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—Allen H. Neuharth, Founder, Sept. 15, 1982

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Smaller classes help many

**Opposing view:
If people want better teachers,
start paying them more.**

By Alan B. Krueger

There is no such thing as a free lunch in education — and so it goes with improving student achievement by cutting class size or improving teacher quality.

Most studies — including a large scientific experiment conducted in Tennessee in the late 1980s — have found that reducing class size increases student achievement, especially among low-income and minority children. In Tennessee, smaller classes in grades K-3 raised test scores by about 4 percentile points for white students and 8 for black students; years later, students from small classes were more likely to apply to college. Each dollar spent reducing class size generated an estimated \$2 in benefits.

But abrupt changes on a wide scale can inadvertently lower teacher quality, offsetting some of the benefits. Two studies have found that California's huge statewide class-size reduction initiative, launched by Republican Governor Pete Wilson in 1996, measurably improved test scores, but by less than in Tennessee. One of these studies, by the American Institutes for Research, concluded that gains were "felt equally for white and minority students and for high-income and low-income students," while the other

concluded gains were greater for low-income students but small or negligible for black students. Some have argued that in California, wealthy suburbs lured qualified teachers from inner cities, although there is no evidence that emergency-certified teachers performed worse in the classroom.

A better policy than California's across-the-board reduction is to target smaller classes toward low-income and minority students. This has worked well in Wisconsin. Undoubtedly, putting more high-quality and motivated teachers in the classroom would also help. This is not free or easy, however. Teachers clearly matter, but it has proved difficult to identify the characteristics of teachers who make the difference. Teacher quality has suffered because pay has not kept pace with that of comparable professions, especially as opportunities opened up for women in law and business.

Smaller classes for disadvantaged students should be only part of the solution for improving education. Developing strategies to recruit and reward outstanding teachers is a complement to smaller classes, not a substitute for them.

Merely exhorting higher-quality teachers without advocating more money to pay for them — or specifying and evaluating concrete programs intended to raise teacher quality — does not advance the debate.

Alan B. Krueger is the Bendheim Professor of Economics at Princeton University.

Today's debate: Improving education

Cuts in class size fail to bolster learning

**Our view:
Evidence grows that teachers' skills
matter most for students' progress.**

This month, when students are assigned teachers for the new school year, many parents will have one question: How many other kids are in the class?

Small classes are equated with a good education. Not just by parents, but also by educators and lawmakers. In fact, class size is seen as such a crucial measure of educational quality that over the last decade roughly half of all states launched expensive programs to make classes smaller.

Now, new research raises serious questions about whether that push pays off. In some cases, the effort does little to improve education; in others it may even hurt students' progress.

The reason: teacher quality, not class size, has the greatest impact on learning. The latest confirmation that who's doing the teaching matters most comes from a study released by a San Francisco think tank last month on California's \$1 billion-a-year effort to reduce classroom size.

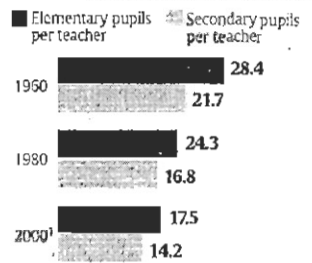
Despite the smaller classes, California students showed only tiny gains in math scores and even smaller improvements on reading tests, according to the Public Policy Institute of California. The researchers concluded that as school districts hired more teachers to staff smaller classes, they wound up with less-effective ones. Lower-quality teaching negated nearly all the benefits from cutting class size.

California's push for smaller classes dates back to 1996, when legislators passed a law to reduce the average classroom from 30 to 20 pupils. At the time, educators expected the costly change to radically improve student performance. That didn't happen. More discouraging, some of the largest and poorest school districts, such as Los Angeles, saw test scores drop.

No one suggests that small classes, on their own, are to blame. To the contrary,

Fewer students per teacher

The average number of pupils per teacher in public schools nationwide has been declining, partly because of an increase in special-education and other non-classroom teachers.



