



Class Size

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State Policies Focusing on Class-size Reduction

Updated by Kyle Zinth

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Twenty-three states currently have policies addressing class-size reductions to a level below 20 students per classroom. The majority of these policies target students in the elementary grades, with the K-3rd grade range being especially popular. Fifteen states specifically focus policies on students in grades K-3. The remaining listed states either all include at least some grades in the K-3 range within their policies, but either extend the grades upward or begin at preschool.

Following the summary chart below is a [brief primer](#) on the rationale behind and evidence for the effectiveness of class-size reduction.

These policies are not synonymous with class-size limitation policies that exist in most states. Those policies establish maximum class sizes, and will be examined in a future StateNote. Corrections and additions to policies listed here are welcome.

State	Category (Type)	Description	Notes	Funding	Average Elementary School Class Size	
					1999-2000 ¹	2003-04 ²
Alabama	Mandate ALA. ADMIN. CODE R. 290-5-1-.01	Targets K-3rd grades. State board resolution ³ sets a timetable and limits to 18 students per teacher		Through the 1995 Foundation Program Plan	18.7	18.4
California	Voluntary CAL. EDUC. CODE § 52120-52128.5	Targets K-3rd grades. Legislation authorized formation of smaller classes and provided funding for those schools choosing to do so.	CAL. EDUC. CODE § 52128 mandated independent evaluation. Report is currently available	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	22.7	21.7

State	Category (Type)	Description	Notes	Funding	Average Elementary School Class Size	
					1999-2000 ¹	2003-04 ²
		Initial targets: 20 in K-3.	online. ⁴	\$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.		
Connecticut	Voluntary/Grant CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-265F	Targets K-3rd grades. Designed in part to enable the reduction of K-3 class-size to no more than 18 in core curriculum classes in schools within a “priority” districts.	Grants allocated: 1. To establish full-day kindergarten 2. To reduce class size in grades K-3 3. To establish intensive early intervention reading programs. Schools may receive a grant for one or more of the listed purposes.	Eligible districts may apply to the state for funding through a competitive grant process. Statute dictates that funds available for this program in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009 be in the amount of \$1.8 million. Eligible districts may also qualify for additional funds for applicable facilities expenditures. (CONN. GEN. STAT. § 285a. § 285d.)	20	19.5
Florida	Mandate FLA. CONST. ART. 9 § 1, FLA. STAT. ANN. § 1003.03, § 1002.55 (applies to private pre-k programs)	Targets P-3rd grades. State constitution stipulates that by the beginning of the 2010 school year, the maximum number of students assigned to each teacher for P-3rd grade is 18. Ratio for 4th-8th grades is no more than 22 students.	Voters approved an initiative in 2002 to amend the Florida constitution in order to provide funding to decrease class sizes.	Specific operating categorical fund for class-size reduction (FLA. STAT. ANN. § 1011.685). The class size reduction lottery revenue bond program exists to fund program (FLA. STAT. ANN. § 1013.737). Classrooms for Kids program may be used for facilities upgrades or purchases in order to reduce class size (FLA. STAT. ANN. § 1013.735).	23.1	21.2
Georgia	Mandate GA. CODE ANN. § 20-2-161 GA. CODE ANN. § 20-2-182	Class sizes are funded as follows: • Kindergarten: 15 • Kindergarten Early Intervention: 11 • 1st-3rd grades: 17 • 1st-3rd grades Early Intervention: 11 • 4th-5th grades early intervention: 11	Due to an “unforeseen and unprecedented downturn in Georgia’s Economy,” for the 2009-10 school year, class-size limits were increased by two students per class. ⁵	Through funding formula	19.7	17.8
Illinois	Voluntary/Grants	Targets K-3rd grades.	Eligibility limited to districts with	Grants		

