



122 W. Washington Avenue, Madison, WI 53703  
Phone: 608-257-2622·Fax: 608-257-8386

John H. Ashley, Executive Director

TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Education  
FROM: Dan Rossmiller, Government Relations Director  
RE: Testimony on Senate Bills 31 & 32 relating to the student achievement guarantee in education (SAGE) program.  
DATE: March 5, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members, my name is Dan Rossmiller, and I am the government relations director for the Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB). Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bills 31 & 32.

The WASB Delegate Assembly meets annually at the state Education Convention to consider resolutions that direct our association's positions on various issues. This year, delegates representing school boards from throughout the state approved Resolution 15-15, which states: "The WASB supports legislation to shift the emphasis of the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Program from class-size reduction to achievement-gap reduction." This is our position.

Wisconsin's challenges surrounding achievement gaps between student subgroups have been well documented. Student poverty certainly impacts achievement gaps. Because of the magnitude of this issue, providing funding for achievement gap reduction efforts is appropriate.

We also appreciate that this proposal provides to school boards flexibility in utilizing SAGE/AGR funds. We feel it is important to note that these funds can still be used for class size reduction if a school board wants to continue doing that. In addition to preserving the small class size option, the bill allows more options that are research-based to help improve student achievement.

The other two intervention options available under the new AGR program are providing instructional coaches for English language arts and math, and one-to-one tutoring. A school is allowed to choose the option that best fits its needs and then create performance goals for and report on the progress its students in the program are making. School boards will receive valuable information about the efficacy of the approach or approaches selected because the bill requires that a participating school report to its school board at the end of every semester of an AGR contract regarding both strategies implemented and progress toward performance objectives. This provides a level of accountability to the public and lawmakers on investment of public dollars in the program. It is also important to note is that there are no sanctions or penalties attached to these reported results.

**Senate Committee on Education  
March 5, 2015**

**Department of Public Instruction Testimony  
on 2015 Senate Bill 31 and 32**

Thank you Chairman Olsen and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Dee Pettack and I am the Legislative Liaison at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). With me today is Jonas Zuckerman, Director of the Title I and School Support Team, which includes the SAGE program. We are here today to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 31 (SB 31) and Senate Bill 32 (SB 32) as these bills raise technical concerns, and more importantly, change the focus of the SAGE program so significantly that it essentially ends a program that has been effective and well utilized in school districts across Wisconsin.

SAGE was created in 1996-97 as a class size reduction program based on the concentration of low-income students in the school. The program quickly became so popular that the eligibility was expanded and now includes 205 school districts, 423 schools, and over 83,000 students in grades K-3. Many children are currently benefitting from this program. Parents across the state know what SAGE is and support the program.

First, I'd like to address SB 31. SB 31 would extend current SAGE contracts for one year. While this seems like an attempt to assist school districts, we are concerned about the patchwork system of solutions created if either of these bills pass on their own. Under current law, 83 percent of our contracts must be renewed for another five year period<sup>1</sup> in the next few months and schools have already begun to plan for the renewal process. Schools need certainty in the contract process which the current five year SAGE contracts provide. If this bill passes on its own it will not allow us to renew any of these contracts again at the conclusion of the extra year. This means that 83 percent of schools in the program will no longer be able to participate.

Second, let's discuss SB 32. SB 32 seeks to rebrand SAGE to create an achievement gap reduction program. While we agree that the achievement gap is a critical need in our state and we believe the legislature should create a program to specifically address the achievement gap. The department has made several proposals in this area, particularly around closing graduation gaps, supporting English learners, and improving workforce outcomes for students with disabilities.

I want to be crystal clear: closing the achievement gap is one of the State Superintendent Ever's top priorities. However, the list of schools and districts that constitute our largest achievement gaps are not necessarily the same as those who are current participants in the SAGE program. SB-32 does not allow new schools to join this reconstituted program, regardless of the

---

<sup>1</sup> 353/423 schools have contracts that expire at the end of the year.

achievement gap in those buildings. The legacy of the old SAGE program would limit which schools could participate from the outset, while changing the program so substantively could impact a school's decision about whether they will participate in programs like this in the future. Schools need consistency and to avoid the duplicative efforts of applying for multiple programs.

