



Council for Education Policy,
Research and Improvement

**IMPACT OF THE CLASS SIZE
AMENDMENT ON THE QUALITY OF
EDUCATION IN FLORIDA**

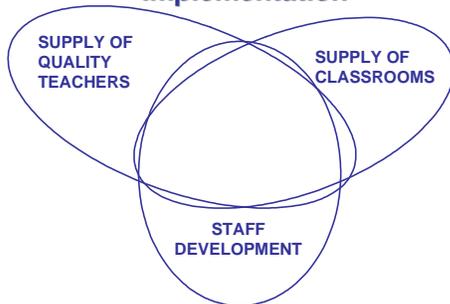


Impact of the Class Size Amendment on the Quality of Education in Florida November 2005

Executive Summary

The Council for Education Policy, Research and Improvement was directed by the 2004 Legislature, to “assess the impact of implementation of the class size reduction amendment on the quality of education in Florida.” Class size reduction (CSR) is a resource-intensive educational reform. It is based on increasing the largest categories of public schools expenditures, teachers and classrooms, and successful implementation is necessarily dependent upon teacher training in order to make effective use of smaller classes (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Successful Class Size Implementation



In carrying out the charge, the Council focused on the following questions:

1. Is CSR an effective strategy for improving the quality of education?
2. Can Florida sufficiently expand the number of teachers to meet the requirements of the CSR Amendment while maintaining a quality teaching workforce?
3. What obstacles need to be overcome in order to meet the requirements of CSR?
4. How does the need to maximize resources to meet the CSR Amendment affect the ability of districts to provide students and parents with the opportunity to choose schools and to take low demand courses?
5. How is staff development related to CSR implementation?

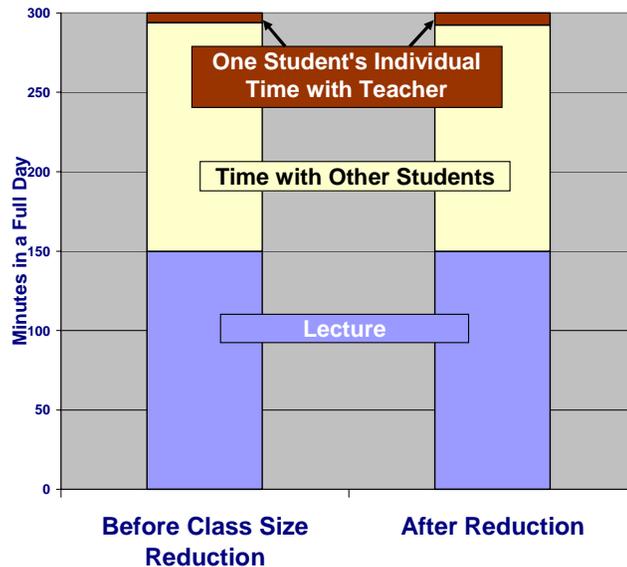
This report is based on a review of the national literature on class size reduction, an analysis of Florida data, and interviews with personnel from six school districts to determine their initial experiences in implementing the class size amendment. Included in the interviews were urban and rural districts, north, central and south Florida districts and districts with varying need to recruit additional teachers in order to meet CSR requirements.

CSR Is not the Best Strategy for Improving Education in Florida

There is no clear evidence that reducing class size leads to increased academic outcomes for students in all grades. There is some evidence that **young children in grades K through 3 may receive persistent benefits from very small classes (less than the 18 student-to-teacher ratio set by the CSR Amendment), particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.** In higher grades where there is more emphasis on lectures

for delivering instruction, reduced class size does not appear to provide a significant increase in individual interaction between students and teacher (Figure 2 assumes 50% of time spent on lecture). On the other hand those successful programs which form the basis of arguments in support of CSR were not sufficiently large to affect the supply of teachers.

A 90-Second Improvement in One on One Contact



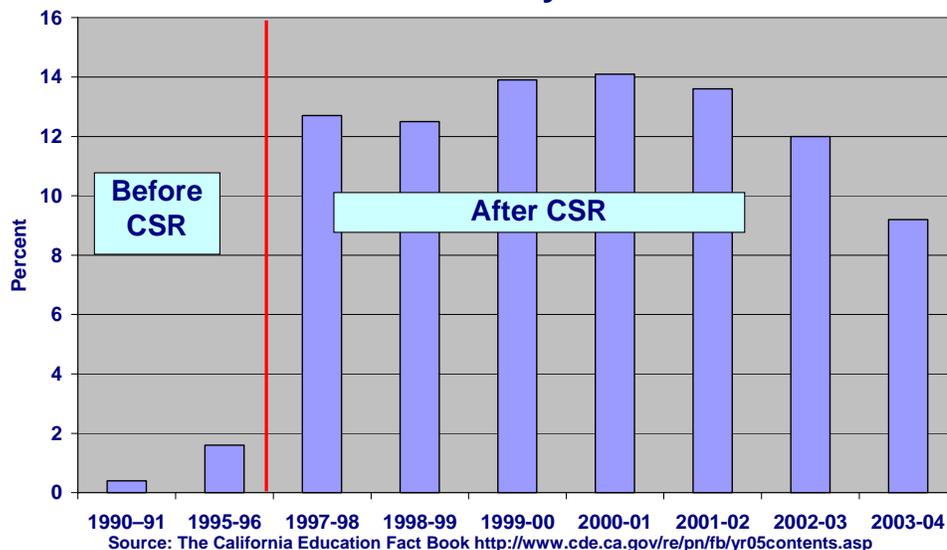
**Figure 2:
Reducing Class
Size Has an
Insignificant
Impact on a
Student's
Individual Time
with the Teacher**