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					1999-2000 ¹	2003-04 ²
	105 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/2-3.134(a), ILL. ADM. CODE TIT. 23, § 565.10 - § 565.60	Limits classes to no more than 20 students per teacher.	schools serving K-3rd grades that are on the academic warning list or the academic watch list.		22.3	22.9
	Voluntary/Pilot/Grants 105 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/2-3.134(b), ILL. ADM. CODE TIT. 23, § 565.110 - § 565.160	Targets K-3rd grades. Limits classes to no more than 15 students per teacher.	Eligibility limited to districts with schools serving K-3rd grades that are on the academic warning list or the academic watch list	Grants		
Indiana	Voluntary/Pilot IND. CODE § 21-43-9-1 - § 21-43-9-11	Targets K-3rd grades. Primetime Program Specifies a target of between 15-18 students per class.		Through funding formula determined by factoring in the school's at-risk index and amount of tuition support.	21.4	21.3
Iowa	Mandate IOWA CODE ANN. § 256D.1	Targets K-3rd grades. Provides resources to reduce class size in basic skills instruction to 17 students per teacher.	Designed to achieve a higher level of student success in the basic skills, especially reading.	Class-Size Reduction funding incorporated into state's K-12 funding formula.	20.1	20.9
Louisiana	Mandate LA. REV. STAT. ANN. § 17:174	Targets K-3rd grades. Classes not to exceed 20 unless authorized in writing by the state superintendent.	No provision of this measure can take effect until funds appropriated specifically by the legislature.	Students above the maximum not to be counted for funding purposes.	18.9	18.7
Maine	Voluntary ME. REV. STAT. ANN.TIT. 20-A, § 4252	Targets K-3rd grades. Enables local units to limit class size within one or more grades. Recommendation of 15 to 1, with a maximum of 18 to 1.	Authorizes a number of policies that districts may implement with state support.	Allowable reimbursable cost	18	17.1
Minnesota	Mandatory MINN. STAT. ANN. § 126C.12	Targets K-3rd grades. Requires districts to expend funds to keep average class size at 17.		State learning and development revenue distributed according to funding formula.	22	22.3
Montana	Mandatory	Targets K-2nd grades.		Does not specify	18.2	18.1

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	MONT. ADMIN. R. 10.55.712	Limits class sizes to no more than 20 students.				
Nevada	Mandate NEV. REV. STAT. § 388.700	Targets K-3rd grades. Legislature limited teacher/student ratio in K-3rd grades to 15 in core subjects.	Directs school districts and licensed personnel associations to develop plans to reduce class sizes in grades 1-3 within limits of available financial support. Districts allowed to apply for and receive waivers to policy.	Does not specify	20.7	22.6
Ohio	Voluntary OHIO REV. CODE ANN. § 3317.02.09	Targets K-2nd grades. Enables a district to modify or purchase classroom space to reduce class size with a goal of attaining class sizes of 15 students per licensed teacher.	The district must certify its need for additional space to the department, in a manner satisfactory to the department.	State funding formula	22.7	20.3
Oklahoma	Mandate OKLA. STAT. TIT. 70, § 18-113.1, § 18-113.2, § 18-113.3	Targets 1st-6th grades. No more than 20 students may be regularly assigned to a teacher.	Districts can face fiscal penalties for failure to comply. Districts can avoid penalties if classrooms are not available and district meets certain guidelines (has maximum millage allowable or voted indebtedness within five prior years).	Funding is addressed through foundation program.	18.6	19.9
Pennsylvania	Voluntary/Grants PA. CONS. STAT. ANN. § 25-2599.2	Targets K-3rd grades. Supports programs to limit class sizes to 17 students or two teachers for every 35 students	Grants may support various allowable uses, including the establishment, maintenance or expansion of a class size reduction program.	Through state "accountability grants" meant to be used by districts to "to attain or maintain academic performance targets."	22.2	20.6
Rhode Island	Voluntary/Grants R.I. GEN. LAWS § 16-67-2	Targets K-3rd grades. Encourages districts to reduce class size to no more than 15 in grades K-3.		Educational improvement block grants (R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-67-4(2), § 16-5-31)	20	19.6

State	Category (Type)	Description	Notes	Funding	Average Elementary School Class Size	
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South Carolina	Voluntary S.C. CODE ANN. § 59-63-65.	Targets 1st-3rd grades. Provides funds to districts choosing to reduce class size to 15.	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.	Funds are provided by the General Assembly to support purpose of this policy.	17.9	18.5
South Dakota	Voluntary/Grants S.D. CODIFIED LAWS § 13-14-8.1	Targets K-3rd grades. Provides incentives for reducing class sizes in to 15 or less.		Youth-at-risk grants funds Grants for up to three years.	18.8	17.8
Tennessee	Pilot TENN. CODE ANN. § 49-6-3501	Targets K-3rd grades. Demonstration centers (operated by local boards) established with class maximum enrollment of 17. Two hundred teaching positions were funded by the department of education.	Program was a pilot and is no longer active. Included in this chart due to its influence on later policy in other states.	All but 5% of costs paid by the department of education.	19.7	19
Texas	Mandate TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 25.112	Targets K-4th grades. Districts may not enroll more than 22 students in a class.	The commissioner may grant exceptions if "the limit works an undue hardship on the district." A campus or district that is granted an exception must provide written notice of the exception to the parent or person standing in parental relation to each student affected by the exception. (TEX. EDUC. CODE ANN. § 25.113)	Does not specify.	18.5	18.7
Utah	Mandate UTAH CODE ANN. § 53A - 17a-124.5	Emphasis on K-2nd grades. Requires districts to reduce class size in grades K-8, with emphasis on K-2. Must use 50% of funds allocated for this purpose to reduce class size in K-2, with emphasis on improving reading skills.	20% of district's allocation may be used for capital facilities projects that will help to reduce class size.	Funding determined through use of weighted pupil units. The budgeted state contribution, for the 2008-09 fiscal year, toward the class size reduction program is \$90,537,741. (UTAH CODE ANN. § 53A-17a-104)	23.7	24.3

