

Title: Information on classroom ratios and legislation

Date: August 2015

Question: >> Please provide information on classroom ratios per state, legislation limiting class size, and results from that legislation

Response:

We have prepared the following memo with information on classroom ratios per state, legislation limiting class size, and results from that legislation. Citations include a link to a free online version, when available. All citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the document, except where noted. We have not done an evaluation of the methodological rigor of these resources, but provide them for your information only.

References

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2012). *Chief's pocket guide to class size*. Retrieved on July 21, 2015, from <http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/Class Size Pocket Guide for LegCon.pdf>

Excerpt: In this Chief's Pocket Guide, we draw from the major studies and literature reviews of CSR to find that, when viewed in isolation—a practice not recommended—dramatic reductions in class size are associated with desirable outcomes, including higher levels of student learning, and the typically modest effects are more pronounced in the early grades and for low-income minority students. When viewed from a whole-systems perspective, however, CSR efforts require a comprehensive consideration of resources, and therefore may not be the most cost-effective approach to improving student learning. This Chiefs' Pocket Guide will examine:

- A brief history of high-profile CSR efforts
- A synthesis of research on the effects of CSR efforts
- Policy considerations for state education chiefs who may be implementing, considering, or reconsidering CSR as part of their reform agenda
- Arguments for designing systems that move beyond the “class size” construct.

Gagne, J. (2012). *Smart class-size policies for lean times* (SREB Policy Brief). Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved on July 22, 2015, from <http://publications.sreb.org/2012/12E02R Smart Class.bkmark.pdf>

Abstract: Most states nationwide have had policies for several decades that limit the number of students assigned to public K–12 classrooms. Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) states, led by Tennessee and Texas, spearheaded this effort in the 1980s, and SREB's own “Legislative Briefings” have marked the growth of class-size policies across the region. The policies became more popular in the 1990s, following Tennessee's now-famous Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (Project STAR) experiment. Today, every SREB state has some kind of policy that controls class size.

Supporters argue that smaller classes help raise student achievement, especially in the elementary grades. Critics, on the other hand, argue that the increases are not sufficient to justify the overall state cost. This argument has gained greater support since the economic downturn began in 2007. As a consequence, policy-makers and education leaders in some states have sought to relax class-size limits in an effort to cut state and local education costs. While the public largely has supported the limits up to now, the mood may be shifting. A 2011 Gallup poll found that when given a choice between “smaller classes with average-performing teachers” and “larger classes with better-than-average teachers,” the public overwhelmingly chose better teachers over smaller classes. Policy-makers and education leaders in some SREB states may be considering changes to their class-size policies but want to do so without jeopardizing student achievement. This “SREB Policy Brief” summarizes current policies (often referred to as “class-size reduction policies”) across the region, reviews prominent research on the issue, and offers recommendations on how states might make sensible adjustments.

Education Commission of the States, State Policy Database. (2014). *Class size*. Denver, CO: Author. Retrieved on July 21, 2015, from <http://b5.caspio.com/dp.asp?AppKey=b7f93000695b3d0d5abb4b68bd14&id=a0y70000000CbsLAAS>

REL West Note: This table contains state-by-state information on legislation pertaining to class size.

Education Commission of the States, State Policy Database. (2014). *Teacher:student ratios*. Denver, CO: Author. Retrieved on July 21, 2015, from <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbquestRT?rep=Kq1411>

REL West Note: This table contains state-by-state information on teacher:student ratios.

Students First. (2014). *State policy report card, 2013–2014*. Sacramento, CA: Author. Retrieved on July 21, 2015, from http://reportcard.studentsfirst.org/policy/spend_wisely_govern_well/spend_taxpayer_resources_wisely_to_improve_outcomes_for_students/promote_staffing_and_programmatic_flexibility/state_by_state

REL West Note: This table contains state-by-state legislation on class size restrictions.

