



Information Briefing

IOWA SCHOOL BOARDS FOUNDATION

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Class Size: SAGE Program

A Wisconsin program determines that lower class size does make a difference.

Wisconsin's Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program was designed as a five-year pilot project that began in the 1996-97 school year. The program requires that participating schools implement the following four interventions:

- Reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in a classroom to 15 students per teacher beginning with kindergarten and first grade in the 1996-97 school year (second grade was added in 1997-98 and third grade in 1998-99).
- Establish "lighted school houses" open from early in the morning until late in the evening.
- Develop "rigorous" curricula.
- Create a system of staff development and professional accountability.

Of the four SAGE interventions, only reduced pupil-teacher ratio in a classroom was uniformly and immediately implemented across all program schools.

The SAGE program was targeted at schools with a higher proportion of students living in poverty. School districts in Wisconsin that had at least one school with 50% percent of children or more living below the poverty level were eligible to apply.

Discussion

The impact of reduced class size in Wisconsin's SAGE program appears to be generally consistent with the results reported by the Tennessee STAR study. The 1997-98 first grade SAGE students made comparable or slightly larger achievement gains in the smaller classes as the students in the Tennessee study. Students in 1997-98 SAGE first-grade classrooms scored significantly higher in all tested areas than other Wisconsin first graders.

Also consistent with the STAR findings, the achievement benefits of SAGE's small class sizes are stronger for African-American students. Indeed, 1997-98 SAGE first grade post-test results reveal that African-American SAGE first-grade students closed the "achievement gap" with White students that was revealed in the first-grade pre-test results.

It is also worth noting that an analysis of student achievement in first grade classrooms with 15 students and 1 teacher and first grade classrooms with 30 students and 2 teachers did not reveal statistically significant differences on any of the subtests or total score. If this finding holds up, it suggests that the benefits of reducing class size may be achievable without the additional capital costs of building additional classrooms.

For further information on the SAGE project, see the following Web site: www.uwm.edu/soe/centers/projects/sage

Reference

Molnar, Alex, et al. (1999). Evaluating the SAGE Program: A Pilot Program in Targeted Pupil-Teacher Reduction in Wisconsin. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 21(2), 165-177