



555 West Washington Ave, Suite 200
Madison, WI 53703

www.wccf.org
☎ 608-284-0580
✉ 608-284-0583

May 14, 2007

TO: Joint Finance Committee
FR: Charity Eleson, Executive Director
RE: Budget Papers # 636 & 637 – SAGE

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) wholeheartedly supports the SAGE program and endorses alternative #2 in paper 636 and alternative #1 in paper 637.

Paper 636 – Per pupil payment level

The legislature should fully fund the commitment it made in the last biennium to increase SAGE payments to \$2,250 per pupil. That payment level has not been increased since the program's inception a decade ago, and if it had been adjusted for inflation each year based on the CPI, the payment level would be more than \$2,500 in 2007.

The fact that some schools have had to drop out of SAGE also illustrates the importance of finally adjusting the payment level. In addition, the Fiscal Bureau paper makes the very important point that one of the things the courts look at in judging the constitutionality of the state's school finance system is the adequacy of funding for programs that are aimed at providing equal opportunity for low-income students.

In light of all of those considerations, we hope the committee will support alternative #2, which would increase the amount in the bill in order to reach the \$2,250 level.

Paper 637 – Program expansion

Over the last four years, the number of districts participating in SAGE has declined from 231 to 220, and the number of schools in the program has fallen from 548 to 480. In light of that drop-off in participation, we support allowing new schools to join the program. We hope the committee will approve alternative #1 – the funding level recommended by the Governor.