

SMALLER CLASSES, BIGGER OPPORTUNITIES: THE BENEFITS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by:

Mary Grace C. Yumena

Teacher II, Pablo Roman National High School

In recent years, the growing size of classroom populations has raised concerns about the quality of education in public schools. Smaller class sizes are seen as a potential solution to improving education by allowing teachers to provide more individualized attention to students. With fewer students, teachers can better address the unique learning needs of each pupil, especially those who require extra support. This personalized attention helps struggling students stay on track, while also benefiting high-achieving students by offering more opportunities for enrichment. Smaller classes enable teachers to be more responsive to the academic needs of all students, creating a more nurturing learning environment that fosters student growth and potential.

Classroom management is an ongoing challenge for teachers, particularly in larger classrooms. As class sizes increase, maintaining order and focusing student attention becomes more difficult, which can negatively impact the learning experience for all students. Smaller classes naturally create a more manageable environment, where teachers can more easily maintain discipline and focus.

In smaller classrooms, students are more likely to feel heard and respected, which can contribute to a positive, productive classroom atmosphere. Teachers can more easily engage with students, correct behavior issues promptly, and ensure that each student is actively participating. This improved classroom environment reduces distractions, increases student engagement, and enhances overall learning outcomes.

The teacher-student relationship is a crucial factor in student success. Teachers who are able to build strong, trusting relationships with their students are better equipped to motivate and inspire them. Smaller class sizes facilitate this relationship-building, as teachers have the time and space to get to know their students personally.

When teachers have fewer students to manage, they can offer more attention to social-emotional learning and check in with students on a more personal level. This increased interaction helps students feel supported and valued, contributing to higher levels of academic and emotional well-being. A positive relationship with a teacher can also lead to increased student motivation, self-confidence, and a greater sense of ownership over their learning.

Numerous studies have shown that smaller class sizes correlate with improved academic performance. Research from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that students in smaller classes scored higher on standardized tests and performed better academically overall. This is likely due to the combination of more individualized attention, better classroom management, and stronger teacher-student relationships, all of which contribute to a more effective learning environment.

For example, in elementary and middle school, smaller classes allow for more effective differentiated instruction, where teachers can tailor lessons to meet the needs of all students. In high school, smaller class sizes enable more in-depth discussions, allowing for a deeper understanding of complex topics. Smaller classes also provide opportunities for project-based learning and collaborative activities, which can enhance critical thinking skills and encourage student engagement.

Teaching is an incredibly demanding profession, and large class sizes can contribute to teacher burnout and stress. When teachers have fewer students to manage, they can devote more energy to planning effective lessons, offering personalized support,

and engaging with students in meaningful ways. This reduced workload leads to less stress and a higher level of job satisfaction for teachers.

Furthermore, teachers working in smaller classrooms are more likely to feel a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment, as they can see the direct impact of their efforts on students' academic and emotional growth. Higher teacher satisfaction, in turn, can lead to lower turnover rates, creating a more stable and experienced teaching force in public schools.

One of the most compelling arguments for smaller class sizes is their potential to help close the achievement gap between different socioeconomic groups. Students from low-income families often attend schools with larger class sizes, where resources are limited, and teacher attention is spread thin. Smaller classes can level the playing field by giving these students more personalized attention, increasing their chances of academic success and reducing disparities in educational outcomes.

By reducing class sizes, public schools can provide more equitable learning opportunities, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have access to the attention and resources they need to thrive.

Smaller class sizes are particularly beneficial for closing the achievement gap between socioeconomic groups. Students from low-income families, often in larger classes with limited resources, can benefit from more personalized attention in smaller classes, increasing their chances of academic success and reducing educational disparities. Additionally, smaller classes foster stronger engagement between teachers, parents, and the community, leading to more support for students' learning and overall success. While reducing class sizes can be costly due to the need for more teachers, the long-term benefits—such as improved academic performance, teacher retention, and student outcomes—are considered to outweigh the initial financial investment.

Ultimately, smaller class sizes offer more equitable learning opportunities, benefiting both students and the broader community.

In some regions, school districts may also face infrastructure limitations that prevent them from creating smaller classrooms. This can be addressed through smart scheduling, the use of larger spaces for smaller groups, or even the introduction of technology to facilitate personalized learning.

Smaller class sizes offer numerous benefits for public schools, from improving academic performance to fostering stronger teacher-student relationships. The opportunity for individualized instruction, better classroom management, and increased student engagement are all key elements that contribute to a more positive and productive learning environment. While there are challenges to implementing smaller classes on a large scale, the evidence suggests that the long-term benefits for students, teachers, and communities are substantial.

As policymakers and educators continue to seek ways to improve education, prioritizing smaller class sizes could be one of the most effective ways to create bigger opportunities for public school students and ensure that every child has the chance to succeed. By investing in smaller classes, we can invest in the future of education itself.

References:

Finn, J. D., & Achilles, C. M. (1999). Tennessee's class size study: Findings, implications, misconceptions. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 21(2), 97-109.

National Education Association. (2020). *Class size and student outcomes*. NEA Research.

Nye, B., Hedges, L. V., & Konstantopoulos, S. (2000). The effects of small classes on academic performance: The results of the Tennessee class size experiment. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(1), 123-151.