

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

Survey Results and Analysis

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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.

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Introduction

Wisconsin's Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program is a statewide program intended to improve student achievement in kindergarten through third grade through the use of four strategies: (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 development and staff evaluation practices.

SAGE was implemented in 30 schools in the 1996-97 school year and has since grown to nearly 600 schools.¹ Although SAGE is sometimes considered simply a reduced class-size reform, it is actually a multifaceted reform program. Each of its elements are intended to relate to and enhance the effects of the others. For example, smaller class size by itself is expected to lead to improved academic results. The assumption of the SAGE program is that even higher academic results will occur when smaller class sizes are combined with a more rigorous academic curriculum and teachers properly trained in teaching in small size classrooms.

The improvement of professional development and staff evaluation practices is the focus of this study. It addresses the following questions: (1) To what extent have SAGE professional development requirements been implemented in SAGE schools? (2) How might the professional development elements of Wisconsin's new teacher standards and No Child Left Behind (ESEA) 2001 affect SAGE schools? and; (3) How might SAGE schools address professional development programs in light of new legislative requirements and current best practices identified in the research literature?

In designing and implementing a program of professional development that meets the various legislative requirements, SAGE schools have a window of opportunity to align the specific training needed by SAGE educators with the best practices suggested by research to make the most efficient use of the SAGE programs resources to enhance students academic achievement. The convergence of the legislative requirements of the SAGE law, the new Wisconsin Teacher Standards, and the federal No Child Left Behind act provides SAGE schools with the prospect of transforming their professional development programs from the traditional training model to a new paradigm in which the entire school is a learning community and teachers and administrators learn as well as the students. Well-designed professional development programs for SAGE schools offer the opportunity to shift the school culture from one of the individual isolated, teacher working alone to one where consultation and collaboration are common in pursuit of the school-wide goal of improved student learning and achievement.

Student Achievement Guarantee in Education Program²

The professional development provisions of Wisconsin's SAGE legislation (Wisconsin Acts and Statutes s. 118.43), require each school participating in the program to:

- 1) Develop a one-year program for all newly hired teachers to assist in their transition from their previous employment or school to their current employment.
- 2) Provide time for employees to collaborate and plan.
- 3) Ensure that each teacher and administrator submit a professional development plan that focuses on how the individual will help improve student academic achievement.
- 4) Regularly review professional development plans to determine their efficacy in improving student academic achievement.
- 5) Establish an evaluation process for professional staff members that:
 - a. Identifies individual strengths and weaknesses.
 - b. Clearly describes areas in need of improvement.
 - c. Includes a support plan that provides opportunities to learn and improve.
 - d. Documents performance in accordance with the plan.
 - e. Allows professional staff members to comment on and contribute to revisions of the evaluation process.

Student Achievement Guarantee in Education Program Follow-up Survey

In June 2001, the Wisconsin Education Association Council conducted a survey of teachers working in SAGE classrooms. At that time, teachers were asked if they would agree to participate in this follow-up survey. The follow-up survey included questions about the requirements of the SAGE program and Wisconsin Teacher Standards reform initiatives. The survey was mailed in February of 2002. In March of 2002, a second mailing was sent to those who had not responded. The analysis of data

was begun in April 2002. Of the teachers (1,048) who took part in the initial survey, 325, (31%), participated in this survey. Table 1 provides a profile of survey respondents.

Table 1: Profile of Survey Respondents

Survey Question	Response	<i>N</i>
Gender	Female: 96% Male: 4%	321
SAGE classroom teaching experience*	Mean: 2.4 years Median: 2.0 years	305
Mean SAGE teaching experience for teachers of specified grade levels	Kindergarten: 2.2 years 1 st grade: 2.1 years 2 nd grade: 2.1 years 3 rd grade: 1.5 years	141 168 66 9
Total teaching experience	Mean: 15.0 years Median: 15.0 years	296
Percentage of respondents by years of SAGE classroom teaching experience	Less than one year: 1.1% One to Two years: 30.5% Two to Three years: 39.4% Three to Four years: 11.8% Four or more years: 17.3%	279
Highest degree attained	Bachelor's: 53.3% Graduate degree: 46.7%	319

Source: SAGE Follow-up Survey conducted February/March 2002.

*7 surveys were disregarded in the computation of SAGE classroom teaching experience statistics due to invalid responses.

For the “Yes-No” SAGE-related questions, the survey was constructed so that “YES” responses indicate compliance with or implementation of requirements set forth in the SAGE legislation. The number of “YES” responses to each question was tabulated and the results for each question were divided into quarters. The implementation of each requirement was then scored based on the number of “YES” responses. Thus, on implementation, a question producing “YES” answers from 0 to 25 percent of respondents was scored low; a question to which 26 to 50 percent of respondents answered “YES” was scored as low to moderate; a question to which 51 to 75 percent

answered “YES” was scored as moderately high; and a question to which 76 percent or more answered “YES” was scored high. Affirmative answers ranged from a low of 10 percent to a high of 67 percent.

