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State Class-size Reduction Measures

Updated by Kyle Zinth

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The following states have attempted to limit the teacher/student ratio to 20 or fewer students per teacher. Several "marginal" class-size reduction measures that do not meet that standard also are included.

State	Category (Type)	Year Enacted	Description	Notes	Funding	Average Elementary School Class Size
Alabama	Mandate	1997 Amended 1998	State board resolution sets a timetable and limits. K-3, 18 students per teacher	Classes with aides reviewed as an exception by the state superintendent of education	Through the 1995 Foundation Program Plan	18.7
California	Voluntary CAL. EDUC. CODE § 52120-52128.5	1996 Amended 2000	Legislation authorized formation of smaller classes and provided funding for those schools choosing to do so. Initial targets: 20 in K-3. Additional $200 million for 8,000 additional classrooms, either through remodeling or use of portables. The appropriation for new facilities is a one-time provision, while class-size reduction funds are expected to be included annually in the state budget.	CAL. EDUC. CODE § 52128 mandated independent evaluation by March 28, 2002. Almost 29,000 new teachers were needed to accommodate the smaller class sizes. Many districts hired teachers lacking full credentials in order to meet the demand, with most of these teachers being hired by schools serving the most disadvantaged students.	Schools may apply for funds under one of two options. Under option one, a school district that provides a reduced class size for all pupils in each classroom for the full regular school day for each grade level may receive an apportionment equal to $800 per pupil. Under option two, a school district that provides a reduced class size for all pupils in each classroom for at least half of the instructional minutes offered per day at each grade level may receive an apportionment equal to $400 per pupil.	22.7
Connecticut	Voluntary/Grant CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-265F	1998	Designed to reduce K-3 class-size to no more than 18 in core curriculum classes in "priority" schools.	Grants allocated for three purposes: (1) to establish full-day kindergarten; (2) to reduce class size in grades K-3; and (3) to establish intensive early intervention reading programs. Schools may receive a grant for one or more of the listed purposes.		20
Florida	Mandate FLA. CONST. ART. 9 § 1	2002	The maximum number of students assigned to each	Voters approved an initiative in 2002 to amend the Florida constitution in order	FLA. STAT. ANN. § 1011.685 created the operating categorical	23.1

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			teacher for pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade is 18, and for 4th through 8th grade is not to be more than 22 students. Beginning in the 2003-04 fiscal year, the state legislature is to provide sufficient funding to reduce the number of students per classroom by at least two students per year until the requirements of the amendment are met.	to provide funding to decrease class sizes.	fund for the class size reduction program and FLA. STAT. ANN. § 1013.737 sets up the class size reduction lottery revenue bond program.	
Georgia	Mandate GA. CODE ANN. § 20-2-161 GA. CODE ANN. § 20-2-182	2000	Class sizes are funded as follows: Kindergarten – 15; Kindergarten Early Intervention – 11; Grades 1-3 – 17; Grades 1-3 Early Intervention Program – 11; Grades 9-12 remedial – 15.		Through funding formula.	19.7
Hawaii	PUBIC ACT 221	2004	State aims to reduce class size in grades K-2, although the Act does not specify a target class size.		State appropriated $2,143,350 in 2004 to hire 75 elementary school teachers to reduce class size in grades K-2.	23.1
Illinois	Voluntary/Grants 105 ILL. COMP STAT. 5/2-3-51 105 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/2-3.134	1997 2004	Reading Improvement Block Grant Program authorized grants to improve reading instruction through several measures, one of which is to reduce class size in grades K-3. Targets K-3 students. Classes to have no more than 20 students per teacher. Only those schools that are on the State Board of Education Early Academic Warning List or the academic watch list that maintain grades kindergarten through 3 are grant eligible.			22.3
Indiana	Voluntary/Pilot IND. CODE § 21-1-30 (Initially under IND. CODE. § 21-1-29-1.)	1981 Amended 1999	"Prime Time" program Statutes specify a target of between 15-18 students per class, determined by factoring in the school's at-risk index and amount of tuition	Chapter scheduled to expire January 1, 2006.	Through funding formula	21.4

