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## WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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### STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GUARANTEE IN EDUCATION (SAGE) PROGRAM

Room 411 South  
State Capitol

September 22, 2014  
10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

[The following is a summary of the September 22, 2014 meeting of the Study Committee on the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Program. The file copy of this summary has appended to it a copy of each document prepared for or submitted to the committee during the meeting. A digital recording of the meeting is available on our Web site at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lc>.]

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#### Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Olsen called the committee to order. The roll was called and a quorum was determined to be present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Sen. Luther Olsen, Chair; Rep. Mary Czaja, Vice Chair; Sen. Dave Hansen; Reps. Jill Billings, Sondy Pope, and Thiesfeldt; and Public Members John Gaier, N. David Kipp, Randy Nelson, Miguel Sanchez, Anne Smith, Robert Way and Angela Wiemer.

COMMITTEE MEMBER EXCUSED: Public Member Beth Graue.

COUNCIL STAFF PRESENT: Katie Bender-Olson and Jessica Ozalp, Staff Attorneys.

APPEARANCES: Christa Pugh and Dave Loppnow, Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB); Jonas Zuckerman, Department of Public Instruction (DPI); Grant Sim, Value-Added Research Center (VARC), UW-Madison; Teri Willems, Executive Director for Elementary Schools, Green Bay Area Public Schools; and John McMullen, School Board President, Tomah Area School District.

## **Approval of the Committee's Minutes From the August 14, 2014 Meeting**

The committee unanimously approved the minutes from the committee's August 14, 2014 meeting.

### **Description of Materials Distributed**

#### **Memorandum, Local District Expenditures by SAGE Aid Recipients and Fiscal Estimates of Changes to the SAGE Program, From Christa Pugh, Fiscal Analyst, LFB (dated September 15, 2014), Described by Christa Pugh and Dave Loppnow, LFB**

Christa Pugh, Fiscal Analyst, LFB, described the numbers contained in Attachment 2 to the memorandum distributed to committee members prior to the meeting. The memorandum addressed local district expenditures and fiscal estimates of proposed changes to the SAGE program raised by members at the August 14, 2014 meeting. Ms. Pugh explained the significance of various figures appearing in the attachment. The figures represented the cost or change from current appropriation levels for the various proposals, such as including 4K in the SAGE program or increasing the threshold percentage of low-income pupils required before a school is eligible to participate in SAGE.

#### **SAGE Financial Report, Described by Jonas Zuckerman, DPI**

Jonas Zuckerman, Director of Title I and School Support Staff, DPI, described the contents of a SAGE financial report distributed to committee members prior to the meeting. The report detailed the amount of state aid received by school districts participating in the SAGE program and the amount of district matching funds provided by these districts during the last three school years. Mr. Zuckerman noted that the district matching funds information is voluntarily reported, so it does not represent all funds or all districts. He further explained that year-to-year changes in these amounts may result, in part, from different school districts reporting during each school year, as reporting is voluntary.

#### **Memorandum, Non-SAGE Survey Results, Described by Grant Sim, Value-Added Research Center, UW-Madison (dated September 15, 2014)**

Grant Sim, Assistant Researcher, VARC, provided a PowerPoint presentation explaining the results of a survey distributed to administrators in school districts with at least one school that meets the following criteria: (1) has at least one grade in Kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade; (2) has at least 50% of the student population eligible for free or reduced price lunch; and (3) is not currently participating in SAGE. Mr. Sim outlined the questions asked of administrators, including possible reasons for non-participation in the SAGE program. He noted that the survey was distributed to 53 school districts and achieved a response rate of 34%, which was reasonable given the response deadline of one week.

Mr. Sim also summarized the responses provided by administrators. According to survey respondents, the most important consideration preventing schools from participating in SAGE is inadequate funding. The changes to SAGE most likely to increase future

participation are increased funding and more flexibility on class size restrictions. Survey respondents also provided suggestions for the amount of per-student funding that would allow their schools to participate in SAGE, and the average suggested funding amount was \$3,129. The median average class size in Kindergarten to 3rd grades reported by respondents is 21.5, which is higher than the 18 student limit imposed by the SAGE program.

### **Presentations by Invited Speakers**

#### **Teri Willems, Executive Director for Elementary Schools, Green Bay Area Public Schools**

Teri Willems, Green Bay Area Public Schools, addressed the committee regarding the school district's choice to only have some of its qualifying elementary schools participate in the SAGE program. Ms. Willems provided background information about the Green Bay Public Schools and noted that the district has 21,109 students, of which approximately 50% are minority students, more than 50% are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and a significant number are English Language Learners. The Green Bay School District includes 21 elementary schools eligible for the SAGE program, but only 10 of these schools currently participate in the program.

Ms. Willems explained that the only elementary schools participating in the SAGE program are those with the highest poverty rates in the district. She explained that the district only participates in SAGE for those schools where the SAGE funding actually covers the additional costs of participation. Ms. Willems specifically noted that a school must have an 80% to 85% free and reduced-price lunch population before SAGE funding will cover the expenses associated with an additional classroom teacher. Ms. Willems also explained the district's relative class sizes in SAGE schools versus non-participating schools. The average class sizes in SAGE schools are as follows: 10 in Kindergarten; 14 in 1st grade; 15 in 2nd grade; and 15 in 3rd grade. In contrast, the average class sizes in non-SAGE schools are: 20 in Kindergarten; 21 in 1st grade; 22 in 2nd grade; and 22 in 3rd grade.