¹ — estimate
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

By Adrienne Lewis, USA TODAY

some studies show that students generally learn better in smaller groups. But that's only when teaching remains consistent.

California's drop in teacher quality was most obvious in high-poverty districts, such as Los Angeles, which have the hardest time finding good teachers. By 1999, three years into the program, nearly 30% of black students in the state's poorest districts had teachers who weren't fully certified, the study found. Another 25% had teachers with only a year or two of experience.

Teacher certification doesn't guarantee quality. But for students assigned weak teachers, the class-size reduction reform did more harm than good. Studies confirming the importance of teachers have found that over a single school year, students assigned to a good teacher score a grade-and-a-half improvement; students enduring a bad teacher advance by only a half grade.

Already, a few California districts are shifting away from class-size reform. They say the money can be better spent, especially on improving teaching skills. They're right. States still pouring millions into the effort need to study the lessons from California: Teacher quality trumps class size every time.

Single-sex classes go public

Our view:

Carefully done, all-boy and all-girl instruction gets results for schools.

Ready or not, single-sex classrooms may be coming soon to a public school near you.

In about a month, the Education Department is set to release final regulations on how public schools can set up single-sex classes, or even single-sex schools, without being vulnerable to discrimination lawsuits.

As a result, many parents will be asking: Would my son or daughter fare better in all-boy or all-girl classes?

That's quite possible. A growing body of research shows that boys and girls learn differently. Boys, in particular, suffer from a one-size-fits-all approach. And, as students reach middle school, they are increasingly distracted by members of the opposite sex.

Poised to attack single-sex public schools are groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union, that perceive them as discriminatory and ill-advised. Earlier this month, the Louisiana ACLU sued Livingston Parish schools to block an attempt to experiment with single-sex middle schools.

There is some reason for caution, but experiments should be encouraged with careful limitations. Parents should be allowed to choose whether they want their kids in single-sex or mixed-gender classes. And lesson plans mustn't play into sexist stereotypes. (Joe Cook, executive director of the Louisiana ACLU, says Livingston educators were following "unfounded notions like 'boys need to practice pursuing and killing prey, while girls need to practice taking care of babies.'")

Districts inept enough to see single-sex education that way deserve lawsuits. But

educators succeeding with single-sex schools would find that approach laughable.

Four years ago at Woodward Avenue Elementary in DeLand, Fla., boys were lagging in reading and dominating the special education classes. Principal Jo Anne Rodkey won permission from the district to start an opt-in experiment in single-sex education. The experiment has included:

► **Staff training.** In addition to supplying teachers with the latest research, each year Rodkey sends them to summer institutes featuring brain researchers who study gender learning differences.

► **A focus on literacy.** Drop by the fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms at Woodward and you'll find very different books lying around. In the girls' class there's *The Great Gilly Hopkins* and *The Chocolate Touch*. In the boys' class there's *Stealing Home: The Story Of Jackie Robinson* and *Dragons of Deltora*. Giving boys books they prefer to read gets them more excited about reading.

► **Boy-friendly classes.** Tessa Michaealos' all-boys kindergarten features a pile of Legos, hard hats and a balance beam used for a vocabulary contest. Michaealos' boys soar academically. Many of the all-boys classes in other grades out-perform both the girls-only and mixed-sex classes.

Although boys, who lag behind girls in schools, stand to gain the most from these experiments, girls can also benefit. At Woodward, teachers are using their single-sex lessons to find ways to boost girls' math and science performance.

Successful single-sex schools have everything to do with adjusting to different learning styles — and nothing to do with predators and prey. That's a lesson for educators and the ACLU.

Bad for both boys and girls

Opposing view: 'New discoveries' about gender differences are just old stereotypes.

By Emily Martin and Katie Schwartzmann

This summer, after receiving a complaint from parents told they faced a mandatory sex-segregated educational program at a public school in Livingston Parish, La., the ACLU filed a lawsuit and the school board quickly withdrew the plan. This was an exciting victory, but unfortunately, the Livingston school is not unique.