Table 2 below overall teacher responses for the survey questions related to the teacher professional development requirements under the SAGE legislation.

Table 2: Survey Questions Related to Level of Implementation of SAGE Requirements.

Survey Questions	Responses		
	YES	NO	N
Moderately High			
Did you submit a professional development plan that focuses on how you will improve student academic achievement?	62%	38%	315
Do you receive support from your principal when implementing your professional development plan?	59%	41%	281
Have you participated in an evaluation process that identified your individual strengths and weaknesses and clearly described any areas of needed improvement?	57%	43%	313
Have you had the opportunity to make modifications to your professional development plan to reflect changes in your teaching practice?	56%	44%	279
Is the evaluation process of your professional development plan a collaborative effort between you and your supervisor?	56%	44%	286
Have you been given the opportunity to comment on and contribute to the professional development evaluation process at your school?	55%	45%	311
Is your professional development plan part of professional development program at your school?	54%	46%	292
Has your professional development plan been regularly reviewed to determine if it is effective in helping to improve student academic achievement?	52%	48%	286
Has your teaching performance been documented in accordance with your professional development plan?	52%	48%	279
Moderately Low			
Are SAGE program goals used to help design professional development activities in your school?	49%	51%	314
Were you given assistance in developing and implementing a rigorous curriculum?	46%	54%	314

Did your professional development plan include a method by which you will receive evaluations from a variety of sources on your success of your efforts?	46%	54%	283
Did this evaluation process include formulating a support plan that outlined opportunities available to learn and improve your teaching practices?	33%	67%	287
Do SAGE teachers at your school receive additional time to plan and collaborate with other SAGE teachers?	31%	69%	314
Low			
If you came from a non-SAGE school, were you given the opportunity to participate in a one-year transition program to help you with your transition from a non-SAGE school to this SAGE school?	10%	90%	227

Source: SAGE Follow-up Survey conducted February/March 2002.

Overall, survey results suggest that SAGE schools have had only mixed success at implementing the professional development and evaluation requirements in the SAGE legislation. Of fifteen questions, one (6.7%) received less than 25 percent affirmative responses and fell into the low implementation category; five (33.3%) were grouped in the low to moderate category; nine questions (60.0%) were in the moderate to high grouping; and no questions received enough “YES” replies to place them in the highest implementation category.

Low Implementation

Only one question received so few “YES” responses (25 percent or less) that it fell in the lowest implementation category. Only 10 percent of respondents reported that they were given the opportunity to participate in a one-year transition program to their new SAGE schools.

Low to Moderate Implementation

Five of the 15 questions (33.3%) drew “YES” responses from 26 to 50 percent of those surveyed, meaning that they scored low to moderate on implementation. Of those, two questions drew affirmative responses from less than 35 percent of those surveyed. These questions asked whether SAGE teachers at the respondent’s school received additional time to plan and collaborate with other SAGE teachers, and whether the evaluation process in use included formulating a support plan that delineated opportunities available to learn and improve the respondent’s teaching practices. The remaining three questions that scored low to moderate in implementation drew “YES” responses from more than 45 percent of the respondents. These questions addressed whether each development plan included a method that would ensure that each teacher received evaluations from a variety of sources (46% yes responses), whether each teacher received assistance in developing and implementing a rigorous curriculum (46% yes responses) and whether the SAGE program goals were being used to design professional development activities in the respondent’s school (49% yes responses).

Moderate to High Implementation

The remaining eight questions all scored moderate to high for implementation, meaning that 51 to 75 percent of respondents answered, “YES” to each of them. Of these eight questions, however, only one had more than 60 percent “YES” responses. That question (62% yes responses) asked whether the SAGE participants submitted a development plan aimed at improving student academic achievement. The other elements of the SAGE legislation that were rated “moderate to high” in implementation

are directly related to peer review, evaluation, and consequent modification of individual SAGE teachers' development plans. These included whether teachers received support from their principals in the evaluation process (59% yes responses), whether teachers were aided in identifying strengths and weaknesses in their teaching practices (56% yes responses), and whether teachers were able to make modifications accordingly (56% yes responses).

Professional Development Experiences of SAGE teachers

As part of the survey, teachers were also given the opportunity to supply short answers to questions about the professional development program at their school. The questions posed and counts of the responses are given below in tables 3-5.

Table 3: Professional Development Activities Rated Most Effective

Response	% of 227	<i>N</i>
Professional Development that focused on reading	15%	34
Professional Development that was related to the classroom and appropriate grade level	11%	25
Professional Development that allowed time for collaboration to share ideas with colleagues	8%	18
Professional Development that focused on writing	6%	14
Professional Development that focused on team teaching	6%	14
Professional Development related to SAGE	5%	11

N = 227 Source: SAGE Follow-up Survey conducted February/March 2002.

