PARENT VIEWS AND PERCEPTIONS

OF THE

BAYFIELD SAGE PROGRAM

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose was to determine parent views and perceptions of the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program in the Bayfield School District in Wisconsin. The subjects were the parents of K-3 SAGE students. There were 92 surveys distributed and 45 were returned for analysis.

The instrument was developed by the investigator based upon the literature review. It consisted of five sections: general information, parent views of the SAGE program, parent participation at home and school, what parents liked about the SAGE program, and parent suggestions for improving the program.

Section I contained nine items that pertained to demographic characteristics of the population. These items included age, gender, race, number of children in the household, place of residence, distance from school, head of family, level of education, and

employment status. More females responded to the survey, with the majority being between the ages of 26-40. The majority of the respondents were white or Native American. More parents lived in Red Cliff/Town of Russell, than those that lived in the City/Town of Bayfield. Two-thirds of the respondents were married, with almost half of them having two children in their families. Forty percent of the respondents had their high school/GED degrees, and 31.1% had a college degree. Over half were employed full-time, and about one-fourth were employed part-time.

Section II included 14 statements regarding parents views of the SAGE program. They were rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 9, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The respondents indicated that their top concerns were students' personal contact with the teacher through sharing and instruction, and positive social interactions with their peers. Respondents agreed on the statements of being satisfied with their child's academic instruction and progress reports, getting to know and communicate with the teacher, and feeling welcomed at school with adequate involvement opportunities.

Section III included 13 statements designed to measure parent involvement at home and school. These statements were rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 7, ranging from never to almost always. In home participation, parents placed more importance on helping their children with homework, reviewing their completed work, and communicating absences and concerns. In participation in school, parents almost always attended open houses and parent-teacher conferences, and their children's special activities and events.

Section IV elicited comments from parents regarding what they liked about the SAGE program. The majority of the parents supported reduced class size because of the

positive learning environment and better discipline, the teaching and monitoring of reading skills, and frequent interaction between staff and parents. A large number stated that they liked the individualization. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents commented that they were pleased and positive with the SAGE program.

Section V asked for comments from parents regarding suggestions that they had for improving the SAGE program. Comments centered on two main topics: the student teacher ratio, and the disruptions caused by special needs students. Parents requested that the 15:1 student-teacher ratio be closely followed, and that disruptive students be served according to their needs.

The responses of the survey were analyzed by the University of Wisconsin Stout Computer user support services using descriptive statistics. The following conclusions were drawn:

- Parents highly value reduced class sizes and the resulting individualization.
- Communication and relationships between teachers, students and parents are effective and better developed in SAGE classrooms.
- Parents have contact with their child's academic work at home, communicate information and concerns, and provide materials and time to practice skills at home.
- Parents' highest participation in school is through attending school functions.

DEDICATION

The dedication of this work is four-fold:

- To God be the glory! "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variance or shadow of turning." James 1:7
- I would like to dedicate this work to my cherished son, Tyler, and to his future. He has been patient and enduring throughout this long process.
- I would also like to dedicate this work to my late beloved parents. Their nurturing, guidance, and encouragement have been the foundation for my life and aspirations.
- This thesis project is, of course, dedicated to all the wonderful students that I have been privileged to teach at the Bayfield School district from 1974-2002.

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CHAPTER I

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction

Education in the state of Wisconsin is facing many challenges. The most important challenge is that of closing the educational achievement gap. Many factors affect the achievement gap. Poverty is a main factor, but not the only one. Inadequate housing, high mobility, higher health risks, and unsafe communities are all factors in the achievement gap. The student population has become more diverse, which has brought cultural and social learning differences, and language barriers (Benson, 2000).

Disparities have been shown in attendance, discipline figures, grade point averages, standardized test scores, course selections, and high school completion rates. Consequences of not closing the achievement gap include low and under-employment, higher crime rates, and neighborhoods with high rates of transition. Families, schools, and communities much work together to address current and future community and employment needs. Our future depends on "all children receiving a fair public education that prepares them to become wise and good citizens" (Benson, 2000, p. 2).

In 1993, a special task force was appointed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to study the condition of urban education in Wisconsin. As a result of this study, the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE), was created and was signed into law in 1995. The SAGE program was designed to promote academic achievement of students in kindergarten through third grade classrooms in schools serving low-income children. Participating districts receive $2,000 for all students who

qualify for the free and reduced lunch program (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

These districts are required to meet specific contractual requirements with the Department of Public Instruction. The contract specifies four strategies that are to be implemented to promote academic achievement in grades K-3. These strategies include 1) class size reduction: establishing a 15:1 student/teacher ratio, 2) rigorous curriculum: setting performance goals with high achievement expectations, 3) staff development: typing professional development plans to student achievement, and 4) family-community involvement: insuring the lighted schoolhouse' concept for extended student, family, and community educational and recreational activities (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.).

The program began during the 1996-96 school year with 30 schools in 21 districts. These schools that have been with the program since it's inception are part of an extensive evaluation conducted by the Center for Urban Initiatives and Research at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. Evaluation of the first five years of the program show that students in the SAGE schools scored significantly higher than students in comparison schools in reading, language arts, and mathematics (Molnar, Smith, Zahorik, Halbach, Ehrle, Hoffman, & Cross, 2001).

The SAGE program was expanded during the 1998-99 school year to include 50 more schools, and again in 1999-2000 to include 78 additional schools. Another major expansion was signed into law on October 27, 1999. The state provided an additional $37 million, which allowed approximately 400 more schools to join the program during the 2000-2001 school year. Also, a new $3 million categorical aid program was also

created to reimburse school districts for 20% of debt service costs related to the construction of new classrooms for the SAGE program (Wisconsin Education Association Council, n.d.).

There have been many studies that have reported a significant relationship between low teacher-student ratios, rigorous curriculum, staff development, and parent/community involvement to increase academic success in the early elementary years (Achilles, 1996, Achilles & Finn, 1997, Burmaster, 2002, Epstein, 1995, Gursky, 1998, Hartigan, 1990, Jones, 1998, Lazar, Broderick, Mastrilli, & Slostad, 1990, Molnar, 1999, Molnar & Smrazek, 1994, Molnar, Smith, Zahorik, Palmer, Halbach, & Erhle, 1999, Molnar, et al, 2001, Pape, 1999, Smrazek, 2002, Wang & Finn, 2000, Wherry, 1994, Zahorik, 1999, and Zahorik, Molnar, Ehrle, & Halbach, 2000). Education researchers agree on the basics of what works to improve student achievement, even though they may vary in recommendations as to implementation. The following strategies have been proven effective by research: intervening in early childhood, focusing on reading and math, early individual tutoring, investing in teachers, reducing class size, increasing learning time, goal setting and assessment, and assuring a coordinated K-12 curriculum (Jones, 1998). The SAGE program has components that address these areas.

In the 1980's, Tennessee's Students/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project looked at the results of randomly assigning K-3 students to smaller classes (13-17) and regular classes (22-25). The results were that students in the smaller classes did much better in reading and math than students in regular classes. This became a landmark in educational research (Gursky, 1998).

Wisconsin researchers have found that small class-size increases attention to individual students. The three main effects that lead to increased individualization are: fewer discipline problems and more instruction, more knowledge of students, and more teacher enthusiasm for teaching (Zahorik, 1999). Research confirms that involved families in education is a powerful influence on children's achievement in school, and that the benefits are numerous and lasting (Pape, 1999).

The School District of Bayfield enrolled in the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program for the 1998-99 school year. The teachers recommended implementing all day kindergarten as part of the district's new initiative, which the school board approved. Due to physical space constraints in the K-12 building, a modular unit, which housed two classrooms, was rented and relocated adjacent to the elementary wing of the school. The SAGE program was designed to be implemented in a graduated fashion. Therefore, kindergarten and first grade were enrolled during the 1998-99 year, second grade was added during the 1999-2000 year, and third grade was added during the 2000-2001 school year. At the completion of the 2001-2002 school year, the district had been enrolled in the SAGE program for 4 years. Therefore, the class that completed third grade in 2002 was enrolled in the SAGE program for the full 4 years, from kindergarten through third grade.

On February 7-8, 2000, the state's first SAGE conference, titled " SAGE Schools Are Great Schools", was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The conference was organized by the Wisconsin Education Association Council, in partnership with the Wisconsin Federation of Teachers, and the Wisconsin Realtors Association. More than 1,000 educators and guests were in attendance. Among them were four Bayfield SAGE

teachers, including this investigator. The Bayfield teachers brought back additional information for the district, including examples of what other districts were doing to establish knowledge of the SAGE program among their parents and communities (Wisconsin Education Association Council, n.d.).

This investigator, along with the district's SAGE Coordinator, determined that it would be a benefit to the Bayfield School District to have as the objective of this study to determine the parent's views and perceptions of the SAGE program. The students that completed third grade on June 7, 2002, were the first students that have participated in Bayfield's SAGE program since the district's enrollment in 1998. during the first year of a district's enrollment in SAGE, many school incorporate the four strategy areas as well as they can, as they become acquainted with the program and its requirements. Then in each succeeding year, the development is continued in each area. The investigator and SAGE Coordinator concluded that determining parent views and perceptions would contribute to the program's development.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine parent views and perceptions of the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program at the Bayfield Elementary School in Wisconsin. The parent views and perceptions data was collected from a survey, using a questionnaire format. The survey was mailed to K-3 SAGE parents in August 2001. Surveys were return via mail and student delivery after the school year began. A second distribution of surveys was distributed at Parent-Teacher

Conferences in Early November 2001. Again, surveys were returned by mail or student delivery.

Research Objectives

This study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Describe the demographics of the SAGE parents regarding age, gender, Race, number of children in the household, place of residence, distance from school, head of family, education level, and employment status.
2. Identify parent views and perceptions of the SAGE program in the Bayfield School District in Wisconsin.
3. Determine parent participation at home and school in educational activities.

The survey entailed determining the parent's views and perceptions of the SAGE program, their participation at home and school, what they liked about the SAGE program, and suggestions for improvement. Demographics that were tabulated included age, gender, race, number of children in household, place of residence, distance from school, head of family, education level, and current employment status.

This investigator used systematic sampling, which was the most effective method for the research. The subjects were parents of kindergarten through third grade students that were enrolled in the Bayfield School District SAGE program.

The surveys were mailed to each family that had children enrolled in the SAGE program during the 2000-2001 school year, with a cover letter attached. Each participant was asked to carefully read the information, complete the survey, and return it in the

stamped envelope provided. A second distribution of the survey was given out at Parent-Teacher conferences in November 2001, to encourage a high percentage of returns.

