

Reference: Achilles, C.M., Finn, J., & Pate-Bain H. (2001, April). Reasonable-size classes for the important work of education in early elementary years: A manual for class-size reductions so that all children have small classes and quality teachers in elementary grades. Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Seattle, WA.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Background: Extensive empirical research supports the positive short-term and long-term effects of small class sizes for students in kindergarten through third grade. Over the past twenty years, researchers and practitioners active in small class size studies and initiatives have developed and refined practical, effective strategies and methods for realizing small class sizes in the early elementary grades.

Purpose: To provide a practical manual to help education practitioners implement and sustain small class sizes in kindergarten through third grade in elementary schools. Topics include how to galvanize political action to support small class sizes, how to implement small class sizes, and how to set up and perform ongoing evaluations of the processes and outcomes of small class sizes.

Intervention: Small class size in full-day kindergarten typically consists of about 15 students per classroom, with a maximum of 18 students. In grades 1-3, small class size generally consists of fewer than 20 students.

Research Design: Analytic Essay.

Conclusions: Small class sizes are not necessarily expensive if school-wide resources are carefully reallocated. To maximize the long-term positive effects of small class sizes, small classes should begin in kindergarten or pre-kindergarten, students should spend the entire school day in the small class, and small classes should be maintained for at least three consecutive years. Additional recommendations for securing the greatest academic benefits for students from small class sizes include using random assignment when pairing or grouping students for peer tutoring or groupwork and adopting a cohort model where the same group of students and teacher remain together over several years. Class size should not be confused with the concept of “pupil-teacher ratio,” as a school with a pupil teacher ratio of 18 could easily have an average class size of 28. Political suggestions for supporting small class sizes include interviewing prospective candidates for public office and backing appropriate campaigns, forming state and local coalitions around small class sizes, and performing comprehensive evaluations of small class size initiatives to provide evidence of their effectiveness.