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**FROM THE EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES LABORATORY AT ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY**

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**ACHIEVEMENT GAINS PERSIST IN LATEST SAGE STUDY  
EVALUATION UNDERScores BENEFITS OF SMALLER CLASSES**

Wisconsin's SAGE class-size reduction program continues to demonstrate that reducing class sizes leads to higher achievement for students living in poverty, a team of scholars reports in their evaluation of the program's fifth year.

The Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program, which reduces student-teacher ratios in kindergarten through third grade classrooms to 15:1, consistently improves the test scores of participating students throughout the first three years of elementary school, the evaluators concluded in their latest report, released today by the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University.

"The SAGE achievement advantage persists," the evaluators write. At the same time, they report, increasing class size reduces achievement levels: "Adding students lowers the average performance of classrooms."

SAGE is a statewide effort to increase the academic achievement of children living in poverty by reducing the student-teacher ratio in kindergarten through third grade to 15:1. Schools participating in the SAGE program are also required to implement a rigorous academic curriculum, to provide before- and after-school activities for both students and community members, and to implement professional development and accountability plans. The SAGE evaluation is being conducted under contract with the Department of Public Instruction by the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

The evaluation is directed by Alex Molnar, formerly of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and a team of researchers from UW-M. Molnar currently directs the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University.

First implemented in 1996-'97 in 30 schools around Wisconsin, SAGE has steadily grown in size. The 2000-'01 evaluation focused on 1,542 third-grade students in 93 participating classrooms in the state and showed continued evidence of higher achievement among students in smaller classes.

To measure academic achievement, third-grade students in SAGE schools and in a group of Comparison schools were administered the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in the spring of 2001.

“The data suggest that students continue to be best served by being in SAGE throughout the early years of their education,’ said Molnar. “In SAGE, Wisconsin policymakers got it right by determining an independent third-party evaluation. Wisconsin has been well served.”

In addition to testing students, SAGE evaluators also conducted interviews and observations in selected second- and third-grade classrooms and administered questionnaires to teachers and principals in all SAGE schools. In analyzing the findings, the evaluators concluded:

- “The major effect of reduced class size is increased individualization.” With fewer students, teachers can better attend to the needs of individual students. Smaller classes, the evaluators concluded, allow more time for instruction and require less time for discipline. They also contribute to greater teacher enthusiasm for their work.
- Increased individualization comes in three forms: improved one-on-one teacher-student interaction; improved small-group tutoring; and improved total class teaching.
- Even where class sizes are reduced, some teachers are more effective in raising achievement than others. Teachers in higher-achieving classrooms “emphasize the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills, mostly through the use of explicit instruction.” These teachers use a structured classroom style with rules and routines and carefully planned and paced lessons. Teachers in lower-achieving classrooms tended to use more permissive student management techniques, and their lessons appeared to be less carefully planned.

The report is available on the SAGE section of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory website at: [www.edpolicylab.org](http://www.edpolicylab.org)