

# **The Professional Development Needs of Teachers in SAGE Classrooms:**

## **Survey Results and Analysis**

by

**Alex Molnar  
Glen Wilson  
Daniel Allen  
Sandra Foster**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Introduction**

Wisconsin's Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program is a statewide program intended to improve student achievement in kindergarten through third grade by: (1) reducing class size to a 15:1 student-teacher ratio; (2) increasing collaboration between schools and their communities; (3) implementing a rigorous academic curriculum; and (4) improving professional development and staff evaluation practices. Although SAGE is often considered to be merely a "reduced class size" reform, it is actually a multifaceted reform program. The four major elements of the SAGE program, each of which alone would be expected to increase student achievement, are intended to work synergistically with the other elements. The best possible student achievement gains are expected to result when reduced size classes are combined with a rigorous academic curriculum and teachers properly trained for teaching in small size classrooms.

The improvement of professional development and evaluation practices is the focus of this study. Specifically, the following questions were addressed:

- To what extent have SAGE professional development requirements been implemented in SAGE schools?
- How might the professional development elements of Wisconsin's new teacher standards and the No Child Left Behind act (ESEA 2001) affect SAGE schools?
- How might SAGE schools address professional development programs in light of new legislative requirements and current best practices identified in the research literature?

**To what extent have SAGE professional development requirements been implemented in SAGE schools?**

Overall, the survey results indicate that SAGE schools have had only mixed success at implementing the professional development and evaluation requirements in the SAGE legislation. Of the fifteen survey questions asking teachers how well SAGE professional development and evaluation requirements have been implemented, 60 percent of the questions received responses indicating a moderately high level of implementation, 33 percent indicated a low to moderate level of implementation, and about 7 percent showed a low level of implementation.

**How might the professional development elements of Wisconsin’s new teacher standards and the No Child Left Behind act (ESEA 2001) affect SAGE schools?**

New licensure and license renewal rules based on the Wisconsin Teacher Standards are set to take effect on July 1, 2004. The federal No Child Left Behind act (ESEA 2001) will phase in new teacher quality requirements by the end of the 2005-06 school year. The SAGE and Wisconsin Teacher Standards requirements are well aligned with each other and, in most areas, meet or exceed the new requirements of ESEA 2001. Thus, schools that fully comply with SAGE and Wisconsin Teacher Standards requirements will not face significant additional requirements stemming from ESEA 2001. However, survey results indicate that *current* professional development and evaluation activities and practices will not fully satisfy the new, upcoming state requirements and therefore, must be improved upon for full compliance with the Wisconsin Teacher Standards rules.

**How might SAGE schools address professional development programs in light of new legislative requirements and current best practices identified in the research literature?**

Scholarly literature indicates that high quality teachers and effective professional development are important factors in realizing increased student achievement. Recognizing this, SAGE legislation outlines to SAGE schools the types of professional development that have been shown to be effective. According to survey results and the best practices suggested by research, SAGE schools may be missing opportunities to maximize student achievement gains by failing to making effective use of the professional development requirements of the SAGE law to build on the achievement gains that have resulted from class size reduction. A series of recommendations is offered to improve the professional development program structure and initial content of SAGE schools’ professional development programs.

Program structure recommendations include:

- Train district administrators and school principals in the SAGE program about the program’s requirements for professional development and evaluation.
- Inform teachers in SAGE schools about the program’s professional development and evaluation processes and requirements.
- Ensure that all teachers participate in the formulation and revision of their school’s “achievement guarantee contract” with the state.
- Ensure that professional development is provided for an extended period of time.

- Design structures for professional development so they include opportunities for school-wide collaboration.

Initial program content recommendations include:

- Teachers should be trained in effective instructional strategies for reduced size classrooms.
- Ensure that professional development content is focused on academic content.
- Provide teachers with training in implementing before- and after-school activities.

To further help SAGE schools bring their current professional development programs into full compliance, a checklist has been developed to assist schools in identifying those areas in which their current practices may not be fully satisfactory. SAGE schools that can answer yes to most or all of the checklist questions can be relatively confident that their professional development programs will comply with SAGE, Wisconsin Teacher Standards, and ESEA 2001 requirements as well as reflect the scholarly consensus regarding effective professional development. Those schools that respond negatively to checklist items will have a ready agenda for improvement.