State	Category (Type)	Year Enacted	Description	Notes	Funding	Average Elementary School Class Size
			support.			
Iowa	Mandate/Grants IOWA CODE ANN. § 256D.1	1999	Iowa early intervention block grant program's goal is to provide resources to reduce class size in basic skills instruction to 17 students per teacher. The program is designed to achieve a higher level of student success in the basic skills, especially reading.			20.1
Louisiana	Mandate LA.REV. STAT. ANN. § 17:174	1986	K-3 classes not to exceed 20 unless authorized in writing by the state superintendent.	Students above the maximum not to be counted for funding purposes. No provision of this measure can take effect until funds appropriated specifically by the legislature.	Unknown	18.9
Maine	Voluntary/Grants ME. REV.STAT. ANN.TIT. 20, § 4252	1989	Local units may elect to target class size within one or more grades, K-3. Recommendation of 15 to 1, with a maximum of 18 to 1.		Competitive grant program	18
Nevada	Mandate NEV. REV. STAT. § 388.700	1989 Amended 1993, 1995, 1999, 2001	Legislature limited class size in K-3 to 15 (core subjects). School districts and licensed personnel association(s) must develop plan to reduce class sizes in grades 1-3 within limits of available financial support.		Special revenue fund for class-size reduction NEV. REV. STAT. §388.032	20.7
North Carolina	Mandate N.C. GEN. STAT. § 115C-301	1993 1995,1997, 2001	Efforts to reduce class size in NC were accomplished through state budget allocations awarded at the urging of the governor. The class size reduction efforts are documented in the NC General Assembly's *Joint Conference Committee Report on the Continuation, Expansion, and Capital Budgets,* produced after the approval of each state budget. In 2001, the NC General Assembly changed the kindergarten teacher	Ultimate goal is the reduction of all K-3 class sizes to 18 students. The North Carolina General Assembly has allocated $500,000 to study the effectiveness of the class size reduction program. Additional class size reduction funds are available for chronically low performing schools as follows: K-3 allotment 1:15 4-8 allotment 1:17 9-12 allotment 1:20	Per N.C. GEN STAT.§ 115C-472.10, the state board of education allocates funds made available through the sale of special registration plates to reduce class size.	20.9

State	Category (Type)	Year Enacted	Description	Notes	Funding	Average Elementary School Class Size
			allotment from 1:20 to 1:18. The 1st grade and 2nd grade allotments were also changed from 1:20 to 1:18 in 2002 and 2003, respectively. The 2004 budget was the first to include 3rd grade. It changed the teacher salary allotment from 1:22.23 to 1:18.			
Oklahoma	Mandate 70 OKL. ST. § 18-113.1	1990	Targets grades K, 1-3, 4-6. No more than 20 students may be regularly assigned to a teacher. With the exception of certain conditions (these vary by grade levels above), fiscal and accreditation penalties apply for noncompliance.	If limitations exceeded after the first nine weeks of the year, no fiscal penalty applies. Physical education and music classes are not subject to limitation. If classrooms are not available and district meets certain guidelines (has maximum millage allowable or voted indebtedness within five prior years), then district not penalized.	Funding addressed through foundation program.	18.6
Pennsylvania	Voluntary/Grants PA. CONS. STAT. ANN. § 25-2599.2	2003	The state provides grants to districts with various allowable uses, including the establishment, maintenance or expansion of a class size reduction program. Such programs shall appoint and assign a minimum of one teacher for every 17 students or two teachers for every 35 students enrolled in a kindergarten, first, second or third grade classroom.			22.2
Rhode Island	Voluntary/Grants R.I. GEN. LAWS § 16-67-2	1987 (effective 88-89); Re-enacted 2001	Districts encouraged to reduce class size to no more than 15 in grades K-3 (The Literacy Program).		Educational Improvement block grants R.I. Gen. Laws §16-5-31 (3)	20
South Carolina	Mandate S.C. CODE ANN. § 59-20-40 S.C. Code Ann. § 59-139-10	1977, Amended 2003 1993	To qualify for funds, each district is required to attain 21 to 1 average pupil-teacher ratio in basic skills classes of reading and mathematics (grades 1-3); districts may apply to the state board for waivers (phased in from 1979 to 1983). Early Childhood Development and		Funding is addressed through foundation program Kindergarten weighted 1.30; primary 1-3, 1.	17.9

