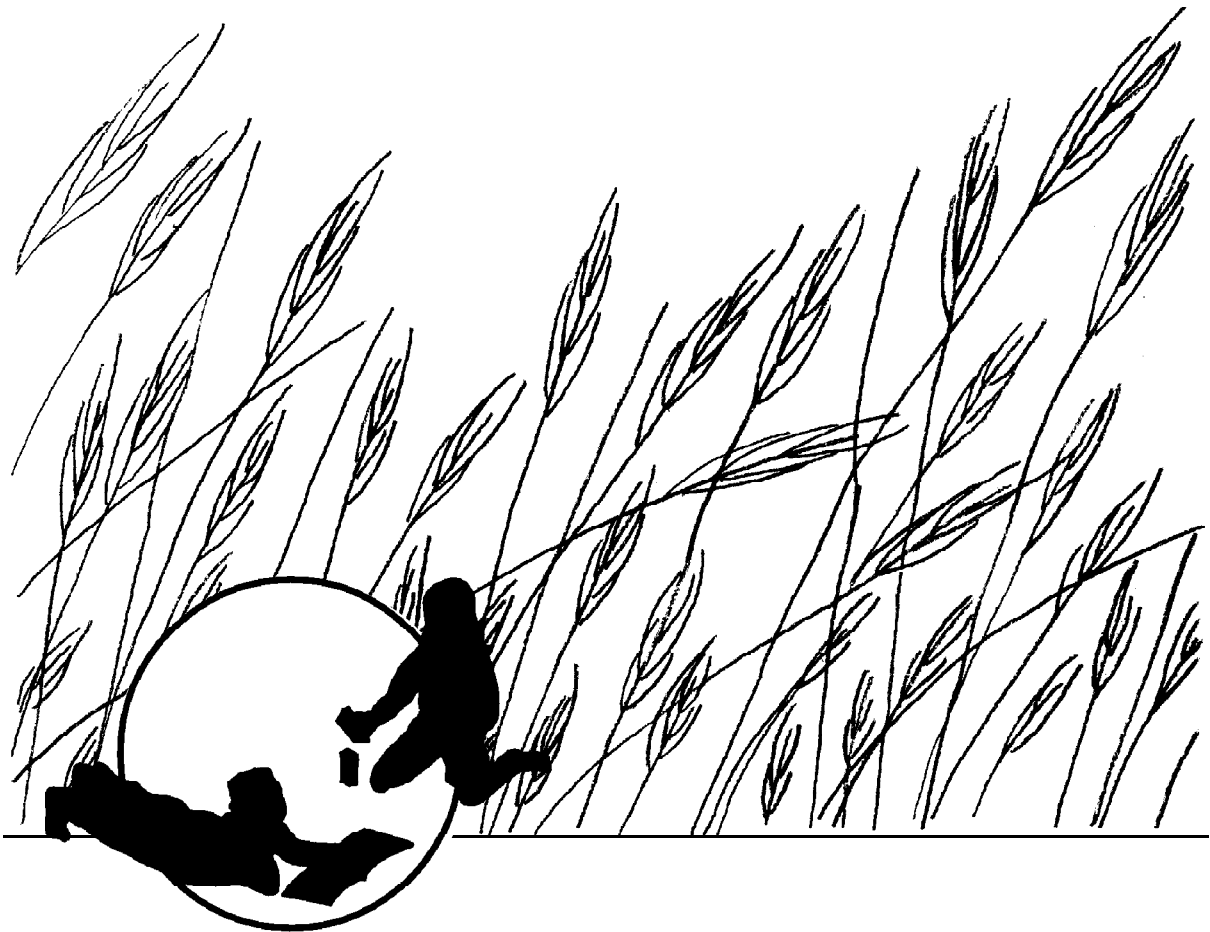


Iowa DE/AEA Early Childhood Network

Fact Sheet
on
Class Size



This fact sheet was a collaborative effort of the Iowa Department of Education/Iowa Area Education Agencies Early Childhood Network. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive document on this topic, but rather a concise, helpful reference tool. This fact sheet is in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.



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Research Synthesis:

In May 1998 a very comprehensive research document was released by the U.S. Department of Education called: ***“Reducing Class Size: What Do We Know?”*** It is found on the U.S. Department of Education web site at: <http://ed.gov/pubs/ReducingClass/research.html>

Analysis of the twenty years of research on the topic of class size that found the pattern of research findings points more and more clearly toward the beneficial effects of reducing class size.

- *A consensus of research indicates that class size reduction in the early grades (kindergarten through third) leads to higher student achievement.
- *The most significant effects of class size reduction on student achievement appear when class size is reduced to between 15 and 20 students.
- *The greatest results were achieved when the teacher work load was reduced to under 20 rather than the adding of associates to larger classrooms.
- *The related student achievement moves the average student from the 50th percentile up to somewhere above the 60th percentile. For disadvantaged and minority students the effects are somewhat larger.
- *Students, teachers, and parents all report positive effects from the impact of class size reductions on the quality of classroom activity.
- *The focus on the early grades suggests that smaller classes represent a preventative, rather than a remedial approach.
- *Teachers will need professional development opportunities to optimize the potential benefits of smaller classes

While research indicates that class size reduction leads to higher student achievement, it must also be recognized that the quality of instruction plays a major role. As suggested above ongoing professional development for teachers will maximize student achievement results.

Do Smaller Classes Make a Difference?

Benefits to the students in a smaller class:

1. Each student receives a larger portion of the educational resources represented by the teacher's instructional time.
2. There is more time for each student to contribute while others listen.
3. Students develop better relationships with their classmates and with their teacher.
4. Students receive more individualized attention.

Benefits shared by teachers, administrators and parents:

1. Classroom atmosphere is improved.
2. Teachers have more flexibility to use different instructional approaches and assignments.
3. Enhanced instruction and assessment for
 - ...more time ...to spend in small group,
 - ...for individualized instruction,
 - ...for child centered practices;
 - ...greater opportunity to cover more material in greater depth.

Conclusions:

Research and common sense suggest that smaller classes (20 and below) offer teachers the chance to devote more time to each student. A number of states (Indiana, Tennessee, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Texas, California) have already implemented class size reduction programs with positive results. Other states are in the process of developing plans for class size reduction.

The U.S. Department of Education research concludes that reducing class size to below 20 students **leads to higher student achievement**. This is particularly true in kindergarten, first, second, and third grades.

It is recognized that class size reduction represents a commitment of funds. To quote Charles Achilles:

"Small classes in early primary grades benefit students and provide a basis for substantial education reform without necessarily requiring massive infusions of funds. Consider some potential cost savings from using small classes in grades K-3:

- ...fewer retentions,
- ...less need for mediation and/or special education
- ...improved behavior, and
- ...increased achievement."



Resources and References:

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