Respondents rated as most effective professional development activities that covered reading and writing as well as those that allowed time for teachers to work together, collaborate, and share ideas. According to the research literature (covered in

more detail later in the report), such professional development activities were most likely effective because:

- 1) They focused teachers on content knowledge and instructional strategies.
- 2) They gave teachers the time necessary for collaborative activities.
- 3) The focus of the professional development program was related to the classroom.

Table 4: Professional Development Activities Rated Least Effective

Response	% of 127	<i>N</i>
Professional Development not related to classroom or appropriate grade level	16%	20
Professional Development not related to SAGE	14%	18
Professional Development that were presented poorly	12%	15
Professional Development that focused on technology	9%	12
Professional Development that didn't allow time for implementation into the classroom	9%	11
Professional Development offered by the district	5%	11

N = 127 Source: SAGE Follow-up Survey conducted February/March 2002.

Respondents rated as least effective professional development activities that:

- 1) Did not seem related to the classroom or to an appropriate grade level.
- 2) Did not seem relevant to teaching needs in SAGE classrooms.
- 3) Were not presented or modeled using effective pedagogy.
- 4) Were offered by the district

Table 5: Questions Related to How Your School’s Professional Development Program Might Be Improved

Response	% of 208	<i>N</i>
We need more time.	26%	54
We need more professional development activities related to SAGE.	19%	39
We need more opportunities to collaborate with colleagues.	17%	36
We need a professional development program at our school.	15%	31
We need more funding.	8%	17
We (teachers) need to be consulted for input in the design, development, and decision-making process of professional development activities.	8%	17
We need more options to choose from.	7%	14
We need professional development activities that are relevant to classroom and student goals.	7%	14

N = 208 Source: SAGE Follow-up Survey conducted February/March 2002.

Additional time for staff development, opportunities for collaboration, and relevancy to SAGE topped the list of respondents’ suggestions for improving existing professional development activities at their schools.

Wisconsin Teacher Standards

Teacher licensure rules for teacher candidates and continuing education and professional development requirements for educators practicing in Wisconsin are about to change. A new set of licensure rules based on the Wisconsin Teacher Standards, with demonstrated proficiency required in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for each of the specified standards will take effect on July 1, 2004. The new licensure rules effectively move teacher preparation and license renewal from a course/credit orientation

to a demonstrated competency basis. To be certified for their initial educator licenses, candidates, through their teacher preparation programs, will have to demonstrate or exhibit that they possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions identified in the Wisconsin Teacher Standards. Teachers seeking to renew their licenses will be required to engage in a program of self-planned and self-directed professional development tied to the Wisconsin Teacher Standards.³ Wisconsin's Teacher Standards are comprised of ten major elements:⁴

1) **Teachers know the subjects they are teaching.**

The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the disciplines she or he teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for pupils.

2) **Teachers know how children grow.**

The teacher understands how children with broad ranges of ability learn and provides instruction that supports their intellectual, social, and personal development.

3) **Teachers understand that children learn differently.**

The teacher understands how pupils differ in their approaches to learning and the barriers that impede learning and can adapt instruction to meet the diverse needs of pupils, including those with disabilities and exceptional needs.

4) **Teachers know how to teach.**

The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies, including the use of technology, to encourage children's development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

5) **Teachers know how to manage a classroom.**

The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

6) **Teachers communicate well.**

The teacher uses effective verbal and nonverbal communication techniques as well as instructional media and technology to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.

7) **Teachers are able to plan different kinds of lessons.**

The teacher organizes and plans systematic instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, pupils, the community, and curriculum goals.

8) **Teachers know how to test for student progress.**

The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the pupil.

9) **Teachers are able to evaluate themselves.**

The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his or her choices and actions on pupils, parents, professionals in

the learning community and others and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.

10) **Teachers are connected with other teachers and the community.**

The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support pupil learning and well being and acts with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner.

Professional Development Plans Under Wisconsin Teacher Standards

Although the Wisconsin teacher standards will not go into effect until July 1, 2004, it is important to consider the effect that the new standards will have on SAGE program teachers and their professional development needs. Under Wisconsin's teacher standards legislation, teachers must develop personal professional development plans that focus on one or more of these standards. To qualify for the professional educator's license from the initial license, an initial educator must devise a professional development plan that shows increased proficiency in those Wisconsin Teacher Standards that have been identified as areas for improvement.⁵ The professional development plan shall include the following:

- 1) Specific activities and objectives related to professional development goals, school or district goals or the educator's own identified performance goals.
- 2) A timeline for achieving the professional development goals.
- 3) Evidence of collaboration with professional peers and others.
- 4) A self-assessment plan that specifies indicators growth.