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			Academic Assistance requires districts to design long-range plans which may include reduction in kindergarten pupil-teacher ratio (the class size component here is voluntary, but the plan is mandatory).			
	Voluntary S.C. CODE ANN. § 59-63-65.	1998	School districts which choose to reduce class size to 15 in grades 1-3 shall be eligible for funding for the reduced pupil-teacher ratios from funds provided by the General Assembly for this purpose. Districts choosing to implement the reduced class size must track the students served in classes with a 15:1 ratio for three years so that the impact of smaller class size can be evaluated.			
South Dakota	Voluntary/Grants S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 13-14-8.1	1993	Youth-at-risk funds (grants) offered as incentives for reducing class sizes in K-3 to 15 or less.		Grants for up to three years	18.8
Tennessee	Pilot TENN. CODE ANN. § 49-6-3501	1984	Demonstration centers (operated by local boards) established with class maximum enrollment of 17. Two hundred teaching positions were funded by the department of education.	Purpose of the demonstration projects and centers was to study the effects of reduced pupil-teacher ratio on the achievement of students in public school. First study began in 79 elementary schools in 1985. Greatest gains occurred in inner-city small classes. Classes with teacher aides achieved slightly higher scores than regular classes, but differences were not statistically significant. (Project STAR - Student Teacher Achievement Ratio)	All but 5% of costs paid by the department of education. Funding provided through the foundation program (weighting).	19.7
	Mandate 1985 TENN. COMP. R. & REGS. 0520-1-3	1985	Local boards of education are required to implement policies ensuring that pupil-teacher ratios do not exceed ratio prescribed. Within a building, the average of any grade level cannot exceed the school average, although any individual class within the unit may exceed the average (but not the maximum). K-3 average: 20 (maximum of 25).			

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Texas	Mandate TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 25.112 TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 25.111 TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 25.113	1984 1995 2001	School district may not enroll more than 22 students in K-4 classes. Stipulates that except for as provided in TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. §25.112, a ratio of not less than one teacher to each 20 students in average daily attendance (K-4). A campus or district that is granted an exception from class size limits must provide written notice of the exception to the parent of or person standing in parental relation to each student affected by the exception.	Numerous exceptions apply.	Unknown	18.5
Utah	Mandate UTAH CODE ANN. § 53A -17a-124.5	1992	Through use of appropriations, districts must reduce average class size in grades K-8, with emphasis on K-2. Must use 50% of allocation to reduce class size in K-2, with emphasis on improving reading skills. If average class size is below 18 in K-2, may petition the state board for waiver to use its allocation for reduction in other grades.	20% of district's allocation may be used for capital facilities projects that will help to reduce class size.	Funding determined through use of weighting formula (weighted pupil units). State board of education disperses funds to school districts and charter schools. The budgeted state contribution, for the 2004-05 fiscal year, toward the class size reduction program is $65,902,946. (UTAH CODE ANN. § 53A-17a-104)	23.7
Virginia	Voluntary VA. CODE ANN. § 22.1-199.1	1996	Legislature established long-term goal of reducing pupil-teacher ratio and class size for K-3 in those schools with high or moderate concentrations of at-risk students.		State funding based on the incremental cost of providing the lower class sizes according to the greater of the division average per-pupil cost of all divisions or the actual division per-pupil cost. Local districts must provide matching funds based on the composite index of local ability to pay. State Board of Education to budget accordingly.	19.4
Washington	Mandate WASH. REV. CODE ANN. § 28A.505.210	2000	The long-term goal is for class sizes to be reduced to no more than 18 students per teacher in grades K-4.	In 2000, voters approved Initiative 728, which became effective in 2001. Selected class size reductions are to be made in grades 5-12, such as small high school writing classes.	Student Achievement Fund	23.9

