Professional Development in SAGE Schools

Recognizing that producing student achievement is a complex endeavor, SAGE encourages schools to change instruction through:

- Smaller classes K-3
- Rigorous curriculum
- Professional development & teacher evaluation
- Activities that strengthen the link between home and school

The professional development segment of SAGE legislation has five distinct components: a transition program for new employees, planning time, submission & review of teacher/administrator professional development plans that address student achievement, and a staff evaluation process focused on student performance.

In this policy brief, we look at the role that professional development plays in SAGE schools. We describe how nine schools developed professional development activities that addressed the specific knowledge & skills that teachers need to take advantage of the resources provided by SAGE and we explore how school & district professional development programs supported SAGE teaching practice.

SAGE-specific Professional Development

Class size reduction is a good investment because smaller classes can provide opportunities for more positive teacher-student interactions, fewer discipline problems, and more intense teaching & learning. In smaller groups, teachers are able to do more assessment and they develop closer relationships with students & families so they tailor their instruction to student strengths & needs. A self-generating cycle of success is created where teachers have higher morale and students develop stronger student identities.

Although it might seem natural for teachers to change their practice when they move from a large to smaller group, that is not necessarily the case. The strategies that make the most of class size reduction are typically different, requiring strategic professional development.

Interviews with SAGE teachers & principals indicate that schools have provided very limited staff development on the elements of the SAGE program. Few of our more than 40 participants in nine schools could recall SAGE-specific professional development and they felt that it would be a valuable addition to their practice. Because most of our participants’ knowledge of SAGE was limited to the class size provision, we recommend the development of staff development related to the SAGE program.
1. So that teachers and administrators can take advantage of the resources provided by the SAGE program, professional development programs should address the specific knowledge & skills necessary for teaching smaller groups.

2. Promising SAGE professional development activities should be multidimensional. SAGE educators suggest the following:
   a. A SAGE orientation to provide an overview of the program’s theory, elements, and research basis for all teachers & administrators.
   b. Presentations about high quality administrative & instructional practice with smaller groups.
   c. Specific efforts to support co-teaching, including attention to both instructional and interpersonal strategies used in successful 30:2 classrooms.