Teachers who complete the objectives of their professional development plans must document having done so with a portfolio of evidence. Teachers already holding professional educator certification will undergo a similar process to renew their licenses. In this case, a renewal requires a professional development plan that shows increased proficiency and that reflects the Wisconsin teacher standards, as appropriate, including:

- 1) Goals and objectives that address the selected Wisconsin teacher standards with a rationale for each goal.
- 2) Specific activities related to the professional development goals with evidence of application to the classroom or learning community.
- 3) A timeline for achieving the professional development goals with evidence of annual review of goals and activities.
- 4) Evidence of collaboration with professional peers and others, including a required review panel.
- 5) An assessment plan that specifies indicators of growth and how meeting the goals improved the educators professional knowledge and affected student learning.

Renewing teachers also must present a portfolio of evidence documenting their professional development plans to a professional development team consisting of licensed classroom teachers, administrators, and pupil service professionals.⁶

Survey Responses Related to Wisconsin Teacher Standards

Table 6 on the next page shows teachers' responses to questions related to the requirements of the Wisconsin Teacher Standards from the SAGE teacher follow-up survey and the professional development activities in which they participated during the 2000-01 and 2001-02 academic years. The data reveal gaps between current professional

development activities in SAGE schools and future professional development requirements of the new Wisconsin Teacher Standards.

Table 6: Respondents' Level of Participation in Professional Development Related to the Wisconsin Teacher Standards.

Have you participated in professional development activities that focused on:	2000-01			2001-02		
	YES	NO	<i>N</i>	YES	NO	<i>N</i>
Understanding students' broad range of learning abilities and providing instruction that supports students' intellectual, social, and personal development?	60%	40%	299	58%	42%	285
Understanding barriers that impede learning and adapting instruction to meet the diverse needs of students, including those with special needs?	52%	48%	297	50%	50%	282
Using formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate, ensure, and document continuous learning and development?	60%	40%	298	56%	44%	291
Using a variety of instructional strategies to encourage critical thinking and problem solving?	51%	49%	298	48%	52%	286
Creating a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation?	49%	51%	298	46%	54%	288
Using verbal and nonverbal communication to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom?	37%	63%	300	36%	64%	288
Utilizing knowledge of subject matter, students, community, and curriculum goals to systematically organize and plan for your classroom?	49%	51%	296	47%	53%	290
Fostering and developing relationships with school colleagues, parents, and larger school community to support student learning and well being?	39%	61%	299	40%	60%	291
Using reflective practice to evaluate teaching, choices, and actions?	33%	67%	296	34%	66%	289

Source: SAGE Follow-up Survey conducted February/March 2002.

The data in Table 6 suggest respondents are already, to varying degrees, engaged in professional development activities of the types required by the Wisconsin Teacher Standards. For example, nearly six of ten teachers reported having participated in

activities related to how children with broad ranges of ability learn and how to provide instruction that supports their intellectual social and personal development. A similar percentage also reported participating in professional development activities that use formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of students. Conversely, only about three of every ten teachers reported participating in professional development activities that focused on using reflective practice to evaluate teaching, choices, and actions. Overall, the results between 2000-01 and 2001-02 were remarkably stable, with only a few percentage point differences in the results between the two school years. It should be noted however, that for seven of the nine questions, the percentage of “YES” answers decreased from 2000-01 to 2001-02. The more desired outcome would be increasing numbers of affirmative answers over time. Overall, the results suggest that only a slight majority of SAGE teachers surveyed are currently taking part in professional development activities congruent with the new standards promulgated under the Wisconsin Teacher Standards legislation.

As a part of the survey, respondents were asked if their school districts provided them with information about the Wisconsin teacher standards and their opinion as to the adequacy of the information provided. About 67 percent indicated that their school districts had already provided them with information on the new teacher standards, while 33 percent reported that they had not been provided with such information (see Table 7 on the next page).

Table 7: Respondents' Reporting of the Source and Adequacy of Information Related To The Wisconsin Teacher Standards

Survey Questions	Response		<i>N</i>
	YES	NO	
Did your district provide you with information about Wisconsin's new teacher standards, which go into effect in July 2004?	67%	33%	318
Did you receive an explanation of the new requirements under Wisconsin's teacher standards that in your judgment was adequate?	49%	51%	304

Source: SAGE Follow-up Survey conducted February/March 2002.

Of those who received information from their school districts, 71 percent reported that they were satisfied that they received an adequate explanation. A content analysis (a quantitative count of qualitative data) of 189 written responses to the survey revealed that out of those 189 respondents, 53 percent reported they were given information in written form via flyers, brochures, and handouts; 24 percent reported they received information via staff meetings, and 20 percent reported that information was provided through staff development workshops.

Another 29 percent of teachers reported they received information from the district and that the explanation was, in their opinion, inadequate. Content analysis of 145 written responses revealed that 15 percent of those respondents reported they were still unclear about the requirements. It is apparent that many SAGE school districts are making efforts to ensure that teachers are informed and understand the new Wisconsin teacher standards. It is also apparent that as the deadline for implementation nears, schools and school districts must communicate these new standards to their personnel more effectively.