State	Category (Type)	Year Enacted	Description	Notes	Funding	Average Elementary School Class Size
Wisconsin	Voluntary/ Grants WIS. STAT. ANN. § 118.43	1995	Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE). Districts enter into five-year achievement guarantee contacts with the department of public instruction. Schools receiving preschool through 5th grade grants provided for in WIS. STAT. ANN. **§** 115.45 are not eligible for the program. The program was initially intended for schools and districts with the highest poverty rates and included a minimum 50% low-income student threshold for eligible districts, amended to allow all districts to apply in the 2000-01 school year. No new applications are to be accepted past the 2000-01 school year. Transfer of existing contracts is permitted.	Targeted K, 1st grade in 98-99; added 2nd grade in 1999-2000; added 3rd grade in 2001-2003. Most recent requirement is to reduce class size to 15 in at least grades K-3. Class size reduction is one of several requirements for the grants. Annual renewal of contracts is contingent on the schools maintaining the class size reduction from the previous year, keeping the school open for extended hours, implementing changes in the curriculum to ensure high levels of achievement for all students, implementing a professional development and staff evaluation process with specific components – including potential dismissal of staff – and collaborating with community organizations to make educational and recreational opportunities, as well as community and social services, available in the school to all district residents. Staff development and accountability programs are to be regularly reviewed against student achievement.	Finance formula funds reduction in class size to 1: 15 in each SAGE classroom.	20.8

Small Class Sizes: Discussion, Rationale, Evidence

The debate over the effectiveness and efficiency of reducing class size remains unresolved. Nonetheless, several state legislatures are appropriating large sums of money to reduce K-3 class sizes to between 15 and 20 students.

Researchers keep the discussion alive as they argue about the merits and methodologies of various class-size studies. For state policymakers, reducing class size is a visible, concrete initiative that can be replicated throughout schools. Meanwhile, teachers and parents proclaim what they see as obvious – fewer students in a class make it easier to teach and to learn. In the end, state leaders must weigh the "political points" they earn from teachers and parents against the high cost of reducing class size and the education reforms left unfunded because of this policy.

The class-size reduction discussion intensified in 1990 when the Tennessee legislature funded a longitudinal study on smaller classes and student achievement, and then commissioned a follow-up study to determine the lasting benefits. The first study, known as Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) studied 7,000 students in 79 elementary schools. Researchers concluded that small class sizes (13-17 students) significantly increased student achievement scores, compared to regular classes of 22 to 25 and regular classes with a full-time teacher's aide. They also found that gains made in kindergarten were maintained through 3rd grade and the greatest gains were made in inner-city small classes.

Tennessee's second analysis, the Lasting Benefits Study, tracked students from grades 4-7 as they returned to normal size classes and concluded these students:

- Were less frequently retained in grade

- Succeeded in narrowing the achievement gap between children living in poverty and more affluent students, and between white and African-American students
- Had higher achievement "across the board" (in science, social studies, math, reading, spelling and study skills)
- Continued to outscore peers from larger classes; however, differences diminished somewhat as years went on.

While the results from these two studies appear convincing, critics point out that 1,100 small-class size studies produced mixed findings. They also question whether Project STAR and the Lasting Benefits Study should be viewed as the definitive studies on which to develop and invest in class-size reduction policies.

Overall, the evidence is inconclusive as to whether small classes improve student achievement. The research has produced mixed and contradictory results, including:

- Students in early grades learn more and continue to have an edge over the rest of their peers when they return to normal classrooms. The impact is greatest and longer-lasting if they remain in small classes, however.
- The payoff in terms of student achievement gains does not translate into a cost-effective investment. Tutoring and direct instruction appear to be more cost-effective.
- Kindergarten through 3rd grade students benefit most, as do minority students in urban schools.
- Class-size reduction cannot be isolated as the sole factor for increased student achievement.
- Reading and math scores improve for some students in comparison to peers in regular-size classes.
- Smaller classes force districts to hire significantly more teachers and create more classroom space.
- Effectiveness depends on whether teachers adapt their teaching methods to take advantage of small classes and have more focused time with students.
- Small classes result in fewer classroom distractions and more time for teachers to devote to each student

Characteristics of High-Quality Initiatives

Reducing class size is most effective when:

- Classes are reduced to between 15 and 19 students. (Little impact has been demonstrated in class sizes of 20 to 40 students.)
- Particular schools are targeted, especially those with low-achieving and low-income students
- Teachers are provided ongoing, high-quality professional development to make the most of the smaller class size conditions
- Teachers are well-qualified and a challenging curriculum is used for every student.