Note: Assumes 50% of teacher time is spent on lecture

It will be Difficult to Recruit Enough High Quality Teachers

California's CSR initiative appears to be the only one that approaches Florida's in its rigor, although limited to grades K-3.

**Figure 3: Percentage of California
Teachers Not Fully Certified**

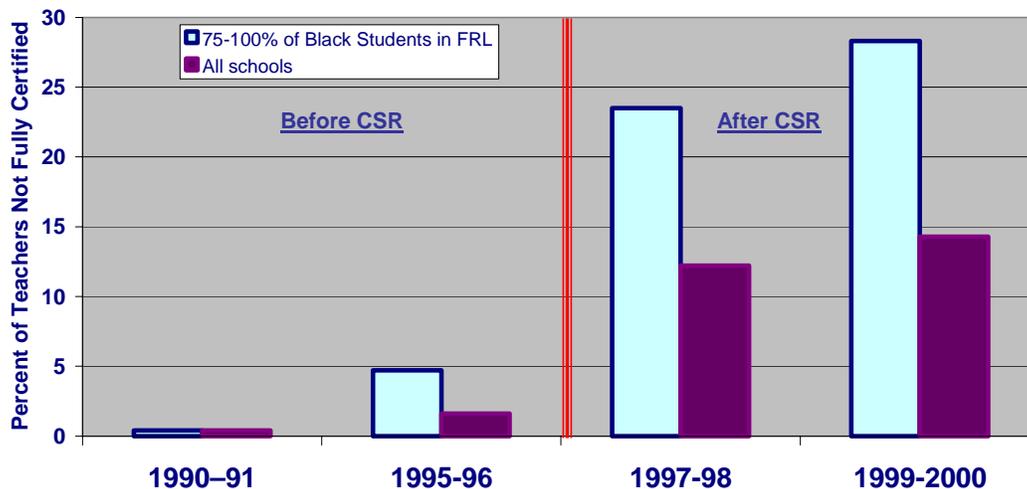


Source: The California Education Fact Book <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/fb/yr05contents.asp>

The CSR initiative in California resulted in a persistent deterioration in the quality of the teaching workforce (Figure 3). Furthermore, in California less qualified and less experienced

teachers became concentrated in disadvantaged schools as competition for teachers increased. The result was to widen the gap in the quality of education between disadvantaged and other schools and worsen the quality of disadvantaged schools in absolute terms (Figure 4).

Figure 4: In California CSR the Highest Percentage of Teachers Who Were Not Fully Certified Occurred at Disadvantaged Schools



Source: Jepsen, Christopher and Steven Rivkin, *Class Size Reduction, Teacher Quality, and Academic Achievement in California Public Elementary Schools*, Public Policy Institute of California, 2002.

Florida's Implementation of CSR Will Be More Difficult Than for Other States

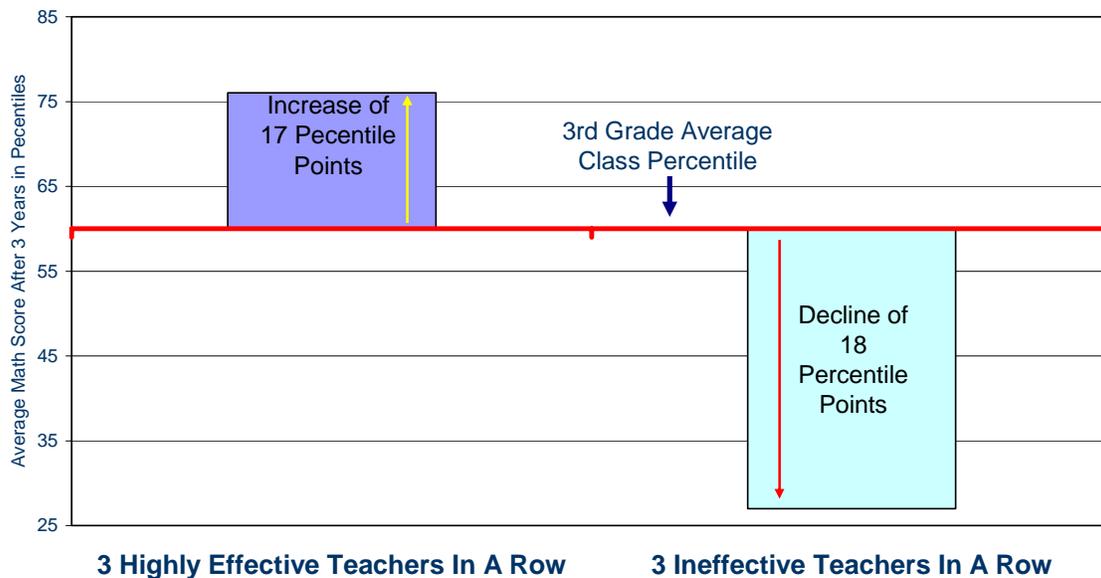
There are several circumstances that combine to indicate that Florida will probably experience even more difficulties recruiting enough quality teachers to implement CSR than has been the case in other states.