Definition of Terms

For clarity of understanding, the following terms need to be defined:

- SAGE: Student Achievement in Education
- STAR: Student Teacher Achievement Ratio
- CTBS: Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills
- WRCT: Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test
- WRCT Proficiency Levels:
    - *Advanced*: Distinguished in the content area. Academic achievement beyond mastery. Test scores provide evidence of in-depth understanding.
    - *Proficient*: Competent in the content area. Academic achievement includes mastery of the important knowledge and skills. Test scores show evidence of skills necessary for progress in reading.
    - *Basic*: Somewhat competent in the content area. Academic achievement Includes mastery of most of the important knowledge and skills. Test scores show evidence of at least one major flaw in understanding.
    - *Minimal*: Limited achievement in the content area. Test scores show evidence of major misconceptions or gaps in knowledge and skills tested.
- PTA/PTO: Parent Teacher Association/ Parent Teacher Organization
- PACT: Parent and Child Together

Assumptions

Assumptions of the study were that parents would respond honestly to the questionnaire, and had knowledge and experiences upon which to base their responses. A mailed parent survey, using a questionnaire format, was thought to be the best vehicle to obtain honest, confidential answers upon which to base this study.

Limitations

Three limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, the survey was only generalized to the K-3 parents of the Bayfield Elementary School in northern Wisconsin. Second, the parent perceptions survey was specifically designed for this study by the investigator and evaluated by local educators. There are no validity or reliability measures. And third, the findings are restricted to factors measured by the survey of parent perceptions.

This chapter has provided an introduction to this study. Subsequent chapters include a review of research literature, methodology of the study, and a statistical and narrative presentation of the findings. The last chapter will be comprised of a summary, the conclusions of this study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will examine what the literature has to say about the Wisconsin SAGE program, and the four areas that are mandated in the SAGE contract. For the purposes of this study, the research literature has been divided into five sections. The first section provides the history and overview of the Wisconsin SAGE program. It also highlights achievement results of the school in which the parent involvement instrument was conducted. The second section examines the foundational area of class size reduction, and its relationship to student achievement. Important factors that contribute to a rigorous curriculum have been explained in section three. Components of recommended staff development procedures are defined in section four. The last section of the chapter will focus on the crucial area of parent involvement. This will cite reasons and benefits for the involvement of parents, as well as examples found in SAGE schools.

The Wisconsin SAGE Program

To present a description of the SAGE program, the history of its development should be examined. In 1993 the Wisconsin Urban Initiative Task Force was appointed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to study the condition of urban education in Wisconsin (Molnar & Jmrazek, 1994). The task force discussed the educational ideals and the concerns of people from across the state. They determined that comprehensive change was needed in our educational system. Our schools needed to provide the opportunity to guarantee that *all* students could reach a high level of academic achievement.

The investigation found that poverty, and all of its accompanying characteristics, was found in many rural as well as urban areas. Poverty is a key factor that keeps numbers of children from succeeding in school. Molnar and Jmrazek reported that the task force concluded that the school could be a focal point that could serve as learning centers and recreational facilities for families, as well as children. It was their belief that frequent, positive contact between adults and children in the school setting would greatly impact student achievement and well-being.

In 1994, the task force recommended a program to guarantee academic achievement for needy children through the implementation of four strategies:

- Reduce the student-teacher ratio in their classrooms to 15:1 in grades K-3;
- Stay open extended hours (creating "lighted schoolhouses");
- Develop rigorous academic curriculums; and,
- Implement plans for staff development and professional accountability.

The task force was able to interweave all of the basic areas that educational researchers agree promote student achievement (Jones, 1998). Early childhood intervention is incorporated by including kindergarten classes in the reduced class sizes, realizing that it is necessary to begin at the base of public education. Reading and math instruction is central to this program, along with continuing assessments. This early individual intervention can save money by drastically reducing the number of students who later need special education and remedial services. Investing money in staff development of teachers assures the quality of instruction for beginning and veteran teachers, which translates into student achievement. Reducing class size has produced drastic improvement in reading, language arts, and math scores, reduced discipline

problems, which allow time for instruction. Setting these components in a rigorous curriculum, complete with goals and assessment can only produce positive results. Working together with families in a partnership is the foundation for all students' learning (Jones, 1998).

The program titled Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) was created in 1995, and was implemented the 1996-97 school year. Any school district that had at least one school serving 50% or more children living in poverty was eligible to apply for participation in SAGE. Any school within these districts that had 30% or more students below the poverty level was eligible to become a SAGE school. Schools participate on a voluntary basis, and sign contracts to reduce class size in kindergarten through third grade to a ratio of 15 students: 1 teacher. (Wang & Finn, 2000).

Districts that qualified were allowed one school to become a SAGE school. The only exception was that the Milwaukee school district was allowed up to ten SAGE schools. Funding was set at a maximum of $2,000 per low-income student enrolled in the grade levels targeted by SAGE. During the 1996-97 school year, 30 schools in 21 school districts (7 were in Milwaukee) began the program in kindergarten and first grade. Second grade was added in 1997-98, and third grade was added in 1998-99 (Molnar, et.al, 1999). The legislature authorized the expansion of SAGE in 1997, and in the fall of 1998, an additional 49 schools enrolled in the program. This expansion continued and 400 schools were enrolled by the year 2000.

The University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee has conducted an evaluation of the SAGE program in the original 30 schools that entered the program in 1996. They have been compared with 14-17 non-SAGE comparison schools. Students were tested in the

focal areas of reading, language arts, and math, using the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) Complete Battery, Terra Nova edition. This test was selected to show comparisons over time, and was decided to be acceptable for students use, as questions were similar to those used in the classroom. The CTBS results are used to compare two large groups: all thirty original SAGE schools versus all comparison schools (Molnar, 1999).

Results showed that students in SAGE schools scored significantly higher in reading, language arts, and math than students in comparison schools. Reducing class size has proved to be particularly promising for disadvantaged and minority children. African-American males, in particular, benefited from the smaller classes. Their scores rose 40% more than those of black males in the control schools (Gursky, 1998).

In addition to the CTBS, other areas of the SAGE program were evaluated using questionnaires, interview, and classroom observations. These evaluation strategies helped the evaluators better understand and interpret the test score data. The evaluation data are provided to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Legislature, and the Governor for their review (Molnar, 1999).

In the 2001 SAGE evaluation results, the University of Milwaukee evaluation team found that the academic advantage persists (Molnar, et al, 2001). The major effect of reduced class sizes has been increased individualization. Teachers have more time for instruction, have been able to meet individual needs, and have had less discipline problems. They have a greater knowledge of each student and their skills. This has resulted in teachers having greater enthusiasm for their work (Molnar, et al, 2001).

The Bayfield SAGE Program

This investigator has review some of the achievement results from the School District of Bayfield. There is an interesting comparison between the Bayfield and State of Wisconsin results.

Table 1: Average Percent Gained in Reading and Math

Taken from 2001-2002 Pre and Post Tests

Grade	Av. % Reading Gain	Av. % Math Gain
Kindergarten	19.28	11.53
Grade 1	32.49	52.97
Grade 2	17.42	17.78
Grade 3	18.45	54.53
Total K-3 Av. % Gained	21.91	32.76

From pre to post tests, Kindergarten students showed an average reading gain of 19.28%, and average math gain of 11.53%. First grade students made an average reading gain of 32.49%, and an average math gain of 52.97%. Second grade students totaled an average reading gain of 17.42%, and an average math gain of 17.78%. Third grade students were recorded with an average reading gain of 18.45%, and an average math gain of 54.53%. A total K-3 average reading gain of 21.91% was attained, along with an average math gain of 32.76%.

The class that completed third grade in the spring of 2002 was the first class that was enrolled in the Bayfield SAGE program for the full four years, since the program began in the fall of 1998. This class would have been enrolled in the SAGE program for

Kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade. As part of Wisconsin's statewide testing program, every third grade class is given the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test. Therefore, to document the current success of the district's SAGE program, the pre-SAGE (1997-98) third grade test scores have been compared with the third grade test scores of the 2001-2002 class.

Table 2: Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

An Assessment of Primary-Level Reading at Grade Three

Numbers & Percentages	Pre-SAGE 1997-1998	Year 4 2001-2002	Differences	State Results 2002
# Enrolled	28	40	+12	
# Not Tested	5	6	+1	
% Not Tested	17.9	15.0	-2.9%	6.5%
# Minimal	3	2	-1	
% Minimal	10.7	5.0	-5.7%	5.5%
# Basic	6	7	-1	
% Basic	21.4	17.5	-3.9%	13.9%
# Proficient	9	19	+10	
% Proficient	32.1	47.5	+15.4%	
# Advanced	5	6	+1	
% Advanced	17.9	15.0	-2.9%	
#Total Ad+Pro	16	25	+9	
%TotalAd+Pro	50.0	62.5	+12.5	74.1%

The examination of the pre-SAGE and 2002 third grade reading test results show very positive results for Bayfield students. The percent of students that were not tested dropped 2.9%. The percentage of students that scored in the minimal area of competency dropped 5.7%. The percentage of students that scored in the basic area of competency dropped 3.9%. The most promising statistic is shown in the fact that a gain of 15.4% of the students scored in the proficient area. There was a slight drop of 2.9% of students that scored in the advanced area, which brings the combined gain of proficient and advanced scores to 12.5% (Department of Public Instruction, 2002). State Superintendent, Elizabeth Burmaster said, "Scores on the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test move up or down slightly from year to year, but the gains we see over time tell a story that supports our emphasis on reading in the early grades" (Burmaster, 2002, p. 1).

At the completion of the four year period (1998-2002) of this school district being enrolled in the SAGE program, an average of 62.5% of the third grade students scored in the two highest proficiency categories (proficient and advanced) on the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test. This is a 12.5% gain from the pre-SAGE average of 50%. School districts with the highest concentrations of students in poverty (50 percent or more) have 26 percent fewer students scoring proficient or advanced than districts that have less than 5 percent of their students coming from needy families (Burmaster, 2002). These economically disadvantaged schools have had an average of 61% of students that have scored in the combined proficient and advanced area on the 2002 test. The Bayfield school district has 50 percent or more low-income students, and the school average of 62.5% scoring in the combined proficient and advanced areas is comparable to the state

average of 61%. Also, the number of students from economically disadvantaged schools which were not tested in 2002 was 12 percent. Bayfield had 15 percent of the students that were not tested in 2002, which again, is comparable with the state average (Department of Public Instruction, 2002).

State Superintendent Burmaster concludes that Wisconsin's investment in early learning and supporting reading instruction will help close the achievement gap. The state's efforts will ensure that *all* children will gain the academic foundation and skills that they need for a successful future, regardless of economic, language, or racial/ethnic status (Burmaster, 2002). The results from the Bayfield school district show that this ideal is being realized as, there has been a steady increase in test scores as the 2002 third grade class has moved through the grades (Department of Public Instruction, 2002).

Class Size Reduction

History of class size reduction

Since 1993, the high-school graduation rates of 11 nations have passed the United States, according to an annual assessment of education statistics by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Andreas Schleicher of the OECD stated that "the U.S. has lost it supremacy as the premier educator, not because it is doing worse, but because so many other countries have become better" (What the numbers say, 1999). However, the U.S. still maintains the world's second-highest college graduation rates with 35 percent of all citizens at college age earning a degree.