Ms. Willems responded to committee questions regarding differences between SAGE schools and non-SAGE schools in the Green Bay School District. She noted that non-SAGE schools experienced higher class sizes and slightly greater rates of behavioral issues. Ms. Willems also noted a difference in parental requests for in-district school transfers and teacher turnover between SAGE and non-SAGE schools. However, she stated that the difference cannot be directly linked to a school's SAGE participation, but may include other considerations, such as extended learning opportunities or family supports available at a particular elementary school, or teacher concerns regarding the manner in which teachers will be evaluated based on student performance under the new Educator Effectiveness system.

Ms. Willems also responded to committee questions about particular academic, behavioral, and bilingual interventions and approaches employed by the Green Bay School District. She explained that interventions depend upon the particular school, but noted use of the Reading Recovery Program, the Math Recovery Program, Guided Reading Plus, Advantage Math Recovery, and small-group, differentiated instruction workshops. Ms.

Willems also noted use of the following behavioral interventions: social workers, school psychologists, CHAMPS, TRIBES, and Check In-Check Out programs. Finally, she noted use of “two-way” bilingual programs, which include English and Spanish-speaking students learning both languages, as well as “one-way” bilingual programs, which only include Spanish-speaking students.

### **John McMullen, School Board President, Tomah Area School District**

John McMullen, Tomah School Board, addressed the committee regarding the Tomah Area School District’s choice not to participate in the SAGE program. He provided background information regarding the district, including its large geographic area and declining enrollment. Mr. McMullen explained that the school district has never participated in SAGE, though all elementary schools in the district would qualify. He explained that when the school board considered SAGE in the past, the board’s decision not to participate was largely based on a lack of classroom space, concern about future loss of SAGE funding, and equity between different elementary schools regarding class sizes. He also noted that the school board has not considered SAGE recently because of the time and attention required for other educational changes, such as Educator Effectiveness and Common Core State Standards.

Mr. McMullen commented that although the Tomah Area School District does not participate in SAGE, it achieved similar school report card scores as surrounding districts that do participate. Mr. McMullen also informed the committee that his school district has unwritten policies regarding maximum class sizes, though they do not participate in SAGE. The district attempts to limit 4K to 18 students, Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade to 20 students, and third grade to 23 students.

Mr. McMullen also noted that the Tomah Area School District has limited resources and has chosen to focus on efforts other than class size to improve student achievement. He noted that while his district is not critical of the SAGE program, the district chooses to instead focus on attracting and developing high-quality classroom teachers and addressing retention challenges. Mr. McMullen further commented that his district would see a larger impact from increased state funding for students living in poverty and for transportation costs than from changes to the SAGE program.

### **Discussion of Committee Assignment**

Chair Olsen began the committee discussion portion of the meeting by showing a short video clip regarding approaches used by successful school systems around the world. The presenter in the clip, Andreas Schleicher, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, noted three major differences between the U.S. educational system and higher-performing school systems in other countries. He summarized the differences as follows: (1) other countries require higher standards to enter the teaching profession; (2) other countries have larger class sizes than schools in the United States; and (3) other countries provide higher levels of pay for teachers.

Chair Olsen then commenced committee discussion by requesting a brief summary of Memo No. 2 by Legislative Council staff. Members engaged in discussion regarding funding for the SAGE program and state funding for education more generally. Members suggested that the school funding formula should be revised to weight low-income students more heavily, and that local districts should determine the best approach for utilizing the extra funds to enhance achievement. Members also suggested splitting existing SAGE funding for distribution amongst districts based on low-income student numbers, without imposing the existing SAGE requirements. Finally, members emphasized a need for increased funding if the SAGE program is expanded to include additional schools or students.

Members discussed identifying the primary goal of the SAGE program before deciding on specific options, and suggested one of the following goals: assisting low-income students, achieving small class sizes, increasing test scores, or closing the achievement gap. Committee members also raised several suggestions for revising the existing SAGE program, including flexibility for SAGE funding to be directed towards high-quality teaching rather than class size reduction, and allowing schools to achieve one of the purposes behind the SAGE program (such as implementation of rigorous curriculum), rather than requiring rigid compliance with the existing SAGE criteria.

Chair Olsen suggested raising the threshold percentage of low-income students for SAGE eligibility and also implementing an equivalency model that would allow school districts to use alternative methods for closing the achievement gap, rather than requiring strict compliance with required classroom ratios. He also suggested requiring schools districts employing these alternatives to show progress in closing the achievement gap within a specified number of years. If a district were to fail to do so, then the district would not be eligible to renew its SAGE contract. Chair Olsen indicated that he prefers to allow districts to select alternatives without pre-approval by DPI or other body. Instead, he proposes having districts show results or face removal from the SAGE program.

### **Other Business**

Legislative Council staff announced that a future meeting date in November would be determined based on member responses to an online scheduling poll.

### **Plans for Future Meetings**

The next meeting of the Study Committee is scheduled for **Wednesday, October 22, 2014**, in Madison.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.