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Date: September 9, 2014
To: Members of the Legislative Council Study Committee on the Student
Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Programs
Re: Consideration for a SAGE equivalency model

Thank you for reviewing the SAGE program and considering modifications to the current flexibility option. I would like to share our concern with the current flexibility option, alternatives to the current flexibility option, and what a SAGE equivalency model may look like.

Concern with the Current Flexibility Option

The SAGE program was developed to promote academic achievement through the implementation of four school improvement strategies:

- **class sizes of no more than 18:1 or 30:2 in grades K-1, and grades 2-3 at the district/school's choice;**
- increased collaboration between schools and their communities;
- implementation of a rigorous curriculum; and
- improved professional development and staff-evaluation practices.

While the SAGE program has four elements, class size is the determining factor for eligibility. According to state statute 118.43 (3r) ADJUSTMENT TO PARTICIPATING GRADES: A school district that has entered into or renewed an achievement guarantee contract under this section may, in one or more years covered by the contract, choose not to comply with the requirement to reduce class size in grades 2 or 3, or both, in one or more schools in the district, resulting in the entire grade not being eligible for SAGE funding at the affected school.

Our concern is the significant financial impact that a single student can have on all students in a SAGE eligible grade if a single class size exceeds an 18:1 student-teacher ratio. For further information please refer to the report I presented to the committee on July 23, 2014.

Alternatives to the Current Flexibility Option

1. Create additional flexibility for grades K-3 to address minimal impacts to class sizes. Specifically, when the addition of a single student increases a single SAGE classroom to 19:1. The current flexibility allowed for grades 2 and 3 results in a substantial decrease in SAGE funding that is not equitable with the per pupil revenue provided to the district in the revenue limit formula. In this alternative we would request the committee to consider a reduction in SAGE aid that is equivalent to the state average per pupil revenue limit.

2. Establish weighted criteria on all four strategies of the SAGE program that would allow for a SAGE equivalency model to support student academic success in the context of literacy. Districts could apply for a SAGE equivalency model by implementing research or evidence-based programs that support early literacy such as Reading Recovery or Literacy Coaches. By establishing an equivalency model, districts would be allowed to have class sizes no greater than 20:1. The equivalency model would be monitored, and if by the 3rd year student literacy goals are not met, the district would have to reduce class sizes to 18:1 to remain in the SAGE program. The concept of an equivalency model has been put into practice with Educator Effectiveness. The details of an equivalency model should be determined by a committee whose members would include DPI and other experts in the field of literacy and rules development.

When a single student has the potential of reducing SAGE funds by \$56,763.12 - \$241,243.24, or increasing costs due to hiring another teacher at an average cost of \$74,000, Merrill has no choice but to pull resources from another grade level or program. Applying either alternative will allow Merrill Area Public Schools to implement an innovative instructional model that is student centered.

SAGE Equivalency Model

In Merrill we would develop a literacy intervention that is based on the Reading Recovery program. This research and evidence based literacy program would be a short-term intervention of one-to-one tutoring for low-achieving students. The intervention has been proven to be most effective when it is available to all students who need it and is used as a supplement to good classroom teaching. We would serve the lowest-achieving students who are not catching on to the complex set of concepts that make reading and writing possible.

Individual students will receive a half-hour lesson each school day for 12 to 20 weeks with a specially trained teacher. As soon as students can meet grade-level expectations and demonstrate that they can continue to work independently in the classroom, their lessons would be discontinued, and new students would begin individual instruction.

In closing I would like to again thank you for this opportunity and your dedication to do what is best for public education in Wisconsin.

Respectfully,

Wally Leipart