1. Florida's CSR Amendment is the most stringent in the country and will require the greatest expansion in the teaching workforce of any CSR initiative to date.
 - a) Provisions in other states range from guidelines to goals to a few cases of statutory mandates. States with mandates generally provide exemptions under special circumstances. Some states simply provide funding for districts to reduce class size as much as possible. Florida's implementation of CSR is inflexible.
 - b) Provisions in other states are often based on district or schoolwide averages. Florida's implementation of CSR is based on individual classrooms.
 - c) Most states limit CSR requirements to early grades (PreK-3).
 - d) With the exception of a limited number of grade levels in a few states, Florida's mandate requires the smallest classes.
2. Before CSR, Florida was already experiencing the worst teacher shortages in the country as measured by the percentage of schools with vacancies after the beginning of the school year.
3. Florida's CSR requirements are being implemented in an era of nationwide teacher shortages compounded by intense competition for "highly qualified" teachers mandated by No Child Left Behind.

4. Florida's CSR requirements are being implemented amidst a dramatic increase in construction costs which is affecting both the ability to construct sufficient new classrooms to implement CSR and the availability of affordable housing for prospective teachers.

Since the effect of quality teachers on improving student achievement is clearly established in the research literature (it is near axiomatic that the quality of the teacher – not the quantity – is the key to learning), **the probable result of the implementation of the amendment would appear to be to reduce student achievement.** For example, Figure 5 illustrates the results of one of a number of studies which have compared the cumulative effect of quality teachers on student achievement.

Figure 5: Three Highly Effective Teachers in a Row Improves 5th Grade Math Scores in Dallas



Source: Heather Jordan, Robert Mendro, & Dash Weerasinghe, "Teacher Effects On Longitudinal Student Achievement" 1997.

Based on the impact of California's less stringent amendment, **the greatest deterioration in the quality of the teaching workforce will probably occur in schools with large disadvantaged populations, and these schools will have difficulty in hiring enough teachers to meet CSR requirements,** further exacerbating existing problems at those schools.

Some Districts Are Already Limiting School Choice and Eliminating Low Demand Classes Before the Strict 2006 CSR Requirements Go Into Effect

Some Florida school districts interviewed as part of this study are reporting examples of negative consequences that have not generally been reported by other states:

1. Parental choice of schools is being reduced by districts in order to optimize utilization of existing classrooms.
2. Student opportunities to take academic electives, supplemental courses, and non-core courses are being reduced or eliminated in order to ensure that scarce teaching resources are focused on meeting class size mandates.

3. The ability to use less expensive and/or more effective reform alternatives such as improving in-service training, increasing requirements for tenure, or increasing teacher salaries has been adversely impacted.

Full implementation of the CSR amendment in 2006-2007, when 12,000 new teachers will be needed for CSR, will place even greater strain on district resources than has been experienced to date.

However, the CSR amendment has already had the effect of reducing access to specialized, low demand courses in some districts and it is anticipated that this impact will grow. Reduced district flexibility in managing resources is also affecting the ability to allow parents to choose the school their children attend.

The Importance of Staff Development

Improved staff development will be needed in order to realize those benefits that can be gained from CSR and will be even more important as a strategy to reduce turnover and the anticipated deterioration in the quality of Florida's teaching workforce. A related CEPRI report, *Inservice Education: The Challenge of Determining Cost and Effectiveness* (November, 2005) provides more detail on opportunities and challenges related to inservice teacher education.

Conclusion

In answer to the question posed by the Legislature, all available data indicates that implementation of the Florida Class Size Amendment will not improve the quality of education in Florida. Indeed, the plethora of unintended consequences of Florida CSR will likely adversely impact the quality of education, particularly in schools that are already disadvantaged. Further, flexibility and funding needed for effective reforms to improve the quality of education are being adversely affected by the Florida Class Size Amendment.

Please visit our website at <http://www.cepri.state.fl.us> for the full report
