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Dear Leader of a Learning Organization,

Much debate has been going on for quite some time regarding class size and money. Due to district budget cuts, teachers are reduced and class sizes are increased. In order to have smaller, more individualized class settings, more instructors need to be hired, which obviously costs districts a large amount of money. Due to our struggling economy, most school districts have had to tighten up their belts. Extra-curricular activities and teachers are the first to be put on the chopping block. According to an article published in *USA Today* (2010) titled “Class sizes are getting bigger, but does it really matter?” The Natomas Unified School District in Sacramento, California cut their teaching staff for 10,000 students by 100. In the same article was stated that even with the shrinking school budgets, other districts continue to increase class sizes. The state of Florida recently has spent 353 billion dollars on top of 16 billion spent already to reduce the size of classes in their state. On that same note, the state of California has spent 20 billion dollars on smaller, more individualized instruction. Does class size really matter when it comes to a quality, well-rounded education?

I am currently in my 7<sup>th</sup> year of teaching. Up until this year, I never had a class under 32 students. When I hear or read about overcrowded classes being 25-35 students, I just chuckle. In my first year of teaching, I had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade Career Pathways class of 38 students, mostly boys. Last year, I had a class of 36 5<sup>th</sup> graders. This year, I started with 42 students. When the number reached 46, the decision was made to split the class. Thus, my opinion on a class number which is considered too high, may be biased. Personally, class size doesn’t matter. Consistently, my students have met and or exceeded school and state expectations. My class is known for always being calm and quiet. What gets me through the year with a large class is collaboration with support services, effective teaching strategies and classroom management, technology integration, and communication with the home. This is very similar to what Bloom stated in his piece The 2 Sigma Problem: The search for Methods of Group Instruction as Effective as One-to-One Tutoring. His students conducted studies on learning under 3 conditions-conventional, mastery learning and tutoring. Overall, his students concluded that the most important factors associated with learning were improving student learning processes, effective curriculum and instructional materials, and support from the home. The STAR experiment was constructed with students in Tennessee. According to Kruger who wrote Economic Considerations and Class Size, it was considered the most important educational experiment to strengthen schools. Though it did raise test scores in the primary grades, it showed little improvement for students higher than 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Even supporters of this study say that this was not a carefully controlled experiment. In a controlled accurate experiment, all types of classes and all types of cities would have been tested (The Tennessee Study of Class Size in Early School Grades). Because of the STAR study, many school districts wanted to follow suit. As I stated above, according to *USA Today* (2010) “Class sizes are getting bigger, but does it really matter?”, states like California and Florida are spending millions of dollars on smaller class sizes. To get the amount of teachers that was needed, they took “anyone off the street” and

didn't put effective educators in the classroom. Both states have shown little to no improvement in academic achievement.

Instead of focusing on smaller class sizes, curriculum, teaching effectiveness, behavior management and communication with the home needs to be addressed. Support in these areas needs to be available to educators and school staff. Technology incorporated into the classroom is a great way to assist in those 5 areas.

A quality curriculum is crucial to a success of a school. The curriculum needs to be user friendly and relevant. Many effective curriculums, such as the KC4, are available online to educators with GLCE's, benchmarks/standards, common core, lessons, and lesson materials. Existing curriculum also needs to be supplemented. Technology can do just this (computers, video streaming, educational sites, video/digital cameras, document cameras, promethean boards, etc). Not only can those technology innovations supplement curriculum, they can also aide in teacher effectiveness. Engaging and effective lessons will cut down in behavior issues because students will be focused on learning and those who have behavior issues due to being low-level, can be accommodated. Technology can also improve on communication with the home. Websites, automated call systems, e-mail, blogs, Facebook, and educational websites are all excellent ways to keep parents connected.

As you can see, it's really quite obvious. Class size has nothing to do with it! Effective teaching in the classroom is what's needed today in our schools!

Educationally Yours,

Allyson Dewar