



JIM DOYLE
GOVERNOR
STATE OF WISCONSIN

April 18, 2006

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE SENATE:

I am vetoing Senate Bill 68. This bill permits schools to choose not to comply with the requirement to reduce class sizes in grades two or three or both and to forego aid under the SAGE program for students in those classes. This provision would apply to just those districts in which no more than 50 percent of the student enrollment is comprised of pupils who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. If a school were to choose to not reduce class size and forego aid for students in grades two or three or both, that school would still be eligible for the current law payment under the SAGE program for students in grades in which it continued to reduce class size.

The bill also creates a new, sum sufficient special education aid supplemental appropriation. The appropriation amount would be equal to the amounts lapsed to the general fund in the previous fiscal year from the SAGE appropriation. The funds would be used for the payment of aids for special education and school age parent programs, to be distributed in the same manner as under current law. In effect, funds appropriated for the SAGE program that go unexpended as a result of districts opting out of the class reduction requirements of the SAGE program for grades two, three, or both, would be used for special education and school age parent programs.

As Governor, I have been forced to use my veto pen on more than one occasion to defend the SAGE small class size program against attacks by the Legislature, and I will do so again today. This bill lets schools take small class size funding without actually reducing class sizes. That makes no sense. Every parent and every teacher knows that one of the best things you can do for a child's education is to put them in a classroom with fewer students. Moreover, research shows that the positive outcomes associated with reduced class sizes are sustained only if class sizes remain reduced over consecutive years, in kindergarten through third grade. This bill is a cynical attack on the SAGE program that would result in more students being packed into larger classes in the early grades – a critical stage in their education.

There is simply no need for this bill, and it would do great harm to our schools. We should be deepening our investment in smaller classes, not backing away from it. That's why I was so pleased that the bipartisan agreement I reached with leaders in the Legislature to bring accountability to the Milwaukee school choice program also includes a major new investment in the SAGE small class size initiative.

Respectfully submitted,

JIM DOYLE
Governor