As part of a plan to counteract this trend, the Clinton Administration developed the "Class Size Reduction Initiative". During the 1999-2000 school year, $1.2 billion was distributed to school districts across the country to hire more than 30,000 new teachers in the early grades (Dyrli, 1999). The funds were to be used to reduce average class size to 18 students, by paying the salaries and benefits for 100,000 new teachers over the following seven years. These funds were to go directly into classrooms. No funds could be used for Federal or State administration cost. Within school districts, only 3% could be used for administrative costs, and up to 15% of the money could be used to provide professional development opportunities to strengthen teacher quality (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Ultimately, school districts would need additional classrooms for the teachers hired to reduce class size. To help address this long-term need, President Clinton proposed a $25 billion initiative to help state and local governments repair or replace 6,000 overcrowded and unsafe schools by providing tax credits to subsidize the cost of school construction bonds (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Even in the past presidential campaign, Al Gore was advocating creating smaller high schools and limiting class sizes not only in the lower grades, but also in the upper grades (Argon, 1999). George W. Bush stated that education was a main component of his platform, and the slogan, "Leave no child behind", was touted by his supporters.

Program funds are distributed to states by formula. All 50 states participate in the program, but the program targets funds to high poverty communities, and research shows that smaller classes provide the greatest benefits to the most disadvantaged students. Each state distributes 80% of the funds to school districts based on the number of poor

children in each district, and the remaining 20% is distributed on the basis of enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

More that 20 states have passed or are considering legislation to reduce class sizes. Additionally, many local school districts and schools have begun to reduce class sizes on their own, without waiting for state support. In 1999, the states of Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, and New York joined California, Indiana, Washington, Wisconsin, and other states to invest in bringing the benefits of smaller classes to their students.

California launched a major statewide class size reduction program in 1996, investing $1.5 billion spread over three years. The first evaluation reports showed that class size reduction led to increased student achievement.

Benefit of class size reduction

A growing body of research demonstrated that students attending small classes in the early grades make more rapid educational progress than students in larger classes (Achilles, 1996; Achilles & Finn, 1997-98; Argon, 1999; Bracey, 1999; Cirone, 1997; Dryli, 1999; Gardner, 1998; Gursky, 1998; Ogawa & Huston, 1999; Wang & Finn, 2000; Zahorik, 1999; and Zahorik, Molnar, Ehrle & Halbach, 2000). These achievement gains persist well after students move on to larger classes in later grades. Students who are able to read proficiently by the end of third grade are more likely to succeed academically and graduate from high school. (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Educational policy in several states and on a national level regarding elementary class size has been impacted by Tennessee's class size research. This foundational study, titled Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (Project STAR), remains the "gold standard"

of class-size research (Gursky, 1998). Project STAR has been tracking 12,000 Tennessee students since 1985 to determine the effects of smaller classes. Project STAR showed clearly that small classes provided higher student outcomes and better student behaviors that either regular or regular-with-aide classes. Early findings showed that students in class sized from 13-17 outperformed students from larger classes on reading and math tests. Even after students returned to larger classes, they continued to do better than other students. It also found that inner-city students benefited the most from smaller classes. Data that was released in 1999 revealed that students who were in smaller classes in their early years were more inclined to go to college, take more challenging courses, and drop out less frequently that students who attended larger classes (Argon, 1999).

Achilles (1996) stated that in subsidiary studies drawing on STAR data, the following has been found in comparing smaller classes to larger classes:

"-small classes ameliorate the effects of large schools;

-fewer students are held back a grade;

-while small classes benefit all students, minority students benefit the most;

-students receive more individual attention;

-smaller classes are friendlier and more intimate;

-there are fewer discipline problems in smaller classes; and

-students are more likely to participate in activities" (Achilles, 1996, pp.78).

He concludes that STAR data shows that smaller classes in early primary grades benefit students and provide a basis for substantial education reform without necessarily requiring massive infusions of funds. Cost savings come from fewer retentions, less need for remediation and/or special education, improved behavior, and increased achievement.

In summarizing researchers' favorite methods of improving student achievement, Jones (1998) lists shrinking the size of classes as very important, as it increases the time that is spent learning, and allows for better conditions for students to acquire basic reading and math skills. She also includes other favored methods: starting early with initiatives that give young children a better start, focusing on reading and math during the early grades, investing in teachers through staff development, setting goals and following through with student assessment. All of these areas can better be achieved in smaller classes.

One way to reduce the equity gap is by "keeping the floor even, at least in the early grades" (Achilles & Finn, 1997-1998, pp. 40). Achilles and Finn indicate that variables that were coded in the STAR database included pupil ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status as determined by free and reduced lunch status. These entries allowed researchers to consider gaps related to these characteristics. The results suggest that all students benefit from reduced class size, but that non-white students benefit more than white students. Achilles and Finn state that small classes provide quality (higher scores), equality (pupils are assigned at random and every child gets a smaller class), and equity (those who usually do less well get greater benefits).

Class size must first influence what teachers and students do in the classroom before it can affect student learning. One of the most important elements is that reducing class size leads to individualized instruction. Small class size has three main effects that lead to increased individualization: fewer discipline problems and more instruction, more knowledge of students, and more teacher enthusiasm for teaching (Zahorik, 1999).

Zahorik (1999) suggests that when misbehavior does occur, it is more noticeable, and teachers can treat it immediately before it becomes a major problem. This reduced time spent on discipline leads to more time available for instruction. Teachers continually monitor the progress of individual students, and if learning problems become apparent, they can be identified and dealt with immediately. As teachers come to have more knowledge of individual students, they begin to know each one personally. Only then can they develop a greater understanding of each student's place in the learning cycle, and establish a caring, family-like atmosphere. Teacher experience less stress from disciplining, correcting papers, and not having the time to do what needs to be done. As stress is reduced, enthusiasm and satisfaction increase, and educators begin to implement teaching procedures that they know will benefit students.

In Wisconsin's SAGE program, Zahorik (1999) reports that with better discipline and more time for individual attention to students, teachers are able to use more varied types of instruction to engage students (Gursky, 1998). Ways in which teachers can individualize can vary from one-to-one tutoring, small group instruction, or individualizing during whole-class instruction by providing many opportunities for each student to express his or her understanding. Instruction includes more hands-on activities and/or learning centers. With more time freed up for instruction, teachers find that they are completing the year's curriculum by April, giving them time to move on to more advanced material, or return to topics in more depth.

Teachers concluded that the best thing about class size reduction is more individual and one-on-one instruction (Cirone, 1997). They indicated that they had time

for better diagnosis of students needs, time for small-group instruction, and more time for assessing and meeting individual needs.

Parents also concluded that more individual and one-to-one instruction was the best and most apparent part of class size reduction (Cirone, 1997). They reported that their children learned more, better classroom control was maintained, and that teachers had better knowledge of the student's problem areas.

Challenges of class size reduction

As can be expected, the positive results of class size reduction do not come without accompanying challenges. The basic challenges include finding and hiring qualified teachers, and finding space for the additional classrooms needed.

In beginning class size reduction during the 1996-97 school year, California was scrambling to find space and enough qualified teachers. Almost half of the teachers hired in Los Angeles to lower class sizes lack regular teaching licenses. Other states have alleviated this problem by gradually including the beginning grades in the class size reduction initiative. Programs have begun with kindergarten and first grade during the first year, added second grades during the second year, and finally adding third grade in the third year.

In addressing space limitations, many schools and school districts are utilizing space that is already in existence, as in libraries, computer labs, lunchrooms, and other facilities. Until schools can expand facilities, the follow approaches have been tried: (U.S. Department of Education, (1999):

"-having two certified teachers team teach in a single classroom either for part of the day or for the entire school day,

-hiring an additional certified teacher for a grade level (e.g., providing three teachers for two third grade classrooms) and dividing the students among the larger number of teachers for sustained instruction each day in priority subjects as reading and math,

-hiring an additional certified teacher who works with half the students in a class for reading and math instruction, while the other half remains with the regular classroom teacher, or

-converting to a year-round schedule" (U.S. Department of Education, 1999, p. 7). These possibilities make use of space that could be vacant for part of the school day or year. Small groups of students would be daily instructed from a qualified teacher. None would require tracking by ability for a long-term basis.

It has been documented that adding students lowers the average performance of classrooms. Each student added to a classroom beyond the 15:1 SAGE student-teacher ratio results in a "decrease of approximately one scale point in the class average in all academic scores" (Molnar, et al, 2001, pp. 2). However, no differences in achievement gains were found between 15:1 and 30:2 classrooms.

The cost and effort of finding more classroom space is balanced by other factors. It has been found that grade retention is expensive, and small classes result in less grade retentions. In addition, teachers in small classes quickly identify learning problems that go undiagnosed in regular classes. Lack of identification leads to costly special education later on. Therefore, schools can reduce the variety of remediation projects that later

attempt to repair education failures (Achilles & Finn, 1997). Zahorik (1999) stated that tentative findings indicate that individualization begins right away, and that both able students and problem learners receive comparable amounts of individual attention. He also concludes that if all students receive individualization, the need for future remedial and gifted programs may be reduced because of small size classes.

Summary of class size reduction

Clearly reducing class size has a powerful impact on improving student achievement. It is an important part of the overall strategy to improve America's schools and international standing. Quality education build on a quality start. The frantic search for equity starts with quality and equality, and these three can be addressed with smaller class size (Achilles & Finn, 1997). The class size reduction initiative seems to have sparked renewed confidence in the public schools. These new, equitable initiatives, along with the renewed public support and confidence, will go a long way in successfully bringing students into the 21st century.

Rigorous Curriculum

Content, performance, and proficiency standards in reading, language arts, and math

Each Wisconsin school district's SAGE contract requires them to develop performance objectives to guide and evaluate academic achievement. The performance objectives are required to consist of 1) content, 2) performance, and 3) proficiency standards in reading, language arts, and mathematics. These objectives are established by each school district, for each grade covered by SAGE. A 1) *content standard* describes

what the students will be expected to know and be able to do as a result of being enrolled in each grade covered by the SAGE program; a 2) *performance standard* describes what students will be asked to do to provide evidence they have met each of the content standards; and a 3) *proficiency standard* indicates the degree of proficiency represented by various levels of achievement on the performance standards (On WEAC, 2000).

On-going Assessment

Teachers conduct individual on-going assessments to monitor and document growth over time. Annual pre- and post-tests are given, using the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. Performance goals are reviewed, and report cards are sent out at the end of each quarter. Some SAGE schools, such as Webster-Stanley of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, report student progress to parents using the state competency levels of Minimal, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The description of each proficiency level is described on student report cards as follows:

H = Highly Proficient/Advanced

S = Satisfactory/Proficient

I = Is improving/Basic

N = Needs Improvement/Minimal

M = More Time Needed

= Not introduced (Vickman, 1999).

The number of students that meet the performance objectives are tabulated and included in an annual contract report that is submitted to the Department of Public Instruction at the conclusion of each school year (Smrazek, 2002).

Annual curriculum review to promote achievement

Teachers and administrators in SAGE schools review the district curriculum each year to determine how it promotes achievement. Test scores are also reviewed, and changes are outlined as needed. The reading, language arts, and math curriculums are reviewed to determine alignment with the districts' performance objectives, as well as state and national standards. Curriculum changes are implemented as necessary.

