



Class Size Matters
124 Waverly Pl., New York, NY 10011
Phone: 917-435-9329
info@classsizematters.org
www.classsizematters.org

Myths and Facts concerning class size reduction in NYC

Myth: The research on the benefits of smaller classes is weak, and the only evidence relates to the early grades.

Fact: [Studies](#) from Tennessee, Wisconsin, and other states demonstrate that students assigned to smaller classes in grades K-3 do better in every way that can be measured: They score higher on tests, receive better grades, and exhibit improved attendance and behavior. The Institute of Education Sciences, research arm of the U.S. Department of Education, cites class size reduction as [one of only four](#), evidence-based reforms proven to increase student achievement through rigorous, randomized experiments -- the “gold standard” of research.

Moreover, [many controlled studies](#) point to significant benefits of smaller classes to students in the middle and upper grades as well, including more engagement, higher graduation rates, and fewer disciplinary problems.

One [authoritative analysis](#) analyzed student achievement in 2,561 schools, as measured by their performance on the NAEP (national) exams and found that after controlling for student background, the only factor positively correlated with higher scores was class size, and the effect was even stronger in the upper grades. [Another study](#) found that “*smaller classes in 8th grade led to improvements in non-cognitive skills like student engagement, persistence and self-esteem that have been strongly linked to success in schools and later in life. ... in urban schools, the economic benefits from investing in smaller classes would be nearly twice the cost.*”

In nearly all of these studies, the benefits of smaller classes were [especially large](#) for disadvantaged students who make up the majority of the population in NYC public schools, including Black, Hispanic, and low-income students.

Teachers overwhelmingly agree that lowering class size would be the most effective way to improve public schools, according to [every survey](#) where this option has been offered. When [NYC principals were asked](#) what class sizes they would need to provide a quality education, the average response was 20 students per class in grades K-3, 23 students per class in 4-5 grades, and 24 students per class in grades 6-12; very close to the levels in the new class size law.

Myth: Reducing class size in NYC schools is too expensive

Fact: The [latest estimate](#) from the Independent Budget Office show that lowering class size will cost “\$214 million in 2026 and \$427 million in 2027, respectively, to cover salaries for additional teachers over the first two years of the three-year phase-in period.” Though the final year would add more costs, this would be a relatively small portion of the \$37 billion+ DOE budget, especially when the intrinsic and extrinsic value of smaller classes is considered.

Moreover, many economists have found that the [benefits of smaller classes outweigh the costs](#). Alan Krueger, the former chief economist of the Council of Economic Advisers, [estimated](#) that that “*the benefits of reducing class size are estimated to be around twice the cost.*”¹ His calculations did not factor in potential savings in academic remediation and special education services, the costs of which would be expected to decrease if class sizes are lowered and instead are increasing rapidly in NYC schools. Yet instead of lowering class size, the DOE has shrunk the K12 teaching force by over 4,000 teachers over the last five years.

Myth: There is insufficient funding to lower class size

Fact: NY State is providing more than \$1.3 billion in additional annual funding to NYC schools as a result of settlement of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit, in which excessive class sizes were the central issue in the case. Even if the DOE does not use these funds accordingly, the city is expected to end this fiscal year with a [\\$3.6 billion surplus](#) according to the Independent Budget Office, as well as a “[rainy day fund](#)” of [\\$2 billion](#).

Additionally, the city has [several options](#) for raising substantially more in revenue with the help of the state, including [nearly \\$100 million annually](#) if the NYC were treated the same as all other school districts by being eligible for state charter transition aid, meant to partially reimburse districts for the cost of charter school expansion. NYC is also the only district in the State required to help subsidize charter school rent. If this mandate was eliminated, the DOE would gain savings of [more than \\$75 million annually](#). And yet to our knowledge the Mayor has not advocated for either of these changes in the law.

Myth: The DOE was not provided with enough time to cap class sizes at lower levels

Fact: The new law was passed in June 2022 with a deadline of five years, starting in the fall of 2022, to achieve full implementation. When Governor Hochul signed the law in September, 2022 it was with the agreement that the phase-in would begin in the fall of 2023 instead. Thus DOE had six years to cap core instructional classes at lower levels. Moreover, because of enrollment decline, in the fall of 2022, [nearly 40% of core academic classes](#) had already met the mandated caps. Unfortunately, there has been no progress since and the number of these classes that met the cap this fall fell to 36.9%.

Myth: Reducing class size will interfere with schools offering AP and other advanced courses.

Fact: There is no reason advanced courses like AP cannot still be offered when class sizes are reduced. Instead, the quality of these courses and student outcomes would likely be substantially improved with smaller classes. [According to the latest 2022 results](#), only one third of NYC Black

students who took AP courses passed any of their AP exams & less than half of Hispanic students. Reducing class size in these classes would likely increase the chances of student success in these courses substantially.

Myth: Adjusting enrollment between nearby schools to allow for smaller classes would be unfair to students or their families

Fact: Actually, this change would benefit students at both overcrowded and underutilized schools. Students at previously overcrowded schools would be allowed to have smaller classes and eat lunch at reasonable times, rather than early in the morning or late in the day as currently. Students at underutilized schools would benefit from more adequate services and electives because currently, the budget of these schools are so limited that they are often unable provide such programs to their students. Despite false claims like this one, smaller classes are the #1 or #2 choice of most parents when asked what changes they would like to see in their children's schools, according to the DOE parent survey.