The strategies proposed in this bill would allow districts to choose among a number of sound educational strategies. While this additional flexibility can be valuable, it also dilutes the program and would make program evaluation difficult. Additionally, these practices are widely in place in most successful schools, which would limit the impact on students and schools.

In this time of so many moving parts, we hear time and time again that stability is critical to the success of our schools. Allowing the SAGE program to continue is one concrete first step on that path. If we adopt SB 31 and SB 32, some schools will operate under the current SAGE rules and some under the AGR rules and it will lead to more confusion. The Department would love to work with the legislature to craft a program to assist schools to approach achievement gap reduction, but not at the cost of the popular SAGE program. If you have any questions, we would be happy to answer them at this time.



## School Administrators Alliance

*Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children*

---

**TO:** Senate Committee on Education  
**FROM:** John Forester, Director of Government Relations  
**DATE:** March 5, 2015  
**RE:** Senate Bill 32 – Achievement Gap Reduction Program

The School Administrators Alliance (SAA) supports Senate Bill 32, relating to transforming the SAGE program into the Achievement Gap Reduction (AGR) program. This bill was developed by the Joint Legislative Council Study Committee on the SAGE program. Our primary reason for supporting this bill is the enhanced flexibility that would be afforded to schools participating in the Achievement Gap Reduction (AGR) program.

The SAA was strongly invested in the work of the study committee. In fact, our members, in seeking greater SAGE flexibility, were instrumental in the establishment of the study committee. Four school administrators were members of the study committee. Four other administrators were invited to share their insights and expertise before the committee. Finally, the SAA collaborated with the committee, and with the Value-Added Research Consortium (VARC), on a survey of school district administrators in districts with at least one school eligible, but not participating, in the SAGE program.

The net result of this involvement was: (1) All four school administrators on the committee supported Senate Bill 32; (2) All four SAA members invited to speak to the committee spoke to the need for additional SAGE flexibility; and (3) Survey respondents reported that they would be most likely to increase future SAGE participation if funding were increased and more flexibility afforded on class size restrictions.

Under current law, a school district may enter into a five-year, renewable SAGE contract with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to maintain class size ratios of 18:1 or 30:2 in exchange for state categorical aid for each low-income student enrolled in grades eligible for SAGE funding.

This bill, if enacted, would require schools participating in the AGR program to implement one of three instructional strategies, or a combination of the three: (1) small class-size ratios of 18:1 or 30:2; (2) evidence-based instructional coaching for teachers; or (3) evidence-based one-to-one tutoring for students at risk of under-performance in math and reading. Information presented before the study committee suggested that these last two strategies have proven effective at helping to close income-based achievement gaps.

I think it is important to note that schools currently participating in SAGE would not have to change their current instructional strategy (class size reduction) in order to meet their obligations under the AGR contract. They would only be required to view their performance objectives and results through the lens of income-based achievement gap closure.

Since joining the SAA more than 13 years ago, I have been struck by the steady and continuous drumbeat of school districts seeking SAGE flexibility. For years, these districts have been caught between the twin fiscal crunches of allowable per pupil revenues and the classroom space necessary to operate the SAGE program. If these districts did not support the program, they could have simply discontinued SAGE in their districts. Instead, in these difficult fiscal times, they continue seeking a way to keep operating the program for the benefit of their K-3 students.

The SAA supports SB 32 for the enhanced flexibility it affords participating school districts and because it provides evidence-based instructional alternatives that, in our estimation, furthers the attainment of our objective for education policy in Wisconsin – improving student achievement for all kids and closing achievement gaps. We also support the provision in the bill making the AGR aid appropriation sum-sufficient.

We urge your support of SB 32. If you should have any questions regarding the SAA's support, please call me at (608) 242-1370.