No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA 2001)

States receiving funds under Title 1 are now accountable for teacher quality under the No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA 2001). By the end of the 2005-06 school year, states must develop a plan to ensure that all teachers are “highly qualified.” To be rated as “highly qualified,” current public elementary school teachers must, at a minimum, possess a bachelor’s degree and show competency in each of the academic subjects they teach, or alternatively, must have completed an academic major or a specified amount of coursework.⁷

The No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA 2001) reflects the belief that even the most effective teachers must continue learning if they are to successfully implement new subject material, instructional methods, and technology into their teaching practices.⁸

The No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA 2001) emphasizes professional development opportunities that focus on:

- 1) Improving and increasing teachers’ knowledge of the academic subjects they teach.
- 2) Teaching strategies for students with disabilities, special learning needs and limited English proficiency.
- 3) Strategies to increase parent involvement.
- 4) The knowledge and skills needed to help students meet challenging state academic content and achievement standards.
- 5) Improving classroom management skills.
- 6) District improvement plans.
- 7) Professional development as an integral part of the daily life of school.
- 8) Advancing teacher understanding of effective instructional strategies.
- 9) Training teachers and principals in the use of technology.

- 10) Aligning state academic content standards, achievement standards and assessments.
- 11) Using data and assessments to improve instructional strategies and student learning in the classroom.
- 12) Evaluating professional development activities for their impact on increased teacher effectiveness and improved student achievement.

The law explicitly states that one-day or short-term workshops are not acceptable professional development activities.⁹ However, according to Sparks and Hirsch, the traditional one-day workshop is currently one of the most popular methods for professional development activities.¹⁰ It is thus clear that the typical short-term professional development practices common today will be inadequate to satisfy the act's new professional development requirements.

Professional Development Literature

In addition to the legislative requirements of the SAGE law, the Wisconsin Teacher Standards, and the No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA 2001), the academic research literature can provide guidance for planning the content and process of SAGE schools' professional development programs. The importance of professional development activities to improved educational outcomes has been well established in the research literature. Some of the outcome areas that may be affected by professional development include: teacher knowledge, teacher attitudes and beliefs, teaching practice, school-level practice, and student achievement.¹¹

A growing body of research literature indicates that professional development is most likely to be effective when such programs and their activities are guided by certain

general principles.¹² Reitzug reports that a general consensus in the research literature supports eight principles to maximize the effectiveness of professional development:¹³

Eight Principles of Effective Professional Development Consistent with Scholarly Literature

- 1) **Professional development strategies should develop at the school level as opposed to being designed and mandated by districts.**

In the past, most staff development initiatives originated at the district level, and were characterized often as one day, one-size-fits-all workshops that offered little follow up at the school level.¹⁴ J.W. Little points out the ineffectiveness of such one-size-fits-all models of professional development because they often fail to take teacher background and experience, local conditions and school context into account.¹⁵ Hammond and McLaughlin argue that the “habits and cultures inside schools must foster critical inquiry into teaching practices and students outcomes.”¹⁶ If such cultures and conditions are to be truly incorporated into the professional development strategy of schools, it becomes essential that those programs originate within the schools themselves. As these school reform movements receive “top down” support from districts and states, it will provide schools with the funding and the authority needed to ensure success.¹⁷

- 2) **Professional development programs must have as their primary objective the learning needs of students if such programs are to be successful.**

Sparks contends that a shift must occur “from a focus on adult needs to a focus on student needs and learning outcomes.”¹⁸ As teachers “become deeply immersed

in subject matter and teaching methods”¹⁹ they will be equipped with the skills necessary to meet students’ learning needs through providing effective instruction. Cohen and Hill reported that California math students tended to perform at higher levels when their teachers had “extended opportunities to learn about mathematics curriculum and instruction.”²⁰

- 3) **Professional development plans increase in effectiveness when they are “sustained” and “rigorous” and are implemented over extended periods of time.**²¹

In their *National Plan for Improving Professional Development*, Sparks and Hirsch suggest that there must be “substantial changes in how schools schedule teachers and time” if schools wish to see positive gains as a result of their staff development initiatives.²² Teachers reported that they were most likely to transfer their learning to their classroom and that the professional development activities had significantly improved their teaching if they participated in professional development activities that required eight or more hours of training.²³

- 4) **Professional development strategies must move away from “formal staff development that introduces largely standardized content”²⁴ and embrace more constructivist learning structures.**

Sparks notes that “constructivist teaching will be best learned through constructivist staff development.”²⁵ This assertion means that teachers should be offered “meaningful intellectual, social, and emotional engagement with ideas,

with materials, and with colleagues both in and out of teaching”²⁶ to allow them to build their own knowledge structures as opposed to having “experts” relate knowledge to them.²⁷

In contrast to the “shallow, fragmented content and the passive teacher roles observable in much implementation training,”²⁸ teachers will be engaged in activities such as action research, problem solving, and reflective practice; all proven methods of effective adult learning.²⁹

5) **In order to effectively implement techniques and practices learned in staff training workshops, teachers must be aided by support activities.**

