindergarten and first grade.
- Positive differential effects for economically disadvantaged students in 2012-13 on MAP growth in schools with:
  - 66-100% poverty for reading at all grades (K-3),
  - 66-100% poverty for mathematics in 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades.
- Positive differential effects on growth in reading and mathematics at all grades in schools with more than 10% African-American Students enrolled in 2012-13.
- Positive effects for urban schools in reading at all grades.

The department is very encouraged by the findings that we are seeing and hopes that additional research in the future will be better able to look at the long-term impacts of this program. SAGE has been a popular program with parents and educators and it is encouraging to see that its anecdotal successes are being seen in the research.

We want to thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about SAGE and at this point we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