[U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics](#). (2015). *The condition of education 2015*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved on July 21, 2015, from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clr.asp

Excerpt: Pupils and Pupil teacher ratios: The number of students per teacher, or the pupil/teacher ratio, has been generally decreasing for more than 50 years at both public and private schools. In fall 1955, there were 1.1 million public and 145,000 private elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States. By fall 2012, these numbers had nearly tripled for both public school teachers (to 3.1 million) and private school teachers (to 414,000). However, increases in student enrollment were proportionally smaller over this period: from 31 million to 50 million public school students (a 62 percent increase) and from 4.6 million to 5.2 million private school students (a 13 percent increase). (See also Public School Enrollment and Private School Enrollment.) For public schools, the resulting decline in the pupil/teacher ratio was concentrated in the period between 1955 and 1985. During this period, the public school pupil/teacher ratio fell from 26.9 to 17.9. Over the next 23 years, the public school pupil/teacher ratio declined to 15.3 in 2008. In the most recent years, the pupil/teacher ratios in 2010, 2011, and 2012 (all 16.0) were higher than the ratio in 2009 (15.4). The private school pupil/teacher ratio decreased more steeply than the public school ratio over the period of 1955 to 2012, from 31.7 students per teacher to 12.5. The pupil:teacher ratio has been lower for private schools than for public schools since 1972.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). *Digest of education statistics, 2013* (NCES 2015-011). Washington DC: Author. Retrieved on July 21, 2015, from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=28>

Excerpt: During the 1970s and early 1980s, public school enrollment decreased, while the number of teachers generally increased. For public schools, the number of pupils per teacher—that is, the pupil/teacher ratio—declined from 22.3 in 1970 to 17.9 in 1985. After enrollment started increasing in 1985, the public school pupil/teacher ratio continued to decline, reaching 17.2 in 1989. After a period of relative stability during the late 1980s through the mid-1990s, the ratio declined from 17.3 in 1995 to 15.4 in 2009. The public school pupil/teacher ratio increased to 16.0 in 2011. By comparison, the pupil/teacher ratio for private schools was 12.5 in 2011. The average class size in 2011–12 was 21.2 pupils for public elementary schools and 26.8 pupils for public secondary schools. Both public school enrollment and the number of public school teachers were about 2 percent higher in 2013 than they were in 2003. In fall 2003, the number of public school pupils per teacher was 15.9, compared with a projected number of 16.0 public school pupils per teacher in fall 2013.

Whitehurst, G. J., & Chingos, M. M. (2011). *Class size: What research says and what it means for state policy*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. Retrieved on July 22, 2015, from http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2011/5/11-class-size-whitehurst-chingos/0511_class_size_whitehurst_chingos.pdf

Abstract: Examines whether class-size reduction has a positive impact on student learning and, if it does, by how much, for whom, and under what circumstances. Studies of class size in Texas and Israel also found benefits of smaller classes, although the gains associated with smaller classes were smaller in magnitude than those of a Tennessee Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) study. Other rigorous studies have found mixed effects in California and in other countries, and no effects in Florida and Connecticut.

Wright, R. (2010). State education finance and governance profile: Florida. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 85(1), 61–65. Retrieved on July 22, 2015, from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ882952>

Abstract: The state of Florida has 67 regular school districts as well as additional special districts comprised of developmental research schools and other schools that serve special populations. In the 2006–2007 school year, the state of Florida had an average student-to-teacher ratio of 16:4, compared with the average state ratio of 15:5. In 1973, the Florida Legislature adopted the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) as the funding formula to be used to allocate funds appropriated by the Legislature to school districts for K–12 public school operations. Although many public schools (2,125) in the state of Florida are making a grade of A or B on the statewide grading scale, slightly more than half of schools (2,512) did not make adequate yearly progress in 2007 as mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Although in 2007 Florida scored above the national average on the fourth-grade math, reading, writing, and science portion and the eighth-grade writing portion, Florida also has consistently scored below the national average on the eighth-grade math, reading, and science portions of National Assessment of Education Progress.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

“Student:teacher ratios” and “legislation”; “student teacher ratios”

Search of Databases

EBSCO Host, Google, and Google Scholar

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the Western region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.