Sparks points out that many current staff development workshops are conducted “with no thought given to follow-up or to how the new technique fits in...”³⁰

Hammond and McLaughlin propose schools pursue professional development plans which are “supported by modeling, coaching, and the collective solving of specific problems of practice.”³¹ Research has shown that a “dramatic increase of transfer in training...occurs when in-class coaching is added to an initial training experience comprised of theory explanation, demonstration, and practice with feedback.”³²

6) **Professional development strategies should be designed to offer opportunities for teachers to work collectively and learn from each other.**

Lieberman and Miller report that schools whose professional development efforts are “impoverished” are characterized as “places where teachers rarely talked to

each other, where work was perceived as routine, and where both self-reliance and isolation flourished.”³³ As schools “allow more time for staff to work and plan together,”³⁴ they will be able to “focus on teachers’ communities of practice rather than on individual teachers.”³⁵ This reflects Sparks contention that one of the most important changes that must occur in staff development is a shift in focus “from individual development to individual *and* organizational development.”³⁶

7) **In order for professional development to be successful, it must be a part of the daily school experience.**

Stein, reporting the successful implementation of professional development plans in three Pennsylvania schools, comments that the success of said development plans was due to their being “grounded in day-to-day practice.”³⁷ Research indicates that “one of the most effective forms of professional development takes place when teachers have opportunities to work together and learn from each other throughout the day.”³⁸ These daily efforts must be inquiry-oriented³⁹ and allow teachers to observe each other, talk about their teaching, and work collaboratively to find solutions for problems.⁴⁰

8) **Principals and other school leaders should create support structures for teachers that provide common meeting times to work collaboratively with colleagues as well as receive feedback on their performance.**⁴¹

This need is echoed by Leithwood, who suggests that principals “develop norms of reflection” as well as “norms of collaboration” in their schools.⁴² As principals

as other school leaders take the initiative in establishing professional development as “one of their most important responsibilities,”⁴³ schools will begin to see the creation of an environment and culture where educators are “better equipped to help all students reach high levels.”⁴⁴

The research literature further suggests that there is a considerable distance between common professional development practice and the eight principles. Researchers have found that most professional development training consists primarily of disjointed, short-term, prepackaged in-service programs that heavily rely on “one size fits all” designs. In addition, professional development opportunities are often limited and their focus often has little to do with the day-to-day work experience of teachers in their classrooms or with student learning goals.⁴⁵

Alignment of Legislative Requirements with Principles of Effective Professional Development

The general scholarly consensus on the characteristics of effective professional development are to a considerable degree reflected in SAGE legislative requirements, Wisconsin Teacher Standards, and the No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA 2001). Table 8 on the next page illustrates whether the broad principles of effective professional development are addressed in each of the three reform initiatives reviewed.

Table 8: Principles of Effective Professional Development Broadly Supported by the Scholarly Literature.

Principles of Effective Professional Development Broadly Supported by the Scholarly Literature	SAGE	Wisconsin Teacher Standards	No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA 2001)
Principle 1: Decisions about professional development should be made within schools rather than at the district level.	X	X	
Principle 2: Professional development should be focused on instruction and student learning.	X	X	X
Principle 3: Professional development activities must take place over an extended period of time.	X	X	X
Principle 4: Professional development activities should model effective pedagogy.	X	X	X
Principle 5: Professional development activities must be supported by modeling and coaching in order to attain a higher degree of effectiveness.			
Principle 6: Professional development should focus communities of practice rather than on individual teachers.	X	X	
Principle 7: Effective professional development requires that continuous inquiry be embedded in the daily life of the school.			X
Principle 8: Principals and other school leaders must provide proactive support for professional development and the initiatives upon which it is focused.	X	X	

The SAGE law and the Wisconsin Teacher Standards address six of the eight principles of effective professional development. Furthermore, SAGE requirements and the Wisconsin Teacher Standards address the same six principles (1,2,3,4,6,8).

ESEA 2001 addresses four of the eight principles, including one, principle 5, that is not explicitly addressed by either SAGE or the Wisconsin Teacher Standards.

Principle 5 requires that professional development activities must be supported by modeling and coaching. Professional development that conforms to principle 5 might look like training activities with numerous demonstrations, practice with feedback, in-class coaching, and other follow-up support.⁴⁶

Neither SAGE, the Wisconsin standards, nor ESEA 2001 address principle 7, which requires that professional development be in the form of continuous inquiry embedded in the daily life of the school, the only principle not covered by one of these three regulatory regimes. Principle 7 requires that professional development (teacher learning) be seen by teachers and administrators as an essential part of daily school life, not as an occasional add-on. This principle requires that professional development depart from its traditional form and instead move toward a form of continuous inquiry and learning that is internalized in the daily activities of the school. ⁴⁷ Moving toward principle 7 might require the greatest change from the way professional development is currently carried out in most schools. It should be noted, however, that schools that comply with Wisconsin's SAGE and teacher standards requirements will not face significant additional requirements due to ESEA 2001.