Myth: Capping enrollment at lower levels at overcrowded schools will for students to travel far from home and/or cause families to flee from NYC public schools

Fact: There is no need to force students to travel far from home if the DOE implements the measures proposed by the Class Size Working Group. Many of the most overcrowded schools are unzoned, and/or enroll many students outside their areas. In addition, the CSWG recommended that safeguards be established so that no student is forced to attend a school far from home.

The Working Group proposes that elementary school students should not be assigned to any school that is more than a half hour from their home by walking; middle school students to any school that is more than a half hour away via public transit, and high school students to any school that is more than one hour away by public transit, unless they choose to attend a school further away. In communities where all nearby schools are overutilized without enough space to lower class size, new schools will have to be built.

Currently, [according to DOE](#), families choose elementary schools that average 0.7 miles from their homes; 1.2 miles for middle schools, and 3 miles for high schools. Of course, many opt to attend schools even further away than this.

As for causing families to flee from the city, the opposite is likely to happen. Lowering class size is likely to attract more families to our public schools and keep them in our schools longer, [as happened in California](#) when that state reduced class size in the early grades. That is why the DOE should plan for a cushion when creating additional space for smaller classes.

Myth: NYC will never be able to build enough schools in overcrowded districts

Fact: DOE has long allowed the problem of school overcrowding to fester and undermine the quality of education in too many communities. The CSWG report has many practical, actionable recommendations to ensure that sites can be identified, and schools can be expanded or built in an accelerated manner where they are needed in order to meet the mandate as long as the process starts now. In fact, the new class size mandate, if complied with, would be the most effective lever to ensure that the DOE and the School Construction Authority eliminated overcrowding and builds sufficient capacity for smaller classes.

Myth: Hiring more teachers to reduce class size will undermine teacher quality

Fact: In California, when class sizes were reduced, [researchers found](#) “little or no support for the hypotheses that the need to hire large numbers of teachers following the adoption of CSR [class-size reduction] led to a lasting reduction in the quality of instruction...Overall, the findings suggest that CSR increased achievement in the early grades for all demographic groups.”

[A separate study](#) concluded that “When the Los Angeles Unified School District needed to triple its hiring of elementary teachers following the state’s class-size reduction initiative in 1997, the district was able to do so without experiencing a reduction in mean teacher effectiveness.”

Rather than causing teachers to flee to higher performing districts as originally feared, follow-up [studies in California](#) showed that after a temporary increase of teachers moving to other districts within the state, teacher attrition rates declined to much lower levels than before the program began, and most sharply in schools with large numbers of poor students. Similarly, [an analysis](#) of New York state schools outside the city revealed that when class sizes were lowered, teacher turnover rates fell.

The same would be expected here in NYC, as smaller classes in our schools will likely lead over time to a more experienced and effective teaching force, especially at our highest need schools. As the researcher of the above study concluded, class size reduction works to “*improve student achievement through both the direct effect of smaller classes on student achievement and the indirect effects of decreasing the fraction of beginning teachers in the classroom and decreasing the disruption associated with teacher turnover.*”

Myth: There was significant dissension on the DOE Class Size Working Group

Fact: Though the DOE did appoint several members to the Working Group who were affiliated with organizations that had opposed the law in the first place and urged the Governor to repeal the law, only nine out of its 46 members dissented with [its proposals](#) to implement the law.

Myth: Reducing class size is inequitable because the more advantaged schools already have small enough classes

Fact: This is one of the most pernicious of the myths put forward by the administration and their allies. Lowering class size is one of very few reforms that, by its nature is highly equitable, as the benefits from smaller classes are about twice as large for students of color and those from low-income families This is why [class size reduction has been found to significantly narrow](#) the achievement and opportunity gap.

And while it is true that when schools are divided into quartiles according to their economic need index, the highest quartile of need already tends to have smaller classes, only 6% of the schools in this category (24 out of the 380) fully met the class size caps this year, and even fewer would be likely to meet them in the future if current trends continue.

Finally, there are far more high-needs students enrolled in the other three quartiles of schools, as defined by DOE, as the highest-need category tends to enroll very few students. According to the

Demographic Snapshot, there are more Black students and English Language Learners attending schools in quartiles 2 and 3, more Hispanic students in quartile 2, and more students in poverty in each of the three other quartile levels, according to the latest available data.

What this analysis shows is that without a comprehensive citywide program of class size reduction, the benefits of smaller classes will never reach all of the students who need them.

Quartile of schools (by Economic Need Index)	Number of Schools	Enrollm ent	Average ENI	Est. Classes Over Cap	Classes At or Below Cap	Black Students	Hispanic Students	ELL Students	Students at Poverty Level
Quartile 1 (5% - 67%)	381	277,314	46.9%	78.5%	21.5%	33,434 (21.2%)	65,678 (19.5%)	19,622 (15.4%)	147,609 (24.9%)
Quartile 2 (67% - 82%)	381	232,601	75.6%	65.8%	34.2%	50,429 (32.1%)	93,300 (27.7%)	38,606 (30.3%)	181,254 (30.6%)
Quartile 3 (82% - 91%)	381	162,603	86.6%	51.1%	48.9%	38,471 (24.5%)	88,420 (26.3%)	35,610 (28.0%)	139,760 (23.6%)
Quartile 4 (91% - 96%+)	380	133,948	93.9%	41.1%	58.9%	35,007 (22.2%)	89,355 (26.5%)	33,504 (26.3%)	123,457 (20.9%)
Grand Total	1,523	806,466	75.7%	62.0%	38.0%	157,341	336,753	127,342	592,081