

The issue of whether class size reduction helps students to learn has been debated many times, there are many studies that say it does. Many studies say that smaller class sizes, especially for grades kindergarten through third help the students during not only those few years, but also in the future. It has been found, however, that class size must be reduced to fewer than twenty students for these results do occur.

It has been shown through numerous studies, including Project STAR (Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio) in Tennessee, CSR (Class Size Reduction) research in California, and SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education) in Wisconsin that the benefits of class size reduction can be seen in the grades Kindergarten through third grade. A program to reduce class size has been put into effect by the US Department of Education and these students have been shown to perform better on standardized tests all the way through high school. Students in these programs are more likely to be well prepared for college. "The advantages of attending a small class for the four years encompassing kindergarten through third grade are equivalent to receiving an additional six months to fourteen months of schooling." (*Class Size Reduction: Myths and Realities*)

The higher student achievement brought about by class size reduction may result from some of the ways in which reducing class size naturally alters the classroom environment. On being assigned to smaller classes, teachers report that the classroom atmosphere is better, that students can receive more individualized attention, and that the teachers have more flexibility to use different instructional approaches and assignments. One unanticipated result of the Burke County reduced class size initiative was that the teachers found themselves with more classroom space to work with, because

they were using the same classrooms with smaller numbers of students. Class size reduction also changes the educational opportunities beyond the classroom, insofar as teachers have a larger portion of time to devote to working with each of their students' parents.

Class size reduction changes numerous features of the classroom situation. There are fewer students to distract each other. Each student in a reduced size class gets more attention ... and more time to speak while the others listen. Reduced class size also reduces the level of noise in a class. (Pritchard, 8)

In both the popular press and in scholarly resources, it has been said that the reduction of class sizes has had a big impact on minority students, those that were in smaller classes in their early years of schooling have higher standardized test scores and are much more likely to apply and be accepted to college.

There are many people that claim reducing class size is not enough because the quality of the teacher is also a main factor in the learning process. The research done by the STAR program shows that reducing class size, no matter what teacher is in the room, will improve upon the achievement of the students compared to a larger class with a teacher of comparable quality. The US Department of Education's Class Size Reduction program, a seven year program that was put into place in 1999, provides money to each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to reduce class size in kindergarten through third grade. This money goes directly to hiring new, qualified teachers, to professional development for both newly hired and experienced teachers in the early grades, and to training for teacher of special needs children. This program helps each state to reduce the size of the classes in the earlier grades on a year by year basis. Each district within a state may only have been able to reduce the size of it's kindergarten classes one year, but the following year they would be able to reduce the size of the first grade classrooms also. The

main problem with this program is that it does not provide the schools with more classrooms. There are many schools across the country that do not have the space for the new classes that are being created. They are finding it difficult to reduce class sizes just because they have a lack of space in their schools.

The effect of class size reduction in fourth through twelfth grades is still being debated. There has been no significant study done on these grade level and the smaller studies that have been done have gotten varying results. Researchers have not come to any sort of agreement on the effects of class size

reduction that takes place after the third grade. This may be because group dynamics start to change as the children get older. More and careful research needs to be done on how class size needs to relate to subject matter in grades four through twelve.

There are many people who don't believe that reducing class sizes helps the achievement of the students. These people have often confused the teacher student ratio research with class size reduction research. In the studies where there is a teachers aide in a classroom, there is no shown difference in achievement, because class sizes are not smaller. When class sizes smaller, there is shown improvement especially in reading and mathematics, even with only one teacher without an aide.

One theory offered to explain the positive effects of class size reduction on student achievement simply argues that in smaller classes each student receives a larger portion of the educational resources represented by the teacher's instructional time, and consequently, learns more. (Pritchard, 8)"

The effect that class size has on students is important to our class because our future students may come from both reduced sized classes and ones that have not been reduced. We may be able to see the long term results of these studies ourselves.

Class size reduction in the early grades is widely supported. Even the

US Department of Education strongly supports this idea. Class size reduction in the later years of schooling has not been proven to increase student success or achievement, so it has not gained near as much support.

The ongoing implementation of smaller class sizes in Kindergarten through first grade should help to support the claims of smaller class sizes being helpful and increasing the achievements of students.

Field Reflection

While observing at Hillside Middle School, I was very aware of the ways that diversity was accommodated. Students were able to express themselves in multiple ways. They had way to express how they were different, who they were, and how they grew up. The science classes were working towards a science fair, each student had to create their own project. These projects allow the students to express themselves because it lets them chose how they want to explore this project. The students could chose almost anything, from testing the amount of acid in soda, to seeing how much liquid a sock could hold. These different projects allow to let students explore their diverse interests. In the eighth grade English classes, the students were writing reality-based fiction. There stories allowed them to express a part of themselves that they wouldn't normally allow to be seen. Some students used these stories to tell of how people have been able to overcome the past, or how the characters were scared of certain things in the world. They were able to express how people lived, the diverse ways of living were expressed. These students could express the lives of people from any culture, any place, and time. I found that the students did a great job in representing the many different cultures they talked about, they had obviously heard stories with some of these problems before, but it is likely that some or maybe even most of what was written was based on the students own life, or the life of one of their friends or family members.