

**SAGE Study Committee Comments**  
**July 23, 2014**  
**Margaret “Peggy” Jones, Elementary Principal**  
**School District of Bonduel**

Good afternoon Senator Olsen and Representative Czaja and committee members. I would like extend a sincere thank you for including me and several of my educational colleagues in this important conversation. I appreciate the time you are taking to hear from us about the SAGE program. You are doing something that is extremely important as we teach and prepare our future leaders.

I have been fortunate to be the elementary principal in the School District of Bonduel for 13 years. When I was first hired there were three elementary buildings in the district. All of them participated in the SAGE program.

My experiences with the SAGE program in my school/district:

Our school district implemented SAGE in the 2000-2001 school year. That means we have participated for 14 years. At the time of implementation our district consisted of 3 elementary school buildings, a middle school and one high school. Eventually, two of the smaller elementary buildings were closed due to financial reasons. For the past four school years, we have operated one elementary building in the district. The SAGE program has been extremely beneficial to our district for a number of reasons. Some of them include:

- When some students come to school they are not prepared for the school routines. As kindergarten students, they must learn the building, classroom and all of the “rules” that come with organizing 300-400 students. Small class size allows the teacher to spend quality time with the children to gently teach them about their new environment. Additionally, some students come from families who are reading to their children and they come to school ready to read. There are other children who do not have stable home lives and are not toilet trained at 5 years old. Having small class sizes allows personal attention from the teacher to work with all students in the classroom.
- Reading instruction is much more focused when you have smaller class sizes when teaching the foundational skills to non-readers. In kindergarten, the teachers spend a lot of time teaching phonics. It is much easier and more efficient to do this with a smaller class size. Teachers are better able to deal with short attention spans when you are able to redirect easier with 15-18 children versus 23-25 in a non-SAGE classroom.
- Math instruction has become much more organized and we are able to concentrate on teaching grade level skills. Teachers know from one grade to the next what the students are taught. SAGE teachers are able to spend additional time with small

groups of students to teach and reteach key concepts to mastery. This is extremely important as the students prepare for intermediate grades.

- We utilize Guided Reading starting in kindergarten. Teachers in SAGE classrooms are able to implement this instructional strategy easier with a smaller class size.
- Preparing students to take state assessments. We begin this process in our SAGE classrooms. One example of this is that we begin teaching keyboarding to our first grade students so that they are prepared to take the on-line Smarter Balanced Assessment in third grade.
- Response to Intervention (RtI) – we are faced with many initiatives that teachers must implement. RtI is just one of them. This initiative allows teachers to monitor students and document what is happening for the student in the regular classroom. It is important to keep students in the classroom as much as possible. A student who is exhibiting behavioral or learning difficulties must have interventions in place prior to initiating a referral for a special education evaluation. Smaller class sizes allows the teacher to take the time to implement intervention strategies necessary prior the referral.
- Independence – we strive to teach students to be independent and more responsible with their learning. In the early grades (K-3) students are very dependent on their teachers. In these SAGE grades, teachers work on preparing the students to become responsible for themselves, their materials and ready for the intermediate grades.
- Better Relationships – teachers are spending less time on classroom management and more time teaching. Teachers are able to develop better relationships with students and parents.
- Financial – our district is reimbursed approximately 51% for participating in the SAGE program. We feel that this financial support is extremely important in making school successful for students in their first years of learning reading and math. Without it, class size in kindergarten-third grades would reach mid to high twenties. In addition, staff would have to be reduced. In our case 2.5 elementary teachers would have to be eliminated. This would be devastating.

What additional flexibility in the student-to-teacher ratio or other SAGE requirements would mean in my particular school?

Additional flexibility would mean more collaboration with other teachers. We have students who have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and spend minimal amounts of times in the regular grade level classrooms. These students have severe cognitive disabilities. Flexibility with the SAGE program numbers would greatly be appreciated with these students because their reading and math instruction is provided with a special education teacher.

On many occasions you will find the Title I teachers who focus primarily on reading and math in the regular education classrooms teaching and working with all students in that room. It would be nice to see flexibility especially when there are “push in” services provided.

Suggestions I have about how to incorporate more flexibility into the program.

- Allow conversation with building principals leaders. Principals understand the rules and have sound reasons why they may need to be flexible.
- Every school year is different and enrollment changes happen fast in late August and early September. Having an exemption available would help tremendously. You never know what kinds of students transfer into or out of the district which would require flexibility.

Yours in Education,

Mrs. Margaret “Peggy” Jones  
Elementary Principal  
School District of Bonduel  
404 West Mill Street  
Bonduel, WI 54107  
715-758-4811  
[jonespeg@bonduel.k12.wi.us](mailto:jonespeg@bonduel.k12.wi.us)