State	Category (Type)	Description	Notes	Funding	Average Elementary School Class Size	
					1999-2000 ¹	2003-04 ²
		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.				
Washington	Voluntary WASH. REV. CODE ANN. § 28A.630.055	Targets K-3rd grades. Support for class sizes at a ratio of one teacher to 18.	Authorizes four demonstration projects to develop, implement and document the effects of a comprehensive K-3 foundations program. Policy directs the office of the superintendent of public instruction to contract with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to conduct an evaluation of the demonstration projects.	State grants are provided to approved applicants.	23.9	21.9
	Voluntary WASH. REV. CODE ANN. § 28A.505.210, Initiative 728 (2000)	Targets K-4th grades. Provides funds to districts in order to reduce class size in K-4th grades.	In 2000, voters approved Initiative 728, which became effective in 2001. The initiative stated that “the state’s long-term goal should be to reduce class size in grades K-4 to no more than eighteen students per teacher in a class.” Funds may be used for other purposes spelled out in the policy, including extended learning opportunities or teacher professional development.	State-administered Student Achievement Fund		
Wisconsin	Voluntary/ Grants WIS. STAT. ANN. § 118.43	Targets K-3rd grades Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE). Provides financing to schools to reduce class size to 15.	Districts enter into five-year achievement guarantee contracts 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.	Finance formula. Schools receive state aid equal to \$2,250 for each low-income K-3 child ⁶ .	20.8	19.5

State	Category (Type)	Description	Notes	Funding	Average Elementary School Class Size	
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			Class size reduction is one of several requirements for the grants to be eligible for annual renewal.			

Small Class Sizes: Discussion, Rationale, Evidence

The debate over the effectiveness and efficiency of reducing class size remains unresolved.

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, most experts agree that 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?

This last segment used with permission: EdSource, *Evaluating California's Class Size Reduction Program*, February 1998. To order the evaluation, send \$4 plus \$1 shipping and handling to: EdSource, 4151 Middlefield Road, Suite 100, Palo Alto, CA 94303-4743. 650/857-9604, phone 650/857-9618 fax; www.edsource.org

Sources:

Education Commission of the States, State Policy database, *Recent State Policies/Activities: Class Size*, <http://www.ecs.org/ecs/ecscat.nsf/WebTopicView?OpenView&count=300&RestrictToCategory=Class+Size>.

California Department of Education, *What Have We Learned About Classroom Reduction in California?* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, September 2002.

¹ National Center for Education Statistics. Average Elementary School Class Size, Washington, D.C.: NCES, May 2002; School and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools (Table 1.16 "Average class size for teachers in self-contained classes"). Washington, D.C.: NCES, May 2002, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002313.pdf>.

² National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, Highest degree earned, years of full-time teaching experience, and average class size for teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by state: 2003–04 http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08/tables/dt08_067.asp (Accessed June 4, 2009).

³ Alabama Board of Education Resolution, September 11, 1997, http://www.alsde.edu/html/boe_resolutions2.asp?id=481.

⁴ *What We Have Learned About Class Size Reduction in California*, CSR Research Consortium, September 2002, http://www.classsize.org/techreport/CSRYear4_final.pdf.

⁵ Georgia Department of Education Class Size Exemption Recommendations Effective for the 2009-2010 School Year Only, January 2008, <http://www.gadoe.org/DMGetDocument.aspx/GaDOE%20Waiver%20Request%20Letter%20and%20Information.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6D75E81A462FB23085752B797FE849F24CE0C64A73399F083&Type=D> (Accessed July 31, 2009).

⁶ Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) Program, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Web site <http://dpi.wi.gov/sage/index.html>, (Accessed August 27, 2009)

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