

Reference: Achilles, C.M. & Finn, J.D. (2000). Should class size be a cornerstone for educational policy? In Wang, M.C. & Finn, J.D. (Eds.), How small classes help teachers do their best (pp. 299-323). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Center for Research in Human Development in Education.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Background: The importance of small class size in the early grades is amply supported by research evidence, practitioner experience, and popular opinion. Nevertheless, small class size has not yet been adopted as a fundamental practice or policy in U.S. elementary schools.

Purpose: To provide evidence that class size should be a cornerstone for educational policy.

Research Design: Analytic essay.

Conclusions: When studies are well-designed and controlled, research on class size clearly and consistently shows that students assigned to smaller classes in the early grades realize lasting academic and social benefits. Small classes in the early grades constitute a research-validated intervention to improve schooling for all students, with additional gains for students who had been struggling academically or performing below-average. Implementation research demonstrates that the way in which small class sizes are introduced in a school makes a difference, with certain strategies proving much more effective than others; implementing small classes has both educational and political dimensions, and both need to be handled carefully. Given the overwhelming evidence in support of small classes in the early grades, small classes should not only be a cornerstone but the foundation of educational policy for the early grades in the United States.