

# SAGE: The Evaluators Respond to Tom Hruz

As the evaluators of Wisconsin's Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program, we are writing to express our deep concern over the reckless allegations made by Tom Hruz in "A Cause for Concern: A More Complete and Honest Look at the SAGE Program" (*Wisconsin School News*, September 2001, pp. 14-15).

In his article, Mr. Hruz states that the SAGE program continues to expand and enjoy widespread support in education policy circles "based in large part on the favorable results of biased evaluations of the program" (p. 14). This claim is consistent with his earlier allegations that SAGE data were "suppressed." Mr. Hruz made that charge in "The Costs and Benefits of Smaller Classes in Wisconsin: A Further Evaluation of the SAGE program" (*WPRI Report*, vol. 13, no. 6, September 2000; [www.wpri.org/Reports/Volume13/Vol13no6.pdf](http://www.wpri.org/Reports/Volume13/Vol13no6.pdf)), a report authored for the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, where he is a resident fellow.

Mr. Hruz is free to advocate for his policy preferences. We are concerned, however, with the allega-

tions he makes of "bias" and "suppression" of data. The common meaning of these terms conveys that we willingly and consciously conspired to manipulate, hide, and falsify the research data and results in order to support a pre-determined agenda. These accusations are false, and we take them seriously.

We find nothing in either Mr. Hruz's Wisconsin Policy Research Institute report or his *Wisconsin School News* commentary to support such allegations.

Numerous outside professionals have scrutinized the research methods and findings of the SAGE evaluations. Our work has gone through a peer review process prior to publication in a number of refereed journals. Our SAGE evaluations have been independently judged to be sound social science research that meets the highest standards of the profession. Indeed, our work is frequently cited as an important contribution to the social science literature on the impact of class size reduction.

Interestingly, Mr. Hruz's analysis has not undergone this same

level of rigorous review. In fact, no data are presented to support his many conclusions, for example, "a policy of direct instruction can have a *greater* effect than simply reducing class size" (p. 14, emphasis added).

We encourage thoughtful critique of social science research in general and our work specifically. To that end, all SAGE evaluation reports and the data on which they are based are available to the public through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Anyone who wishes to reanalyze the SAGE data may do so.

It is unfortunate that Mr. Hruz chooses to attempt to discredit us with unsupportable allegations of "bias" and "suppression" of data rather than offer honest analysis in support of his policy preferences. ▀

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## *SAGE-Related Academic Publications by Members of the SAGE Evaluation Team*

- “Evaluating the SAGE Program: A Pilot Program in Targeted Pupil-Teacher Reduction in Wisconsin,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Summer 1999, pp. 165-177.
- “Reducing Class Size Leads to Individualized Instruction,” *Educational Leadership*, vol. 57, no. 1 (1999), pp. 50-53.
- “Smaller Classes, Better Teaching? Effective Teaching in Reduced Size Classes,” in S. Laine and J. Ward, eds., *Using What We Know: A Review of the Research on Implementing Class-Size Reduction Initiatives for State and Local Policymakers* (Oak Brook, Ill.: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory 2000).
- “Wisconsin’s Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Class Size Reduction Program: Achievement Effects, Teaching Classroom Implications,” in M. Wang and J. Finn, eds., *How Small Classes Help Teachers Do Their Best* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University, 2000).
- “Class Size Reduction: From Promise to Practice,” *Educational Leadership*, vol. 58, no. 6, (2001), pp. 32-34.
- *Teaching Reduced-Class Size Classes: Lessons for Teachers* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University, in press, 2002).
- “Advancement of African-American Students in the Wisconsin SAGE Program’s Reduced Size Classes,” in T. Loveless, ed., *Closing the Gap: Promising Approaches to Reducing the Achievement Gap* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, in press, 2002).

## School Start Date—Fewer than 1/6 of 426 School Districts opted to start after Labor Day

Recently, eight-month Gov. McCallum bowed to campaign funding pressure and decided to take more local control away from Wisconsin’s school districts. Didn’t he just tell us in January how he wanted to work with us? Ken Cole has editorialized that now that the uniform date is law, we’ll have to live with it. That may be, but don’t we all vote? Don’t we have spouses and family who vote? Don’t our district employees and their families vote?

And I believe there is one more way that we can “vote.” Why in the world are we meeting in the belly of the tourism beast, which thinks it knows how to operate school districts better than we do? Are we nuts?

The WASB has opposed statewide school start dates forever, and now we’re continuing to generously support the tourism lobby by patronizing them. Let’s get real, folks! I’d like to propose that we never meet in or anywhere

near Wisconsin Dells again—that we carefully consider field trips so that no yellow buses are seen in the Dells. No CESA meetings. No superintendent meetings. No business officials’ meetings. And lastly, we arrange our personal lives so that we’re not supporting the tourism lobby that opposes the wishes of 360 Wisconsin school districts. ▀

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John Benz, treasurer  
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