Staff Development

President Clinton's initiative included elements designed to address some of the problems that arose in California such as: implementing basic-skills testing for new teachers, and incentives to recruit qualified teachers to high-poverty areas. A study was conducted by Ogawa and Huston (1999), which revealed that the academic achievement of a district is strongly associated with the experience and credential status of teachers. This suggests that policies need to be enacted to equalize the experience and qualification of teachers across districts and schools.

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001. The act contains the President's four basic education reform principles: stronger accountability results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

In the 2000-2001 SAGE evaluation report, the University of Milwaukee evaluation team reported some interesting findings, which should impact the professional training of teachers, as well as continued staff development for current teachers. They

found that in classrooms where higher achievement was documented, teachers emphasized the acquisition of basic skills and knowledge, most often through the use of explicit instruction. Carefully planned and paced lessons, along with a structured management systems based on rules and routines, allowed time on instruction to be maximized. The amount and type of individualization was a contributing factor. In lower achieving classrooms, the amount, time, and type of individualization differed from higher achieving classrooms due to their management of students and lesson planning. Student management tended to be more permissive, and lesson plans were more emergent, and randomly sequenced (Molnar, et al, 2001).

Important elements of staff development are incorporated into each SAGE school. The first is that there is regular time provided for teachers to plan and collaborate. During this time, teachers work on developing and implementing rigorous curriculum goals. They plan assessment, which includes pre- and post-tests, as well as on-going evaluations. Performance goals are reviewed at the beginning of each school year, and reported to the Department of Public Instruction at the end of the year. Planning is done for joint projects, meetings, and special events for students and parents (Smrazek, 2001).

Administrators are to coordinate staff development plans that focus on student achievement. As needs vary in each district, so the implementation of training takes place in different ways. Each teacher is to have a personal professional plan, which is developed, implemented, and reviewed on an annual basis (Smrazek, 2001).

Rubenstein and Simmonds (1997) are educators who prepare beginning teachers in district and university settings. They interviewed beginning and veteran teachers as to what they need in pre-service and in-service education. Rubenstein and Simmonds

concluded that teachers need to be prepared for teaching reduced class sized in the following areas: learning outcomes, classroom climate, teaching strategies, parent expectations, and professional development. As the needs of teachers vary, individualized professional growth plans need to be developed. The professional dialogue that results is the foundation upon which comprehensive curriculum and reflective teaching is built.

Educating Teachers on Parent Involvement

In the professional training of many teachers, parent involvement received minimal attention or none at all. Also, some school districts do not give teachers the support that they need to adequately involve parents in their children's education. Involving parents is largely dependent on teacher initiative and experience. Epstein (1995) is a prominent leader in the field of parent involvement. She noted that "most educators enter schools without an understanding of family background, concepts in caring, or the framework of partnerships. And most teachers and administrators are not prepared to understand, design, implement, and evaluate practices of partnerships with the families of their students" (p.21).

The research done by Lazar, et al, (1999) found that two thirds of teachers surveyed had received some information on parent involvement, and that one third had not. There was a significant difference between the amount of parent involvement education that was received by elementary teachers and secondary teachers. Seventy percent of elementary teacher received some information, while only forty-five percent of secondary teachers received information. Self-motivated teachers acquired information

on parent involvement by reading professional literature, speaking to colleagues, attending workshops, or graduate classes. Nearly all of the teachers expressed the need for additional education in collaborating with parents, communicating, understanding parents' perspectives, conducting parent conferences, and sharing governance with parents.

However, most teachers are immersed in meeting students' educational needs and may view parent involvement as a time-consuming extra responsibility which yields little noticeable return. These teachers need and want to hear about experiences of real teachers who have successfully implemented parent-teacher partnering while maintaining a reasonable balance between work and home (Lazar, et al, 1999).

All teachers must be provided with the knowledge, time resources, and recognition necessary to involve parents in education. This support must be provided in both undergraduate and in-service teacher education programs in order for parents to become a valuable resource for the school community (Lazar, et al, 1999).

There are some barriers to parent involvement. It takes concerted effort, coordination, time, and strong support from the administration. Parent involvement is most effective when it is comprehensive, long lasting, and well-planned (Epstein, 1995).

Parent Involvement

Another requirement of the SAGE program is "School/Community Collaboration", and is sometimes referred to as the "lighted schoolhouse". This term describes the school when it is open before and after regular school hours in order to be available for parent/family and community use. The concept of a school being a

"community center" is a welcoming one. It brings involvement and the feeling of ownership by those who partake in the lighted school house activities.

Examples of Student, Family, and Community Involvement in SAGE Schools

There are many examples of the programming various SAGE schools have incorporated during the extended hours before and after school. Many schools open early and offer breakfast programs, as well as after school programs and tutoring. The gym and other areas are open for various recreational activities, community education, and school and community club meetings. Some examples would be 4-H, or Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Ideally, a Family Resource Center is established for parents, which is a room set apart for them to congregate and hold PTA/PTO meetings or education classes. This room should contain comfortable furniture, have coffee and other welcoming drinks easily available, and would have interesting parent education materials.

The Webster-Stanley school district in Oshkosh, Wisconsin has incorporated many areas into their family and community involvement program. Parent and Child Together (PACT) nights are held, and are sponsored by individual grade levels, covering such topics as science and literacy. Extended library hours are held, as well as nights for families to use the computer lab. Parents are included in their SAGE team planning meetings. GED preparation classes are also held for parents, as well as adult English classes, and adult technical education college classes. Health clinics are held 2-3 times per week to maintain physical health (Vickman, 1999). This variety of stated activities are among the many possibilities that can be established when there is a 'lighted schoolhouse' available to the community.

Research shows benefit of Parent/Family Involvement

The evidence of research (Brittingham, 1998; Epstein, 1995; Hartigan, 1990; Kraus, 2002; Lazar, et al, 1990; Pape, 1999 and Rich, 1998) confirms that involving families in education is a powerful influence on children's achievement in school. The benefits of family involvement in the education process are numerous and lasting. This fact is beyond debate, as everyone agrees that it is a win-win situation, with the outcomes being very positive. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life (Pape, 1999).

Reasons for Parent Involvement

The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is the extent to which the student's family is able to create a positive learning environment at home, set high expectations for their children, and become involved in their children's education at school and in the community. The positive results are not affected by income, race, or social status. As a matter of fact, low-income students have the most to gain through parent involvement in education. The achievements of disadvantaged children cannot only improve, but can reach levels that are standard for middle-class children (Wherry, 1994).

Brittingham (1998) conducted a doctoral study on the characteristics of successful school, family, and community partnerships. In an article on this study, many important components were discussed which form the current overall picture of education and the need for parent and community involvement. He stated that media reports blame the public schools for declining test scores, increased violence, decreased discipline, higher

alcohol and drug abuse, growing teen pregnancies, lower workforce productivity, and overall moral decay of the society. Many wonder whether public schools are still able to meet the ever changing diverse needs of children, youth, and families. The loss of confidence in the public school is reflected by the growing support for public funding of private education, charter schools, and voucher programs. He stated that the question no longer remains how to engage the public, but how public schools can become partners with other stakeholders to reform education by community building. The results of this study concluded that the answer remains with relationships. They must be built between schools, families, and communities in order to form a partnership this is committed to improving schools that result in the success of all children.

Benefits of Parent Involvement

There are benefits for students, parents, schools, and communities. The benefits for students are higher grades and test scores, fewer placements in special education, and higher graduation rates. Attendance is better, more homework is completed, and students display better attitudes which produce better behavior. A higher percentage of students enroll in post-secondary education (Christenson & Hurley, 1997).

Parents also gain benefits from involvement, which include having more confidence in teachers and the school and a developing sense of ownership. They gain greater confidence in themselves as parents and in their ability to help their children learn at home. Their involvement increases the likelihood that they will enroll in continuing education to advance their own schooling. This makes them positive role models for their children, and the positive cycle begins to build (Davies, 1993).

Teachers appreciate the greater support from the families and the resulting improvement in attendance and achievement. This results in improved teacher morale and the school as a whole gains a better reputation throughout the community (Christensen & Hurley, 1997).

These reports strongly support the benefits of having parents involved in their children's schooling. Yet, many teachers and parents struggle to connect in a meaningful, productive way that helps to improve student learning. The U.S. Department of Education (1998) did a survey on parent involvement in school-related activities. They found that parents crave information on how to support their children's learning. They appreciate the involvement and communication that they receive, but need more in knowing how to be further involved.

There is no 'magic bullet' for parent involvement, but they list four strategies that have proven beneficial: 1) meet parents on their own turf, and in their time frame, 2) make schools parent friendly, with helpful personnel to greet them, clear directions for moving around the school, and by providing a parent center, 3) covering all languages due to many diverse cultures, and 4) to involve parents in the decision-making process (Pape, 1999).

What Parents Want from Teachers

Parents have been rating the teachers of their children and are looking for certain qualities. Educators can make the most of this, and get credit for what they do well, and will need to make sure that they are working together with parents to improve student learning. Rich (1998) has identified three consistent parent concerns about what teachers

know 1) about teaching, 2) their children, and 3) about communicating with parents. Parents want to know that teachers know their subject matter, set learning goals, maintain safe environments, and enjoy their profession. It is imperative to every parent that their child is treated fairly and with respect, and that the teacher tries to meet their child's needs. Parents want to hear the positive praise when their children do well, and be contacted immediately when there are problems. Parents want clear information regarding curriculum, goals, standards, and expected behavior guidelines. They are looking for regular, clear communication regarding general and specific classroom happenings, and their child's progress. It is important that teachers are accessible and responsive when they have concerns (Rich, 1998).

Pape (1999) recommended that teachers learn the "three R's" of working with today's parents: reassurance, recognition, and respect. She stated that parents need to be reassured that the school is meeting their children's academic needs, recognize the key role that parents play in the academic lives of their children, and respect the role and responsibility of parents.

Model Programs of Parent Involvement

Epstein (1995) is a leader in the field of parent-community involvement. The *Partnership for Family Involvement in Education* program is based on her work. This program is backed by the U.S. Department of Education, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Epstein is the director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University. She had developed a national network of Partnership 2000 schools to help link state, district, and other leaders who are

responsible to help elementary, middle, and high schools implement programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

The program is built on the theory of "overlapping spheres of influence" (Epstein, 1995). This model recognized three major contexts in which students learn and grow: the family, the school, and the community. It is recognized that these three spheres can be drawn together or pushed apart. The main reason to create partnerships is to help all children succeed in school and later in life. When parents, teachers, and others work together as partners, a caring community begins to form around students and begins to work. It is believed that if children feel cared for and encouraged by all partners in these three overlapping spheres, they are more likely to work hard and do their best in all areas to and remain in school.

The framework for the program includes six types of family-community partnerships with the schools. These are: 1) Parenting, 2) Communicating, 3) Volunteering, 4) Learning at home, 5) Advocating and Decision making, and 6) Collaborating (Department of Public Instruction, 1998). The six types of partnerships have been adopted from the research of Joyce Epstein (1995), who is the director for the Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University. Implementation for this program is through the League of Schools Reaching Out, at the Institute for Responsive Education in Boston.