Actions for Policymakers

If state policymakers decide to invest in class-size reduction, they may want to consider the following actions:

- Estimate the cost of funding the proposed class-size reduction plan, then:
    - Determine the state's commitment and any district contribution that will be necessary
    - Indicate whether state funding is permanent, temporary or contingent upon available revenue
    - Address the need for additional, qualified teachers and classroom space
    - Provide sufficient funds for the grades and schools covered under the initiative
- Target the program and dollars to low-income, low-achieving schools to allow significant class-size reduction in a few schools, rather than modest reductions statewide.
- Provide professional development funds so teachers can adapt their teaching methods for the smaller classes.

- Evaluate the small class-size initiative on a regular basis to determine its benefits and cost-effectiveness.
- Assist schools and districts to combine class-size reduction with other school-improvement plans for maximum impact.

Comments to Policymakers

As more states adopt or consider legislation to reduce class size, the discussion should focus on the costs of creating smaller classes and whether the costs are justified by the returns. Moreover, if class size is believed to make a difference, then policymakers need better information about why small classes are beneficial to student achievement and how this information can be used for other reform efforts. Finally, state leaders should be prepared to deal with the unintended consequences if class size is reduced on a statewide scale; for example, the need for additional, qualified teachers and classroom space and the issue of teachers choosing more desirable districts.

Suggestions for Evaluation: California Example

The following was adapted from Report to the State Board of Education: A Plan for the Evaluation of California's Class Size Reduction Initiative 10/20/97.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE CLASS SIZE REDUCTION PROGRAM

The Class Size Reduction program (CSR) consortium proposed a research plan to find information on many topics, broken into seven categories. The answers to some of these questions will come from data (test scores, for example), while many others will require observations, surveys, and conversations with policymakers, teachers and administrators, and parents.

Policymaking at the state, district, and school levels

- What are policymakers' goals and expectation for CSR? Their concerns?
- Do they have common expectations about the influence on student learning? Do these match or differ from teachers' or school boards' expectations.
- How do educational policies, regulations, and labor agreements help or hinder implementation?

Resource allocation within and among schools

- What is the effect on districts' revenues and expenditures? On spending for school operations and facilities, across grades, for instructional support services and programs? On resources across primary and secondary schools and across district programs?
- How did schools find space for new classrooms? If there were tradeoffs, what were they and are they permanent?
- How does CSR money affect equity of funding among districts, schools, and groups of students given the different resources already available to districts?

Intersection with other education reforms

- What is the relationship between CSR and large categorical programs (Special Education, Title 1) and programs for English learners?
- Do district or school characteristics (high or low revenue, for example) affect implementation?
- Is CSR integrated with a district's master plan? Or existing reform efforts? What interaction, if any, will there be with new state curriculum standards?
- Does CSR intersect with other reform efforts, or is it a diversion?

Teacher quality, assignment, and training

- What is the impact of CSR on recruiting and assigning teachers? What is the influence of collective bargaining?

- What are the qualifications and experience of teachers in the smaller classes and in classes with limited-English or minority or special-needs students?
- What professional development and support do teachers get? Does it change according to their experience? Does it vary by district?
- What do teachers report about their satisfaction and attitudes as a consequence of CSR? How do these affect student learning?

Classroom practices

- How has CSR affected teaching practices?
- What methods of instruction are used for English language learners in CSR classes? Does instruction differ across districts, classrooms, or categories of students?
- How is the classroom atmosphere changed?
- What is the impact on personnel to support teachers?

Student outcomes

- Has achievement in reading and math improved? Has promotion, retention changed? What do the next grade teachers report?
- Have transitions into or out of special programs changed?
- What is the impact on students' attendance, behavior, completing homework?
- Are English language learners ready to read sooner?
- Do student outcomes vary according to school, teacher, classroom practices, or the characteristics of the student?
- Have changes in classroom practices affected student outcomes?

Parental involvement

- How have parents been involved in decisions about participation, allocation of resources and space, and pupil assignments?
- Are parents more directly involved with their child's teacher or in the classroom?
- Do parents believe their children's education is improved? Is there a change in their satisfaction with teachers, the school, or the district? Do they think the total school program has improved?
- Have parent involvement programs grown or declined? Parent participation?

Sources:

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Kyle Zinth, researcher in the ECS Information Clearinghouse, updated this report.

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