

Making the most out of smaller class sizes; teacher choices can significantly increase student achievement.

Recent findings in a state-sponsored program in the state of Wisconsin illuminate which teacher actions most influence student learning when class sizes are reduced in the early grades. The Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program reduces class size in K-3 classrooms to a 15:1 student-to-teacher ratio in qualifying districts. Any district with 50% or more low-income children can participate. The study measured the achievement of students in 89 classes in the 2nd grade and 83 classes in the 3rd grade using the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills as compared to matched classrooms with larger class sizes. Gains were particularly significant for African-American students and especially so for African-American males. To better understand variability between student performance and the teaching practices that make the biggest differences in the smaller-sized classes, the researchers observed 76 first grade classrooms and surveyed all of the SAGE teachers and principals. They conclude that, "Having a small class is not a time for teachers to sit back and relax". The observations in grade one classrooms noted that teachers with high achieving students:

1. Establish clear routines.
2. Set goals.
3. Provide frequent feedback.

Teachers in the higher performing grade two and three classrooms:

1. Spent more time teaching than managing the classroom.
2. Integrated subject areas.
3. Spent more time individualizing.
4. Spent more time in discussions.
5. Based activities on students' prior knowledge.
6. More often used cooperative groups.

To find out more and view related studies go to: www.educationanalysis.org to view the 1999-2000 SAGE Evaluation