A four page flyer (Department of Public Instruction, 1998) quickly describes the program, which is very essential in order for everyone to understand and work from the same model. The front page describes the six types of participation, as well as brief statements under the title of "Getting It Done." The areas listed under this category are 1)

Leadership, 2) Analysis, 3) Planning and Policy Development, 4) Action/Implementation, and 5) Evaluation. Inside the cover a checklist is provided, which gives some examples of practices, programs, and activities that schools and districts can use to help families and communities participate in children's learning. The back page lists titles of education packets that support each participation area. The packets are available from the Department of Public Instruction.

The program is very well developed, with specific plans for implementation. First of all, an action team is chosen, which includes a cross-section of administrators, teachers, community people, students, support staff, counselors, etc. Then there are specific plans for identifying starting points, and obtaining start-up funds and other support. A three-year plan is highly recommended, with an outline of goals for each type of involvement. Then a detailed one-year plan is developed for the first year's work. There are also plans for evaluation and continued development. It is recommended that people involved realize that development is incremental, and that a minimum of a three year commitment would form a starting base.

Another parent involvement program titled "Project Appleseed" was developed by Kevin Walker, who was a former political organizer for the Walter Mondale campaign. He stated that "the age of the parent activist has arrived none too soon" (Hartigan, 1999, p.1). Project Appleseed is a nonprofit group that helps parents get involved in the basic functioning of schools and education policy. Project Appleseed believes that the fate of public education depends on getting the average mom and dad involved in the improvement of their public schools (Hartigan, 1999).

This program is also very well organized, and one of the main components is a Parent Pledge, which requests that each parent commit 5 hours of involvement in the school per semester, and 15 minutes working with their children each school night. This pledge helps parents to see that this is possible to do, and yet has far reaching potential. Project Appleseed had the Title I Learning Compacts built right into the program. The compacts identify learning goals and how parents and schools can work together to assure student success.

Elizabeth Burmaster, our current Wisconsin State Superintendent, has convened a Parent Leadership Corps, to strengthen family-school-community partnerships (Kraus, 2002). Burmaster states that school reform and high levels of student achievement can not be reached without strong parent and community involvement. The goals of the partnerships are to help schools, parents, and communities work together to improve learning; to formulate the most successful school-parent-community practices in the state and country; to increase parents understanding of school systems and what is being taught, and to help parents meet other parents and implement ideas to help achievement in our schools.

Conclusion

Parent involvement has many times posed challenges for educators, as they question how to incorporate this into their full schedule of classroom teaching. The research on this subject shows overwhelming support of parent involvement due to documented successes. Parent involvement not only affects students while in school, but for their entire life. This makes it a necessity for all educators to incorporate and continue to expand the different aspects of parent participation in our schools.

Both Epstein (1995) and Brittingham (1998) stated that we must work as partners in developing caring communities, and that the answer lies in relationships between schools, families, and communities. Our genuine interest in supporting student achievement must have the foundation of partnerships, involving many people in the process. Epstein (1995) stated that schools have two choices in involving families in their children's education. One choice is that we can make the schools like a battlefield, with conflict, power struggles, and disharmony. The other approach views the schools as a homeland, which invites power sharing, mutual respect, and allows energies to be directed toward activities that foster student learning and development. Each school district needs to make a positive choice regarding parent involvement, and then begin or continue the building process in that direction.

Summary

A need for comprehensive educational reform in Wisconsin was documented by the task force that was appointed in 1994. Their recommendations were submitted, and the SAGE program was signed into law in 1995. This investigator appreciates the description of the four elements of the SAGE program has been written by the Webster-Stanley school:

1. CLASS SIZE ~ Establishing a 15:1 student teacher ratio
2. RIGOROUS CURRICULUM ~ Setting performance goals with high a achievement
3. STAFF DEVELOPMENT ~ Tying professional development plans to student achievement

4. PARENT INVOLVEMENT ~ Insuring the 'lighted schoolhouse' Concept for educational and recreational activities (Vickman, 1999).

Wisconsin has been a leader in education. The state should be commended for their efforts to educate all children, regardless of economic status, race, cultural, or language barriers. The SAGE program has proven itself to be a critical factor in student achievement, and has produced results impressive enough to continue its' funding. State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster states that small class sizes work, and that they are a "vital component to improving academic achievement and narrowing the achievement gap" (Department of Public Instruction, 2002, pp.1). The achievement of the Bayfield SAGE program has echoed the state results and research findings.

There have been many concerns regarding the academic status of our country. There has been failing public support for public schools as many facets of society have changed on a continuum. The studies of reduced class sizes have consistently reported the positive connection with student achievement, beginning with Tennessee's Project STAR study conducted in 1985.

Small class sizes have featured increased individualization, more teaching time, less discipline problems, better knowledge of each student, the meeting of individual needs, and greater teacher enthusiasm and satisfaction. Reducing class sizes is an important part of the strategies used to improve public support and confidence, and to improve America's school and international standing.

Rigorous curriculum is the foundation upon which education is built. It must be solid, and yet ever in the building and remodeling process. Continuing to identify district performance goals, as well as state and national standards, will continue to keep

curriculums on the 'cutting edge' of our society as it evolves from stage to stage. Identifying, reviewing, and revising will assure that the education platform is sturdy and strong. Documenting student progress through assessment, and relating it to the curriculum, will communicate to parents and communities. It will inform them of the correlation of the foundation to the results.

Staff development assures quality control to keep all teachers abreast of current topics and trends. The individual staff development plans that the SAGE program recommends helps to guide individuals and schools in their professional development. Time is always a crucial element in every facet of life. The planning/collaboration time recommended by the SAGE program is like a gift of time for teachers. This "gift" allows them to communicate, plan, and collaborate. This time is essential, in order for teachers to support their students, curriculums, classrooms, parents, and communities. The time spent in furthering professional education, as well as communicating and planning, can only enhance the entire educational structure.

Finally, including parents, and interacting with them as partners in education will be an essential asset to any school that wants to succeed. Opening the school as a welcoming haven to families and communities is the first step in encouraging interaction and a feeling of ownership. Only when we all work together will we truly 'leave no child behind', because there is a place of belonging and a network of supportive people.

The SAGE program was recommended to address the many elements of support to promote student achievement, and help schools succeed. It was based on solid research, and the research continues to bear out that the SAGE program, indeed, hold the keys to the guarantee of student achievement in education.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the views and perceptions of the parents of students enrolled in the SAGE program in the School District of Bayfield. This chapter contains the research methodology and design that includes the following areas: research objectives; subjects; development of the instrument; data collection procedures, data analysis; and limitations of this study.

Research Objectives

1. Describe the demographics of the SAGE parents regarding age, gender, race, of children in the household, place of residence, distance from school, head of family, education level, and employment status.
2. Identify parent views and perceptions of the SAGE program in the Bayfield District in Wisconsin.
3. Determine parent participation at home and school in educational activities.

Subjects

The population for this study were parents of K-3 students enrolled in the SAGE program at Bayfield Elementary School in Wisconsin during the 2000-2001 school year. Surveys were sent to 92 parents of 110 students. Parent respondents from each household, with various education levels and backgrounds, were the subjects of the study.

Systematic sampling was used for this study, as surveys were mailed to every family that had K-3 students enrolled in the SAGE program during the 2000-2001 school year.

Development of the Instrument

The survey was developed by the investigator for this study, and was based upon the literature review. The format taught in a UW-Stout class, Applied Evaluation, was employed in developing the instrument. Questions and statements were written after review of two national parent involvement programs: Project Appleseed (Hartigan, 1990), and School, Family, and Community Partnerships (Epstein, 1995). Development of the instrument was influenced by the involvement of this investigator with K-3 parents and students in the SAGE program setting.

Data Collection Procedures

The parent survey and human subjects form were submitted for approval. After receiving the approval, the parent surveys were administered from August through November 2001. The investigator met with the SAGE program director, and compiled a list of all parents of K-3 SAGE students enrolled during the 2000-2001 school year. The surveys, along with a cover letter (Appendix A), were mailed to parents in early August 2001. Stamped, addressed envelopes were enclosed to facilitate ease of return. The return was addressed to the director of the Bayfield SAGE program. A numbering system was applied to the surveys, to determine which ones were returned. Based on this system, a second distribution was completed during parent-teacher conferences, which

were held in early November, 2001. A total of 45 out of 92 surveys were returned. The return rate was 49%.

Data Analysis

The survey used in this study was specially designed to determine the views and perceptions of parents regarding the Bayfield K-3 SAGE program, and to determine their involvement at home and school. It also elicited parent comments regarding what they liked about the SAGE program, and suggestions that they had for improving the program.

Section I of the survey--General Information--recorded age, gender, race, number of children in household, place of residence, distance from school, head of family, level of education, and employment status. Section II included 14 statements regarding parents views of the SAGE program; Section III had 13 statements designed to measure the involvement of parents at home and school. Section IV asked parents to write what they liked about the SAGE program, and Section V asked them to share any suggestions they had for improving the program.

The Likert scale was the response format used in Section II, and III. The Section II format was as follows: 1 (strongly agree), 3 (disagree), 5 (undecided), 7 (agree), and 9 (strongly disagree). Section III format included: 1 (never), 3 (sometimes), 5 (frequently), and 7 (almost always). Written responses were elicited in Section IV, and Section V.

The responses of the survey were analyzed by the University of Wisconsin Stout Computer User support services. Data from the survey was examined by using descriptive statistics to classify and summarize the results. Frequency counts and valid percentage were used on each item were used on each item of Section I. In Sections II,

and III the mean (x = average score of the participants), standard deviation (S.D. = distance from the x of participants score), and rank order of importance were calculated. Results of Sections IV and V were tabulated and summarized by the investigator.

Limitations

Selection of participants for this study was limited to the parents of K-3 students that were enrolled in the SAGE program at the School District of Bayfield. This study cannot be considered representative for other school districts that are enrolled in the SAGE program in Wisconsin. There are many different factors that affect school district populations, such as size, urban or rural location, economic levels, cultural diversity, cultural and social learning differences, language barriers, family mobility, staff preparation and staff development. Furthermore, the instrument was designed by the investigator; and is not a standard instrument. Some participants did not voluntarily respond with written comments regarding the SAGE program in Sections IV and V of the survey.

This chapter has discussed methodology for the research study. The next chapter will include the survey results and a discussion of these findings. The last chapter will summarize the study, draw conclusions from the results of the survey, and state future recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the results of the parents survey followed by a discussion of these results. The demographic findings of the parents will be presented. The survey data collected in Section II through V were analyzed and discussed for the total population in reference to the research to the research objectives. A discussion of the findings in relation to the review of literature concludes this chapter.

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic information from Section I of the survey is presented in Table 1 through Table 9. The following is an overview of each demographic area: Gender, age, ethnicity, place of residence, distance from school, head of family, number of children in household, level of education, and employment status.

Gender

Respondents were asked to indicate their gender. For all respondents, 6 (12%) were males, and 39 (88%) were females. See Table 3.