The U.S. Department of Education plans to release new rules that will allow for expanded use of single-sex education in public schools. Across the country, proponents of gender-segregation are touting boys- or girls-only classrooms as a fix-all solution to the woes of many struggling school districts. In addition to being unlawful, the rationale behind these programs is bad for kids.

Advocates of sex-segregated schools offer pseudo-scientific workshops where educators learn about alleged brain differences between boys and girls. According to some advocates: When establishing authority, teachers should not smile at boys because they're biologically programmed to read this as a sign of weakness; they should only look

boys in the eyes when disciplining them; girls should not have time limits on tests or be put under stress because unlike boys, girls' brains cannot function well under these conditions; and girls don't understand mathematical theory very well except for a few days a month when their estrogen is surging.

Although these ideas are hyped as "new discoveries" about brain differences, they are, in fact, only dressed up versions of old stereotypes — that boys must be bullied and girls must be coddled.

In the coming months, many school districts may introduce such programs. Rather than offering choice, sex-segregated programs limit the education of both boys and girls. Parents and students facing sex segregation in public schools should ask themselves whether these new claims about biological differences look much different from the old stereotypes that have always limited the choices of girls and boys.

The most reliable evidence available shows that proven approaches to educational reform — such as smaller classes, teachers with decent salaries and parental involvement — make much more sense than separating boys and girls based on outmoded stereotypes.

Emily Martin is deputy director of the ACLU Women's Rights Project and Katie Schwartzmann is staff attorney, ACLU of Louisiana.

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[EDITORIALS]

OUR VIEWS

Teacher shortage may lie ahead . . .

Almost eight years ago, a respected education-research group warned that North Carolina was in danger of running short of teachers – let alone qualified ones.

It still is.

In part, the shortages reflect the state's growth and its efforts to improve its schools. But the shortages present a major challenge nonetheless.

A new report by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research finds that North Carolina's colleges, public and private, are graduating only a third of the teachers we need. And the need keeps growing, as more kids head for school and as we reduce class sizes in order to improve quality. The shortages are worst in poor districts and in subjects such as math, science and languages.

The UNC Board of Governors has studied the problem and come up a variety of recommendations. For example, Wilmington's Hannah Gage says education programs should set higher enrollment targets and make it cheaper and more convenient for students to get teaching degrees. They shouldn't have to begin their working lives burdened with school loans, she says.

We also need to pay teachers more to attract more top-notch students into the profession. Perhaps more important, we need to make their jobs fulfilling in order to *keep* them there.

Public School Forum, a think tank supported by business and foundations, called in 1996 for better working conditions, better mentoring and better discipline. Some progress may have been made on those fronts, but clearly not enough.

Within three years of becoming teachers, almost a third leave the classroom, according to the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. Within five years, *40 percent* leave.

If it weren't for an influx of teachers from other states, we'd be in worse trouble.

Among other things, the new report urges the governor and other top education leaders to make the teacher shortage their top education priority, to greatly increase the number of teaching graduates, and to put particular attention on the need for teachers in certain subjects and certain geographical areas.

Those are challenging goals. But perhaps not as challenging as getting the General Assembly to pay for the effort.

. . . particularly if they keep leaving

If a school system can't keep teachers, it has to keep hiring new ones, often inexperienced. That's not a good thing.

But it's a reality in much of North Carolina and in some of our region's school systems.

Between 1998 and 2003, 13.18 percent of North Carolina's teachers left their jobs, according to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction.

Surprisingly, New Hanover County's turnover rate was higher than the state average: 13.71 percent.

Onslow (15.69) and Duplin (17.28) were even worse than that.

But Pender (12.01), Brunswick (12.99), Bladen (12.63) and Sampson (12.70) bettered the state average. Columbus (9.34) beat it easily.

No doubt a variety of reasons explain these differences. But counties whose turnover rate is higher than the state average ought to ask themselves why – and try to do better.