

THE RESEARCH ON CLASS SIZE

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ALL CLASS SIZE STUDIES ARE NOT EQUAL

- ▶ Before the 1980s, there were numerous research studies on class size. These studies showed dramatically different results.
- ▶ Since the 1980s, there have been several large scale studies. There have also many “reports” (not necessarily research) created by states after their experiments with class size reduction (e.g. California, Florida, Indiana, Nevada).
- ▶ The variation in these studies and reports can generally be explained through examining their methodological differences.

DETERMINING A RIGOROUS CLASS SIZE STUDY

- ▶ Over the past 20 years, the effectiveness of class size has been measured through student achievement on standardized tests, but also student grades, attendance, and success beyond school.
- ▶ A randomized control-treatment experiment is the most appropriate way to examine the effects of class size reduction. This is considered the “gold standard” of research.

TENNESSEE PROJECT STAR STUDY (SET UP)

- ▶ The most credible study of class size is the Tennessee Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio Study (Project STAR). Data were collected from 1985-1990, with several additional follow up studies.
- ▶ K-3 students and teachers were randomly assigned to three groups:
 - ▶ Small Class (13 to 17 students)
 - ▶ Regular Class (22 to 25 students)
 - ▶ Regular Class (22 to 25 students) with Teacher's Aid
- ▶ 6,500 students in 330 classrooms at approximately 80 schools.

TENNESSEE PROJECT STAR STUDY (RESULTS)

- ▶ Students who were assigned to smaller K-3 classes scored higher on achievement tests, received higher grades, and had better attendance.
- ▶ Students enrolled in smaller classes continued to outperform their peers when they returned to regular sized classrooms.

TENNESSEE PROJECT STAR STUDY (RESULTS)

- ▶ A follow up study found that students who were placed in smaller classes earned consistently higher grades in high school and scored better on English, math, and science standardized tests.
- ▶ A separate follow up study found that students who were in smaller classes in kindergarten had higher earnings in adulthood and a greater likelihood of attending college.

OTHER STUDIES

- ▶ Wisconsin SAGE Study: 5 year study of districts that took funding to reduce class size. Results showed smaller class size was correlated to gains in achievement, with the strongest gains for poor and African American students.

OTHER STUDIES

- ▶ U.S. Department of Education Office of Education Research and Improvement Report: Analyzed the achievement levels of students in a random sample of 2,561 schools (NAEP). After controlling for student background, the only factor found to have a positive correlation with student performance was smaller classes. Student achievement was strongly linked to class size reduction in the upper grades.

OTHER CLASS SIZE TRIALS

- ▶ California State Mandate: Numerous critiques of this particular reduction in class size revealed, "In the first year of implementation, more than one-fifth of the new teachers hired in that state had only emergency credentials. Hit hardest were schools serving poor and minority students" (EdWeek).
- ▶ However, a limited number of pseudo-experimental studies have shown there were still links between student gains and smaller classes in California.

TENNESSEE STAR STUDY & SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICY COMPARISON

▶ STAR Study Small Class Size:

- ▶ Grade K (13-17)
- ▶ Grade 1 (13-17)
- ▶ Grade 2 (13-17)
- ▶ Grade 3 (13-17)

▶ School Committee Policy:

- ▶ Grade K (16-22)
- ▶ Grade 1 (16-24)
- ▶ Grade 2 (16-24)
- ▶ Grade 3 (17-25)

TENNESSEE STAR STUDY & SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICY COMPARISON

- ▶ STAR Study Class Sizes:
 - ▶ K-3 Small Class: 13-17*
 - ▶ K-3 Regular Class: 22-25
- ▶ School Committee Policy:
 - ▶ K: 16-22
 - ▶ Grade 1-2: 16-24
 - ▶ Grade 3-5: 17-25
 - ▶ Grades 6-8: 17-25
 - ▶ Grades 9-12: None

COST VS. QUALITY

- ▶ Most opponents of class size reduction express a concern that it is not cost effective.
 - ▶ These arguments prioritize cost over quality.
 - ▶ They also assume that the current allocation of education spending (e.g. class size reduction, testing, technology, evaluation and supervision, teaching staff, administrative staff) is equally justifiable and valuable.
- ▶ For instance, the nation spends \$1 billion a year on standardized testing. Could part of that cost be better spent on reducing class sizes nationwide?

CLASS SIZE IS AN EQUITY ISSUE

- ▶ Urban public schools are more likely to have larger class sizes.
- ▶ Yet, students of color and low-income students show even greater gains when placed in small classes.
- ▶ Should the most at-risk students have the largest class sizes?

CLASS SIZE IS AN EQUITY ISSUE

- ▶ “Many of the individuals who are driving education policy in this country, including [President Barack Obama,] New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Jeb Bush, and Bill Gates, sent their own children to abundantly financed private schools where class sizes were 16 or less, and yet continue to insist that resources, equitable funding, and class size don’t matter — when all the evidence points to the contrary” (Parents Across America).

SOME HELPFUL WEBSITES ON CLASS SIZE

- ▶ <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/class-size/>
- ▶ <http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer1999/STARSummer99.pdf>
- ▶ <http://www.classsizematters.org/>
- ▶ <http://neatoday.org/2012/07/09/politicians-ignore-research-say-smaller-class-size-makes-no-difference/>
- ▶ <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Class-size-and-student-achievement-At-a-glance/Class-size-and-student-achievement-Research-review.html>
- ▶ <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/what-we-believe-2/why-class-size-matters/>
- ▶ http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/classizebyraceethnicity.aspx

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