Table 3: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
Male	6	13.3
Female	39	86.7
Total	45	100.00

Age

In the survey, the age of respondents was divided into seven categories. About one fourth of the respondents (n=12, 26.7%) were 35-40 years old, and one fourth were in the 26-30 year old category with 11 respondents (24.4%). The next two age categories had 7 respondents being 31-35 year olds (15.6%), and 6 respondents being 41-45 year olds (13.3%). The 20-25 year old and the 46-50 year old categories were tied with 4 respondents each (8.9%). The 51-55 year old category had the fewest with 1 respondent (2.2%). Table 4 presents the computed results.

Table 4: Age Range

Age level	Frequency	Valid Percent
20-25 years old	4	8.9
26-30 years old	11	24.4
31-35 years old	7	15.6
36-40 years old	12	26.7
41-45 years old	6	13.3
46-50 years old	4	8.9
51-55 years old	1	2.2
Total	45	100.0

Ethnicity

Respondents were asked to indicate their ethnicity. In the survey, the categories included that included African American, and Asian American were not represented. The

majority of respondents (n=25, 55.6%) were white. Seventeen (37.8%) respondents were Native American, two (4.4%) were Hispanic, and one (2.2%) respondent indicated other. See Table 5.

Table 5: Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Valid Percent
Native American	17	37.8
Hispanic	2	4.4
White	25	55.6
Other	1	2.2
Total	45	100.0

Place of Residence

Respondents were asked to identify their place of residence within the school district. The majority (n=25, 55.6%) of the respondents resided in the Red Cliff Reservation /Town of Russell. Twenty respondents (44.4%) lived in the city or Town of Bayfield. See Table 6.

Table 6: Place of Residence

Place of Residence	Frequency	Valid Percent
Red Cliff-Town of Russell	25	55.6
City-Town of Bayfield	20	44.4
Total	45	100.0

Distance from School

Respondents were asked to indicate the distance that they lived from school. Almost half of the respondents (n=22. 48.9%) lived 2.1-6.0 miles from the school. Fourteen (31.1%) respondents lived 0-2.0 miles from school. Eight (17.8%) respondents resided 6.1-12.0 miles from school. See Table 7.

Table 7: Distance From School

Distance from school	Frequency	Valid Percent
0-2.0 miles from school	14	31.1
2.1-6.0 miles from school	22	48.9
6.1-12.0 miles from school	8	17.8
Missing	1	2.2
Total	45	100.0

Head of Family

Respondents were asked to indicate the head of their family. The majority of respondents (n=30, 66.7%) were married. Twelve respondents (26.7%) were single parents, and three respondents (6.7%) indicated other. See Table 8.

Table 8: Head of Family

Head of Family	Frequency	Valid Percent
Married Parents	30	66.7
Single Parent	12	26.7
Other	3	6.7
Total	45	100.0

Children in Household

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of children in their family. Almost half of the respondents (n=20, 46.5%) had 2 children in their family. Nine (20.9%) respondents reported 1 child in their family, and nine (20.9%) respondents had 3 children in their family. Four respondents (9.3%) indicated 4 children in their family, and one respondent (2.3%) had 5 children in the family. See Table 9.

Table 9: Number of Children in Household

Children in Household	Frequency	Valid Percent
1 child	9	20.9
1 children	20	46.5
3 children	9	20.9
4 children	4	9.3
5 children	1	2.3
Missing	2	.1
Total	45	100.0

Level of Education

Table 8 reflects the level of education of the respondents. The largest category of parents (n=18, 40.0%) had completed high school/GED, and fourteen (31.3%) earned a college degree.

Eleven (24.4%) respondents had a vocational/technical degree. Two (4.4%) respondents had a post-college degree. See Table 10.

Table 10: Level of Education Completed

Level of Education Completed	Frequency	Valid Percent
High School-GED	18	40.0
Voc-Tec Degree	11	24.4
College Degree	14	31.1
Post-College Degree	2	4.4
Total	45	100.0

Employment Status

Respondents were asked to indicate their employment status. More than half of the respondents (n=24, 53.3%) worked full-time, and 11 (24.4%) worked part-time. Six (13.3%) respondents were full-time homemakers. Two (4.4%) respondents were attending school, and two (4.4%) were unemployed. Table 11 presents the computed results.

Table 11: Current Employment Status

Employment Status	Frequency	Valid Percent
Attending School	2	4.4
Employed Part-Time	11	24.4
Employed Full-Time	24	53.3
Full-Time Homemaker	6	13.3
Unemployed	2	4.4
Total	45	100.0

Parent Perception/Views Statement

Section II in the survey, Parent Perception/Views, was designed to measure parental views and perceptions of the SAGE program. The fourteen perception/view statements were rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 9: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Disagree, 5 = Undecided, 7 = Agree, and 9 = Strongly Disagree. There were two perceptions/views that the respondents strongly agreed ($x = 8.11$ to $x = 8.44$) upon; ten perception/views that the respondents agreed ($x = 7.09$ to $x = 7.93$) about, and two perception/views in which the respondents were between undecided and agreed ($x = 6.20$ to $x = 6.87$). See Table 12.

Table 12: Parent Perceptions/Views of the SAGE Program

Perception/View Item	n	x	S.D.	Order
1. In a smaller classroom, my child has more personal contact with the teacher through sharing and instruction.	45	8.44	.84	1
2. A smaller class helps teachers to work with students on how to get along together.	45	8.11	1.19	2
6. Report cards and parent teacher conferences inform me of the progress my child is making toward grade level expectations.	44	7.93	1.07	4
3. The individual attention has helped my child to do his best in reading and math.	45	7.93	1.34	4
14. I enjoy coming to school to take part in my child's education.	45	7.93	1.56	4
13. I feel welcome to come to school for school events and activities.	45	7.80	1.46	6

Perception/View Item	n	x	S.D.	Order
6. Teachers are able to get to know the parents better in a class with fewer students.	45	7.67	1.62	7
8. My child is learning what he/she needs through our reading, writing, and math programs.	45	7.38	1.47	8
4. When a child is having a problem, the teacher can see it and help him right away.	45	7.33	1.55	9
5. There is a family-like feeling in a class with 15 students to 1 teacher.	44	7.25	1.59	10
7. In smaller classes, teachers and parents keep in touch more often through phone calls, notes, and informal visits.	45	7.24	1.71	11
11. Our school provides many opportunities for parents to be involved (like volunteering, open houses, attending work-shops, etc.)	45	7.09	1.43	12
12. I get enough information to keep me informed of school events and activities.	45	6.87	1.71	13
10. I like the opportunities that are available for students before and after regular school hours.	45	6.20	2.04	14

The respondents were most strongly agreed with "In a smaller classroom, my child has more personal contact with the teacher through sharing and instruction," and "A smaller class helps teacher to work with students on how to get along together." This signified that parents had the highest concern about their child's well being through

personal contact with the teacher, and positive social interactions with their peers. Both of these personal interaction factors were extremely important in the quality of instruction. It showed that parents understand and strongly agree that student interaction needs to be taught and facilitated/monitored by the teacher. A smaller class size makes it possible for the teacher to carry this out. It also implies that this environment will set the foundation for the child to feel confident in sharing this thoughts and feelings. This will move them toward an enhanced self-concept and will further language development.

The ten statements that the respondents agreed upon included three main areas. The first area was being satisfied with their child's reading, writing, and math instruction, and that adequate information was relayed regarding academic progress. The second area was agreement that parents were able to get to know their child's teacher, and communicate with them. The third area was that parents agreed that they felt welcomed, enjoyed coming to school, and liked the involvement opportunities provided for them.

The two areas in which the respondents replied between undecided and agreement related to receiving enough information about activities and events, and liking the activities that were provided before and after the regular school day. There were no statements with which the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Parent Participation at Home and School

Section III in the survey, Parent Participation at Home and School, was devised to determine parental participation at home and school. The 13 interest statements were rated on a Likert scale from never to almost always: 1 = never, 3 = sometimes, 5 =

frequently, and 7 = almost always. For the purpose of this study, these items were divided into two sections: parent participation at home, and parent participation at school.

In the home section, there were three items in which respondents almost always (x = 6.51 to 6.64) participated, and three items in which they frequently (x = 5.16 to 5.53) participated. See Table 13.

Table 13: Parent Participation at Home

Attitude Item	n	x	S.D.	Order
4. I help with my child's homework as needed, and look it over when it is finished.	45	6.64	.68	1
5. I review the weekly folder that is sent home each Thursday.	45	6.60	1.12	2
6. I communicate with the school to inform them of absences and other concerns.	45	6.51	.89	3
1. I read to my child, or he/she reads to me on school nights.	45	5.53	1.52	4
2. My child does drawing, and/or writing of notes, letters, and stories at home.	45	5.51	1.52	5
3. We practice math skills at home, such as counting, measuring, and basic addition and subtraction problems.	45	5.16	1.34	6

The respondents almost always helped their child in three areas: they helped with homework, reviewed the weekly folder, and communicated with the school regarding absences and concerns. This showed that there was continual contact with the content of their child's academic work, and parents initiated and communicated important information with the school. Participation done frequently at home also included three

main areas of daily reading with their children, practicing math skills, and providing materials that resulted in the child's drawing and writing. This showed that parents were providing the materials, time, and interaction essential to practicing skills at home.

In the school section, there were three items in which parents almost always (x = 6.40 to 6.73) participated; one item in which they frequently (x = 5.67) participated; two items in which they sometimes (x = 3.47 to 3.84) participated; and one item which they sometimes to never (x = 2.73) participated. See Table 14.

Table 14: Parent Participation at School

Attitude Item	n	x	S.D	Order
8. I attend Parent - Teacher Conferences.	45	6.73	.89	1
9. I attend my child's special activities and events.	45	6.60	.86	2
7. I attend the Open Houses to meet the teachers and see the classrooms.	45	6.40	1.18	3
13. I bring treats to my child's class for holidays or special events.	45	5.67	1.57	4
10. I volunteer in the classroom by helping the students and teacher.	45	3.84	1.98	5
11. I volunteer by chaperoning on class trips.	45	3.47	1.97	6
12. I help out with special activities, such as the Book Fair or North Pole Express.	45	2.73	2.13	7

The three categories that respondents marked as almost always all included attending events which were held at school for the parents: parent-teacher conferences,

their children's special activities and events, and open houses to meet teachers and see the classrooms. This showed a high interest and response to invitations to attend school events that centered on their child, his/her teacher, and classroom.

The one area that respondents frequently participated in was bringing treats to their child's classroom for holidays or special events. This indicated a special way of supporting their child in the school setting, from the home setting.

Two areas that respondents listed as sometimes were those of helping in the classroom and chaperoning on field trips. This revealed that it was not a regular way of participating, and yet was of enough interest to be involved at this level sometimes.

The lowest area of participation, which was between sometimes and never, was helping out with special activities, such as the Book Fair or North Pole Express. This finding revealed that parents were not as interested in being involved with activities that would involve the whole elementary, but preferred to be involved directly with their own child's class.