Discussion and Recommendations

The Wisconsin Teacher Standards, ESEA 2001, and the existing SAGE requirements all affect professional development in SAGE schools. The three reforms are largely compatible with each other and with the scholarly consensus about the principles of effective professional development. The convergence of the legislative requirements of the SAGE law, the Wisconsin Teacher Standards, and the federal ESEA 2001 act, along with the identified gaps in implementation of current SAGE requirements and the principles of effective professional development identified in the scholarly literature, combine to offer a window of opportunity as well as a road map to help move SAGE professional development away from the short term, individual training toward

longer-term, extended collaborative development for teachers. The structure of a professional development program can be an important means toward the building of a school culture that values and supports inquiry, collaboration, and learning.

The SAGE law contains a series of professional development requirements consistent with the principles of effective professional development Reitzug has identified. The SAGE survey results suggest that SAGE schools have at best been moderately successful at implementing SAGE professional development requirements and in some instances have done poorly.

Under the requirements of the SAGE legislation, each participating school is required to:

- Have each teacher and administrator submit an individual professional development plan focused on improving student academic achievement (62% yes responses);
- Regularly review individual professional development plans to determine their efficacy in improving student academic achievement (52% yes responses);
- Establish an evaluation process that identifies individual strengths and weaknesses and clearly describes areas in need of improvement (57% yes responses), and includes a plan that supports opportunities to learn and improve, documents performance in accordance with the plan (52% yes responses); and allows staff members to comment on and contribute to revisions of the evaluation process (55% yes responses);
- Provide additional time for staff to collaborate and plan (31% yes responses);

- Develop a one-year program transitional program for all newly hired teachers (10% yes responses).

The SAGE professional development and evaluation requirements themselves set forth a structure for a professional development program supported by the scholarly literature and consistent with Wisconsin's new Teacher Standards and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. However, the opportunity offered by the SAGE program can only be realized by implementing its requirements more thoroughly in participating schools.

Teachers' SAGE survey responses provide information about what they seek in a professional development program. In general, they suggest that more effective professional development activities should focus on academic content knowledge, instructional strategies, and collaboration with colleagues, and the specific needs of SAGE teachers (teaching in reduced-size classrooms).

The laws themselves and the findings presented here therefore suggest several recommendations for organization and content of professional development programs in SAGE schools. The recommendations fall into two broad categories: those concerning professional development program structure and those concerning the initial content of the professional development programs.

Program Structure Recommendations

Recommendation: *Train district administrators and school principals in the SAGE program about the program's requirements for professional development and evaluation.*

Basis for this recommendation: The survey suggests that participating schools do not yet universally comply with SAGE requirements for professional development. One

likely reason for only a moderate level of compliance is that some administrators and principals remain unfamiliar with the scope and details of those requirements. The State Department of Public Instruction should sponsor training to better inform administrators and principals of those requirements.

Recommendation: *Inform teachers in SAGE schools about the program’s professional development and evaluation processes and requirements.*

Basis for this recommendation: Because the SAGE program requires significant input from teachers in planning, carrying out, and evaluating the effects of the professional development plan, it is critical that teachers have a good understanding of their rights, obligations, and responsibilities under the program. A previous survey found that only about half of teachers were aware of the requirements for support plans and formal evaluations.⁴⁸ District administrators and school principals should conduct training to inform instructional staff of those requirements.

Recommendation: *Ensure that all teachers participate in the formulation and revision of their school’s “achievement guarantee contract” with the state.*

Basis for this recommendation: Teacher participation in the formulation of, and any subsequent revision of, their school’s “achievement guarantee contract” will ensure a more consistent focus on improving student achievement. Researchers have consistently reported that academic achievement is unlikely to improve significantly unless its improvement was prime goal all along.⁴⁹ The SAGE law, Wisconsin Teacher Standards, and the No Child Left Behind (ESEA 2001) act all emphasize that professional

development efforts focus on student achievement. Staff participation in the planning process should make this focus explicit to help them stay on target in their efforts and reinforce that the assessment of SAGE is an ongoing process.

Recommendation: *Ensure that all teachers new to the SAGE program receive the yearlong transition plan required under the current SAGE law.*

Basis for this recommendation: Only 10 percent of survey respondents reported that they had the opportunity to participate in a transition plan when they joined a SAGE school. SAGE law *requires* this program for teachers new to SAGE teaching irrespective of prior teaching experience. A prior SAGE evaluation identified teacher behaviors that appear to increase student learning.⁵⁰ The initial transition training is an important opportunity to impart to new teachers the tools for success in SAGE.

