



EDUCATION COMMISSION
OF THE STATES

Your education policy team.

OREGON JOINT INTERIM TASK FORCE ON CLASS SIZES

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Who we are

The **essential, indispensable** member of any team addressing education policy.



What we do

We believe in the power of **learning from experience** and we know informed policymakers create **better education policy**.



How we do it



Class Size: Policies

States' approaches generally fall into two categories:

- Class size **caps**
- Initiatives to reduce **class sizes**

Class Size: Caps

Categories of cap policies:

- **Hard caps** – Districts and schools cannot use average class sizes to meet the requirements.
- **Semi-hard caps** – Districts and schools may use average class sizes to meet the requirements.
- **Mandates that can be waived** – Districts or schools may apply to the department or state superintendent for a waiver excusing it from class-size limitations.
- **Recommended maximums** – Policies are in place that provide a recommended maximum class size.

Class Size: Caps

Some characteristics of class size caps

- More popular in grades **K-3**
- Generally **statewide** policies
- Variations in mandates tied to **state funding** and recommendations for best practice

Reduction Policies

- Like caps, much more frequently targeted at grades **K-3**
- Often targeted at specific, **at-risk populations**
- Variations in mandates tied to state funding and **voluntary grant programs**

Recent Legislation Related to Class Size

- **Virginia HB1377 (2016)**
Requires districts to notify parents if a class exceeds established class-size limits. Requires notification to include the reason the class-size limits have been exceeded and what steps the district will take to reduce the class size.
- **Idaho HB476 (2016)**
Currently, data across the state is collected to determine an average class size for each district. The average class size is used to make determinations related to school funding. Because class size varies depending on the student population of the districts, this method of averaging raises questions of equity among districts. This legislation allows for comparisons of districts based on student enrollment and uses the student enrollment breakdowns already found in Idaho Code that are currently used for funding.

Recent Legislation Related to Class Size

- **Nevada SB515 (2015)**

Provides funding to reduce class sizes and provides guidelines for districts to comply with the required student/teacher ratio.

- **Washington Initiative 1351 (2014)**

This citizen initiative directs the legislature to allocate funding for smaller K-12 class sizes, with extra class-size reductions for all grades in high-poverty schools and for grades K-3 in all schools and for increased student support staffing, including counselors, teaching assistants, librarians, and others. Increased funding for these changes was to be phased in over four years. Schools lacking enough classrooms to reduce class size could use funding for additional staff providing direct student services. In 2015 the legislature passed legislation delaying implementation for four years.

Recent Legislation Related to Class Size

- **New Mexico HB280 (2014)**

Reinstated statutory teaching and class load requirements, citing the lessening of the emergency economic need to grant fiscal solvency waivers. Phased in the return to statutory mandatory individual class loads and teaching loads over a three-year period.

- **Georgia 2014 State Board of Education Resolution**

Granted an exemption from all statutory and regulatory class size maximums for the 2014-15 school year.

What Does the Research Say?

- Overall, the evidence is inconclusive as to whether small classes improve **student achievement**.
- Students in **early grades** learn more and continue to have an edge over their peers when they return to normally sized classrooms; however, the impact is greatest when they remain in small classes.
- The payoff in terms of student achievement gains shows it is not necessarily a **cost-effective investment**. Class size reductions are expensive and lower cost interventions such as tutoring may be more effective.

What Does the Research Say?

- K-3 grade students **benefit** most, as do minority students in urban schools.
- It's difficult to isolate **class-size reduction** to determine if it is the sole factor in increased student achievement.
- **Smaller class sizes** require significantly more teachers and classroom space.
- The effectiveness of smaller classes depends a lot on **teacher quality**. Effectiveness may be offset by teacher inexperience due to the number of new teachers hired to accommodate smaller classes.

What Works?

Reduced
class sizes
are most
effective
when:

- Reductions are large; classes are reduced to between **15** and **19 students**
- Particular schools are targeted, especially those with **at-risk students**
- Teachers are provided on-going, high-quality **professional development**
- Teachers are **well-qualified**

Questions - Contact Us



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