What Parents Liked About the SAGE Program

In Section IV, parents were asked to write what they liked about the SAGE program. Parents wrote comments on 30 (67%) out of 45 surveys in this section. Fifteen (33%) out of the 45 surveys were returned blank in this section. Comments were centered around the two main areas of reduced class size and individual teaching and attention given to students.

Twenty-nine out of 45 respondents (64%) that commented that the reduced class size was what they liked about the SAGE program. The comments that supported

reduced class size pointed to: 1) a positive learning environment with less congestion and better discipline; 2) the teaching of more reading skills, along with tests to monitor student progress; and 3) more frequent, positive interaction between staff and parents.

Twenty-four out of 45 respondents (53%) specifically stated that they liked the individual attention that the teacher was able to give to each student in a smaller class. Nine out of 45 respondents (20%) pointed out that the individual teaching and attention enabled teachers to get to know student's strengths and weaknesses, and that problems were noticed and responded to immediately. These respondents also said that children were encouraged in their individual learning styles, and that appropriate challenges were provided for students as needed. Five out of 30 (17%) specifically stated that teachers got to know each child on a personal basis, and that their self-esteem and confidence was boosted. Parents went on to comment that the positive effects resulting from teaching problem solving skills and complimenting appropriate behavior were more noticeable in a smaller class.

Overall, 29 of the 30 respondents (97%) that commented in this section were very pleased and positive about the SAGE program. One respondent also stated that the after-school program was great.

Parent Suggestions for Improving the SAGE Program

Section V of the survey was intended to elicit parents' views on how the program could be improved. Parents wrote comments on 21 out of 45 surveys (47%) in this section. Twenty-four out of the 45 surveys (53%) were returned blank in this area. Comments were centered around the two main topics of exceeding the 15:1 student

teacher ratio, and disruptions caused by special education students being in the classroom. Additional comments were related to discipline, needing more tutors, and suggestions for teachers, as well as positive feedback.

Nine respondents out of 45 (29%) commented on the situations in which the 15:1 student teacher ratio was exceeded. (In these situations, a second teacher is placed in the classroom to team teach in the core subject areas of language arts and math.) Parents stated that additional students, with an additional teacher, negatively affected the classroom climate in becoming crowded and noisy. They went on to say that the same academic results were not attained in these conditions. Some parents recommended that a second teacher be placed in the classroom for the full day, rather than just during core subjects. This would allow the two teachers to share the responsibilities of the extra students for the entire day. One parent stated that this situation could only be successful if the team teachers were able to work well together, and that this had not always been the case. Four respondents (9%) wrote that the administration should follow the intended guidelines of the 15:1 student-teacher ratio, so that there truly would be smaller classes.

Ten respondents (22%) stated concerns regarding the students that were disruptive and had special learning needs. They stated that students with behavior problems monopolized the teachers' time, and that the rest of the class did not get the teaching and attention that they needed. One respondent indicated being opposed to the mainstreaming of special education students. Others recommended that these special education students be removed to a different setting where it would be more productive for the special education students, and would not interfere with the learning of average-

ability students. Parents thought that this would allow the classroom teacher to have more time and energy for the main class.

Three respondents (7%) made suggestions for teachers and administration. They stated that teachers should try to listen more to children's problems, to find out what each individual child needed. Another parent recommended closer supervision of teachers to ensure that individual attention was given. Three respondents (7%) thought the more tutors, or teachers aides were needed.

Three respondents (7%) made positive comments, encouraging teachers to keep up the good work of keeping students interested and involved. They thanked the teachers and told them that they were doing great! Two parents (4%) stated that they had no suggestions.

Two respondents (4%) had questions and concerns about discipline. One wondered if students were taught about teasing, harassment, feelings, respect, hurting words, and consequences. This parent mentioned concern about the recent school shootings, and that students do not know the fear of God as they once did. Another did not feel that any of her child's teachers handled discipline in a fair way, and that reduced class size did not help to handle the problems appropriately. This parent commented that teachers had stated concerns about her child having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). She did not concur with this, but would continue to communicate with the teachers on a frequent basis.

Discussion

The findings from the survey confirmed much of what the research stated in the review of literature regarding class size reduction (Achilles,1996, Achilles & Finn, 1997, Cirone, 1997, Jones, 1998, and Zahorik, 1999). In his research, Zahorik (1999) has proclaimed that increased individualization is the main component of class size reduction, and has the effects of more instruction and fewer discipline problems, and more knowledge of students. This was also found in the research of Achilles (1996), as well as the fact that minority students benefit the most. In this present study, the parent views reinforced this research in strongly agreeing that their children had more personal contact with the teacher through sharing and instruction, and that students learned better discipline and social skills.

Jones (1998) found that in reduced sized classes, the learning time is increased, which allows better conditions for students to acquire basic reading and math skills. This survey documented that parents were satisfied with their children's reading, writing, and math instruction, as well as the information regarding their progress.

Parents recommended that the student teacher ratio of 15:1 be met, rather than adding a second teacher for part of the teaching time. Parents felt that additional students in the classroom lowered academic achievement. Research has documented that adding students lowers the average performance in classrooms. Each student added to a classroom beyond the 15:1 SAGE student-teacher ratio results in a "decrease of approximately one scale point in the class average in all academic scores" (Molnar, et al, 2001, p. 2)"

The research literature also discussed that parents are looking for regular, clear communication regarding their child's progress, and school happenings. They want to hear positive reports, as well as immediate contact when problems arise (Rich, 1998). This correlates to parents stating that they were able to communicate with the teachers and had been able to get to know them through the year. Both Brittingham (1998) and Epstein (1995) stated that developing relationships is a key factor in building partnerships between home, school, and community.

Research has found that parents and teachers both appreciated the benefits from smaller classes in increased time for instruction and learning, diagnosis and assessment, and meeting individual needs (Cirone, 1997). The research done by Gursky (1998) revealed that teachers used more varied types of instruction to engage students in smaller classes. This was confirmed in the survey as the parents stated that they felt that their children were getting the instruction that they needed for satisfactory success. Equitable education is an ideal goal that can be reasonably achieved in smaller classes (Achilles & Finn, 1997).

The extensive research by Epstein (1995), revealed that it is essential to form partnerships between the family, school, and community to achieve student success and overall well-being. She stated that children learn and grow in the three overlapping spheres of family, school, and community. The survey documents that students were supported at home, through daily reading, supervision of homework, review of completed work, and communicating with the school. Parents stated that they felt welcomed and enjoyed coming to school, and felt adequate opportunities were provided for involvement. They almost always attended parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and

their children's special events. They frequently provided treats for special events, and sometimes volunteered in the classroom or chaperoned on field trips. This documents the overall picture of the child being cared for in the areas of home and school, which produces achievement and well-being.

Parents need to be recognized for their role in their child's education (Pape, 1999). It is believed by our state authorities that high levels of student achievement can only be reached with strong parent and community involvement (Kraus, 2002).

Generally speaking, the research literature supported the findings of the current survey. The majority of the areas were strongly upheld. This substantiates the fact that reduced class size, and parent involvement are critical factors in producing student achievement.

This chapter has examined the data analysis of parent perceptions and views of the SAGE program, their participation at home and school, what they liked about the program, and suggestions for improving the program. A discussion of the findings followed.

Chapter V will contain a summary of the information and draw conclusions from that data. Lastly, it will include recommendations for further educational studies.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter of this study summarizes the methodology and findings. It will then draw conclusions that have been deducted from the findings, and offer research recommendations for further study. Lastly, this chapter will outline the educational implications of the investigation.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine parent views and perceptions of the K-3 SAGE program at the School District of Bayfield in Wisconsin. This entailed a survey that included statements regarding parent views of the SAGE program, their involvement at home and school, and written comments of what they liked about the SAGE program, and suggestions for improvement. Demographic characteristics were investigated to determine their effects on the variables. The independent variables used for the data analysis were age, gender, race, number of children in the household, place of residence, distance from school, head of family, education level, and employment status.

Methods and Procedures

The 29 item survey was administered in August through November 2001. The population was drawn from systematic sampling of parents of SAGE students in the Bayfield School District in northern Wisconsin. The sample group of 92 subjects

received a cover letter and survey (see Appendix A) requesting their participation. There were a total of 45 surveys returned, computing to a 49% return rate.

Parents anonymously completed a five-part survey that encompassed demographics, parent views of the SAGE program, parent involvement at home and school, and comments regarding what they liked about the SAGE program and suggestions for improvement. The investigator developed and designed the instrument for research purposes.

Section I of the survey provided a description of the sample population who participated in the study. There were more females (n=39) that responded to the survey than males (n=6), with the majority of parents being between the ages of 26 to 40. The majority of the respondents were white (n=25), followed by (n=17) Native Americans. More parents (n=25) lived in Red Cliff/Town of Russell, with the majority (n=22) living a distance of 2.1-6.0 miles from school. The second highest group of parents (n=20) were those living in the City/Town of Bayfield, with this cluster (n=14) living a distance of 0-2.0 miles from school. Most of the respondents (n=30) were married, with two children (n=20) in the family. In the area of education, 40% of respondents (n=18) had high school/GED degrees, and 31.1% had a college degree. Most (53.3%) respondents were employed full-time, with 24.4% being employed part-time.

The parent perception/views statements in Section II denoted that respondents have the highest concern about their child's well being through personal contact with the teacher through sharing and instruction, and positive social interactions with their peers due to teaching and facilitation by the teacher. The agreement of respondents included three main areas. The first area was satisfaction with their child's reading, writing, and

math instruction, and that adequate information was relayed regarding academic progress. The second area was agreement that they were able to get to know their child's teacher, and were able to communicate with them. The third area was that parents agreed that they felt welcomed and enjoyed coming to school, and felt like adequate opportunities were provided for them to be involved.

The statements regarding parent participation at home and school in Section III were designed to determine the respondents' involvement. In home participation, parents placed more importance on helping their children with homework, reviewing their completed work in the weekly folder, and communicating with the school regarding absences and concerns. This main involvement was followed by frequent involvement in daily reading with their children, practicing math skills, and providing drawing and writing materials. In participation in school, parents almost always (x=6.40-6.73) attended parent-teacher conferences, their children's special activities and events, and open houses to meet the teachers and see the classrooms. They frequently participated by bringing treats for holidays or special events, and sometimes volunteered in the classrooms or on field trips. The fewest respondents (x=2.73) volunteered to help with more specific activities that involved the whole elementary. This implies that when most parents volunteer, they would prefer to be directly involved in the classes of their own children.

Section IV was composed of parent statements regarding what they viewed as positive aspects of the SAGE program. Parents commented in this section on 30 out of the 45 (67%) returned surveys. The majority of the parents (67%) supported reduced class size because of the positive learning environment and better discipline, the teaching

and monitoring of reading skills, and frequent interaction between staff and parents. A large number (53%) of respondents stated that they liked the individual attention that teacher were able to give in a smaller class, knowing their strengths and weaknesses, and responding to problems right away. They also stated that children were encouraged in their individual learning styles, and challenges were provided as needed. Impressively, 97% of the respondents commented that they were very pleased and positive about the SAGE program.