Recommendation: *Provide adequate time for professional development.*

Basis for this recommendation: SAGE law requires that schools “provide time for employees to collaborate and plan.”⁵¹ Survey results suggest that SAGE schools have not yet fully implemented this requirement. Of 325 survey respondents, 85 percent reported not receiving any additional time to plan or collaborate with other SAGE teachers. The 15 percent who reported receiving extra time described receiving, on average, 65 minutes a week. While the requirement does not specify a minimum amount of time, the SAGE requirements, Wisconsin Teacher Standards, No Child Left Behind (ESEA 2001), and the research literature all suggest that more time be spent on professional development on a regular basis.⁵²

Recommendation: *Ensure that professional development is provided for an extended period of time.*

Basis for this recommendation: For substantive changes to take place in complex activities such as teaching and learning, research suggests that training for improvement must be sustained over an extended time period.⁵³ Short-term or “one-shot” training sessions have not been found to be effective in producing lasting change. This view is affirmed in the federal “No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA 2001). The law holds that acceptable professional development activities must be of sufficient intensity and duration to have a positive and lasting impact on the teacher’s performance in the classroom. Further, the ESEA 2001 act specifically states that “1-day or short-term workshops and conferences”⁵⁴ are not considered acceptable.

Recommendation: *Design structures for professional development practices so they include opportunities for school-wide collaboration.*

Basis for this recommendation: The research literature indicates that opportunity to collaborate and learn from one’s colleagues is one of the most effective professional development activities.⁵⁵ Observation, shared work, and shared problem solving appear to be especially enriching when compared to the traditional approach of working in isolation from one’s colleagues. There is considerable consensus in the research literature that developing “communities of practice” is a potent professional development approach and an effective means of improving student learning. This need is reflected in

survey results, which lists increased opportunities to collaborate with colleagues within SAGE schools as one of the top three suggested areas for improvement.

Initial Program Content

Recommendation: *Teachers should be trained in effective instructional strategies for reduced size classrooms.*

Basis for this recommendation: Reducing class size increases teacher-student interaction, allowing teachers to better attend to their students' educational needs.⁵⁶ SAGE evaluations have identified differing instructional and organizational behaviors associated with lower- and higher-performing SAGE classrooms.⁵⁷ For instance, teachers in higher achieving classrooms tended to use well-planned, logically sequential lessons that focused on the acquisition of core knowledge and skills. Lower achieving classrooms tended to use more permissive student management techniques and often displayed a less ordered lesson management style.

Recommendation: *Ensure that professional development content is focused on academic content.*

Basis for this recommendation: The SAGE law, Wisconsin Teacher Standards, and the No Child Left Behind (ESEA 2001) act and the research literature all emphasize that professional development efforts most effectively increase student achievement when focused on rigorous academic content. Survey results indicate that teachers found professional development focused on reading and mathematics instruction to be particularly effective in helping their students. Professional development programs need

to take into account these and other findings about the most effective teaching strategies for smaller classes.

Recommendation: *Provide teachers with training in implementing before- and after-school activities.*

Basis for this recommendation: SAGE legislation requires that schools remain open before and after regular school hours and collaborate with community organizations to provide educational and recreational activities to the communities they serve. The research literature suggests that programs that increase students' exposure to school-based activities are worthy and should be promoted. Training for teachers will help them be more meaningfully involved in before- and after-school activities.

Conclusion

A Professional Development Checklist for Principals and Teachers

The preceding recommendations provide the basis for the following checklist SAGE schools can use to assess their professional development programs (see next page).

All SAGE schools should have the principal and instructional staff complete the checklist annually. The results should be tabulated and then discussed by school personnel at a staff meeting at the beginning of the school year.

SAGE schools that can answer "YES" to most or all of these questions can be relatively assured that their professional development programs not only meet state and federal laws and standards, but that they reflect the scholarly consensus about the

characteristics of effective professional development programs. Those schools that answer “NO” to one or more will have a ready agenda for improvement.

Professional Development Checklist for SAGE schools

Yes	No	Have administrators and teachers at your school been instructed about the professional development requirements outlined in the SAGE program guidelines, the Wisconsin Teacher Standards, and ESEA 2001?	
		Yes	No
		Are teachers at your school aware of their rights, responsibilities, and obligations regarding the professional development programs being used at your school?	
		Yes	No
		Have all teachers at your school participated in the formulation and revision of your school’s “achievement guarantee contract” with the state	

Yes	No	Is your school in compliance with the SAGE law, as well as with the requirements of the Wisconsin Teacher Standards and with ESEA 2001?	
		Yes	No
		Does your school provide a one-year transition period for teachers new to SAGE?	
		Yes	No
		Are teachers at your school being provided with adequate time to plan for professional development?	
		Yes	No
		Are teachers at your school participating in their professional development programs for “extended periods of time?”	
		Yes	No
		Are the professional development programs at your school ensuring opportunities for school wide collaboration?	

Yes	No	Is the content of your professional development program focusing on student outcomes?	
		Yes	No
		Have teachers at your school been trained in effective instructional strategies for reduced size classrooms?	
		Yes	No
		Is the content of your professional development programs focused on academic content?	
		Yes	No
		Does the content of your professional development programs include training in implementing before- and after-school activities?	

Notes

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