Section V was composed of parent statements regarding suggestions for improving the SAGE program. Comments centered around the two main topics of exceeding the 15:1 student teacher ratio, and the disruptions caused by special needs students being in the classroom. Parents stated that adding more students and a second teacher during core academic subjects did not produce the same environment or academic results. Others stated that if team teaching was assigned to a larger classroom, the teachers would have to be able to work together successfully. Respondents (22%) stated concerns regarding the disruptive behaviors of some special needs students. They stated that students with behavior problems monopolized the teachers' time, and therefore the rest of the class did not get the teaching and attention needed. Additional comments were made related to discipline, needing more tutors, and suggestions for teachers, as well as positive feedback.

Data Analysis

The responses of the survey were analyzed by the University of Wisconsin Stout Computer User support services. Frequency counts and valid percentages were tabulated

for items 1-9 in Section I. In addition, the mean, standard deviation, and rank order for each item in Sections II and III were computed. Written comments from Sections IV and V were tabulated and described by the investigator.

Limitations

This study represents a small population of K-3 parents from a rural school district in northern Wisconsin. The instrument was designed and developed by the investigator; and is not a standard instrument. The findings are restricted to factors measured by the survey of parent views and perceptions.

Conclusions

As a result of the data reported in Chapter IV, there are conclusions to summarize. They will be discussed according to the three main objectives outlined in Chapter I.

Objective 1: Describe the demographics of the SAGE parents regarding age, gender, race, number of children in the household, place of residence, distance from school, head of family, education level, and employment status.

It was found that more females than males responded to the survey, with the majority of parents being between the ages of 26 to 40. Fifty-six percent of respondents were white, and 38% were Native Americans. The percentage of respondents that lived in Red Cliff/Town of Russell were 56%, and 44% were living in the city/Town of Bayfield. Forty-nine percent lived a distance of 2.1 to 6.0 miles from school, and 31% lived a distance of 0 to 2.0 miles from school. Most respondents were married, with two children in the family. In the area of education, 40% of respondents had high

school/GED degrees, and 31.3% had a college degree. Over half of the respondents were employed full-time, and almost one fourth were employed part-time. It was concluded that the parents that answered the survey were a fair representation of the ethnicity, places of residence, head of households, educational status, and employment status within the district.

Objective 2: Identify parent views and perceptions of the SAGE program in the School District of Bayfield in Wisconsin.

It was concluded that parents highly valued the personal contact and individualization that their children received in a smaller classroom. It was also very important to them that students were taught positive, interactive social skills in that setting. It was also concluded that it was important for parents to be satisfied with their child's academic instruction, and progress reports. However, it was essential that this was under laid and nurtured with positive relationships. These relationships were developed through parents and teachers getting to know each other through caring communication, and welcoming parent involvement activities.

Parents satisfaction with the SAGE program centered on the two main areas of liking reduced class size, and the individualization of students. They liked the positive learning environment, better discipline, more teaching and monitoring of reading skills, and positive interaction between staff and parents. Strategies of individualization developed as teachers were able to get to know student's strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents stated that they were very pleased and positive about the SAGE program.

In making suggestions for improving the SAGE program, parents suggested that the student/teacher ratio of 15:1 would be followed without variances. They also suggested that if students with special needs were disruptive to the general classroom population, that they would be removed to special education classrooms, for the benefit of all students involved.

Objective 3: Determine parent participation at home and school in educational activities.

In the area of parent participation at home, it was concluded that there was continual contact with the content of their child's academic work, and that parents initiated and communicated important information with the school. Parents also provided materials, time and the interaction necessary to practice skills at home.

In parent participation at school, parents had the highest response to attending parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and their children's special events. They would frequently bring treats to the classroom for special events, and sometimes would help in the classroom or volunteer for field trips. The lowest area of participation was in activities that involved the whole elementary, which indicated that parent preferred being directly involved in their own child's classroom.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendation for future research include the following:

1. Conduct a follow-up study of the achievement of SAGE students in middle school and high school.

2. Survey SAGE teachers to determine which teaching strategies are most effective.
3. Survey parents in SAGE programs regarding parent participation and satisfaction in a sample of Wisconsin schools.
4. Compare parent participation in SAGE programs versus traditional K-3 programs.

The first recommendation would be part of the on-going study, to determine the long-term effects of the reduced class sizes, individualization, and parent involvement resulting from the district's enrollment in the SAGE program. Studies such as this would be important to the district in showing the comparison of academic achievement to financial investment made in the early years. This would have implications for other schools, as well.

The second recommendation of surveying SAGE teachers to determine most effective teaching strategies, would contribute to increased achievement and further success of the program. This would be a continuation of research that has already been done (Zahorik, et al, 2000) regarding the documented relationship between teaching strategies and styles and academic achievement.

Surveying parent involvement and satisfaction in a sample of Wisconsin SAGE schools is the third recommendation for future research. This would add to the tremendous amount of research that has already been done on parent involvement. It would tie that research with the Wisconsin SAGE program, as well as identify factors that would be most productive and successful. It would also establish the credibility of parents by including them in the evaluation process.

Comparing the participation of parents in SAGE program versus traditional K-3 programs is the fourth recommendation for future research. This would document the actual difference and impact that this element of the SAGE program is establishing. The study could include comparisons of academic achievement due to parent involvement or non-involvement.

Educational Implications

In the search to increase academic achievement, and in the midst of many new public school changes and challenges, a solution has been found that has been shown to be successful. This solution is the SAGE program of Wisconsin with the four components of reduced class size, rigorous curriculum, staff development, and parent involvement. Therefore, the educational implication is that the SAGE program would be continued, developed, and expanded. Other states may want to model strategies that have been proven successful.

As the SAGE program has shown that involving parents contributes to academic achievement in the primary grades, an educational implication is to increase parent involvement activities in grades 4-12. School districts need to creatively develop new ways for parents to be involved in the middle and high school years. As the research of Epstein (1995) and others has shown, the relationships of schools, families, and communities need to interweave for the stability, continuity, and success of the children. Parents want their children to be successful, and they want to support them. As students grow and develop in size and age, schools need to provide parent involvement opportunities in welcoming ways.

It all comes down to the extreme importance of relationships, within classrooms, schools, families and communities. The benefactors of these positive, nurturing relationships are our children. When children are surrounded and encouraged by parents, school, and community members, they will be more likely to reach their goals in life. The early years are the formative years, and they are worth our investment. After all, they are our future!

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APPENDIX A

August 23, 2001
Box 5001
Bayfield Elementary
Bayfield, WI 54814

Dear Parents,

During this past school year (2000-2001), one or more of your children were in a class that was reduced in size due to our school's participation in the Students Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program. Reduced class size is part of the program, along with continued work on curriculum, achievement, staff development, and family-community involvement.

As a graduate student at UW-Stout, I am currently studying student achievement and parents' views of the SAGE program. To collect data for the study, I am working in cooperation with Mr. Terry Bauer, Director of Special Projects & Resources. My advisor for this study is Dr. Karen Zimmerman, of UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI.

I need to ask for your help! Please fill out the survey that is enclosed, and return it in the stamped envelope by September 7, 2001. If you plan to attend an Open House, you could bring it directly to me in room 110, which is a second grade room.

All responses are anonymous and will be kept confidential. You do not need to write your name on the survey, as the envelopes and surveys are numbered to keep track of which surveys are returned.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at home (779-5215) or at school (779-3201, Ext. 240), or call Mr. Bauer (779-3201, Ext. 126). Thank you for your time and effort. I really appreciate your help!

Sincerely,

Ms. Julie K. Eckels
Grade 2 Teacher & Researcher

PARENT VIEWS OF THE SAGE PROGRAM

This questionnaire is part of a study designed to explore parents' views about the SAGE program in the Bayfield Public School. Your Cooperation in this study will be greatly appreciated. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. ALL ANSWERS WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL.

SECTION I: General Information

1. Your age in years: ___20-25 ___31-35 ___41-45 ___51-55
   ___26-30 ___36-40 ___46-50 ___56 or older

2. Gender: ___Male ___Female

3. Race: ___Native American ___Hispanic
   ___African American ___White
   ___Asian American ___Other

4. Number of children in the household: ____

5. I live in: ___City/Town of Bayfield
   ___Red Cliff/Town of Russell

6. Distance that I live from school: ___Miles

7. Head of our family is ___Married Parents
   ___A Single Parent
   ___Guardian or Relatives
   ___Other

8. The highest level of education I have completed is:
   ___8^{TH} Grade
   ___High School Diploma or GED
   ___Vocational/Technical Degree
   ___College Degree
   ___Post-College Degree

9. My current employment status is:
   ___Attending School
   ___Employed Part-time
   ___Employed Full-time
   ___Full-time Homemaker
   ___Unemployed

SECTION II:

The following statements are related to your views of the SAGE program. Using the scale below, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the statements by writing a number from 1 to 9 to the left of each statement.

------1----------2----------3----------4----------5----------6----------7----------8----------9------

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

___1. In a smaller classroom, my child has more personal contact with the teacher through sharing and instruction.

___2. A smaller class helps teachers to work with students on how to get along together.

___3. The individual attention has helped my child to do his best in reading and math.

___4. When a child is having a problem, the teacher can see it and help him right away.

___5. There is a family-like feeling in a class with 15 students to 1 teacher.

___6. Teachers are able to get to know the parents better in a class with fewer students.

___7. In smaller classes, teachers and parents keep in touch more often through phone calls, notes, and informal visits.

___8. My child is learning what he/she needs through our reading, writing, and math programs.

___9. Report cards and parent-teacher conferences inform me of the progress my child is making toward grade level expectations.

___10. I like the opportunities that are available for students before and after regular school hours.

___11. Our school provides many opportunities for parents to be involves (like volunteering, open houses, attending workshops, etc.)

___12. I get enough information to keep me informed of school events and activities.

___13. I feel welcome to come for school events and activities.

___14. I enjoy coming to school to take part in my child's education.

SECTION III:

The statements in this section are designed to measure your participation at home and school. Using the scale below, please indicate the frequency of the participation by writing a number from 1 to 7 to the left of each statement.

--------1----------2----------3----------4----------5----------6----------7--------

Never	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always

___1. I read to my child, or he/she reads to me on school nights.

___2. My child does drawing, and/or writing of notes, letters and stories at home.

___3. We practice math skills at home, such as counting, measuring, and basic addition and subtraction problems.

___4. I help with my child's homework as needed, and look over it when it is finished.

___5. I review the weekly folder that is sent home each Thursday.

___6. I communicate with the school to inform them of absences and other concerns.

___7. I attend Open Houses to meet the teacher and see the classrooms.

___8. I attend Parent-Teacher conferences.

___9. I attend my children's special activities and events.

___10. I volunteer in the classroom by helping the students and teacher.

___11. I volunteer by chaperoning on class trips.

___12. I help out with special activities, such as the Book Fair, or 'North Pole Express'.

___13. I bring treats to my child's class for holidays and special events.

SECTION IV:

Please tell us what you have liked about the SAGE program:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SECTION V:

Please share any suggestions that you have for improving our SAGE program:

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

_____

_____