

Right Sizing

Public schooling in America suffers from a triple problem that a single-policy solution might solve: 1) Our best teachers aren't paid enough, 2) not enough kids benefit from great teachers, and 3) too many are stuck with weak teachers.

A recent paper from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute describes and demonstrates the value of a change in policy that could address all three issues at once, and could be done at no additional cost to taxpayers. Following this route, however, means reversing position on a widely popular but pricey and none-too-effective approach to "educational improvement": class size reduction.

Instead of trying to keep classes small, we should be leveraging our existing teacher talent by enlarging the classes taught by our best instructors—and compensating these excellent teachers for the extra work involved.

Playing to our classroom strengths by redistributing students is not a new idea. Both Arne Duncan and Bill Gates have encouraged schools to try it to soften the blow of recent budget cuts. The rationale is straightforward: We know from rigorous research that the impact on student achievement that comes from having a good versus an average teacher clearly trumps the effect of smaller class sizes. Larger classes for the best teachers benefit the pupils who are reassigned to them; they also help the less effective teachers improve their instruction by enabling them to concentrate on fewer students. However, just how much of a difference could manipulating class sizes in this way make for overall student learning and access to

effective teaching? No district appears to have purposefully allocated students in this manner. To answer this question in the absence of real-world implementation, this study used North Carolina data to simulate student outcomes under the assumption that schools would strategically assign larger classes to the strongest teachers and smaller classes to the weakest.

The study poses a number of questions. Specifically:

1. To what extent do existing class size assignments already reveal differences in teacher performance?

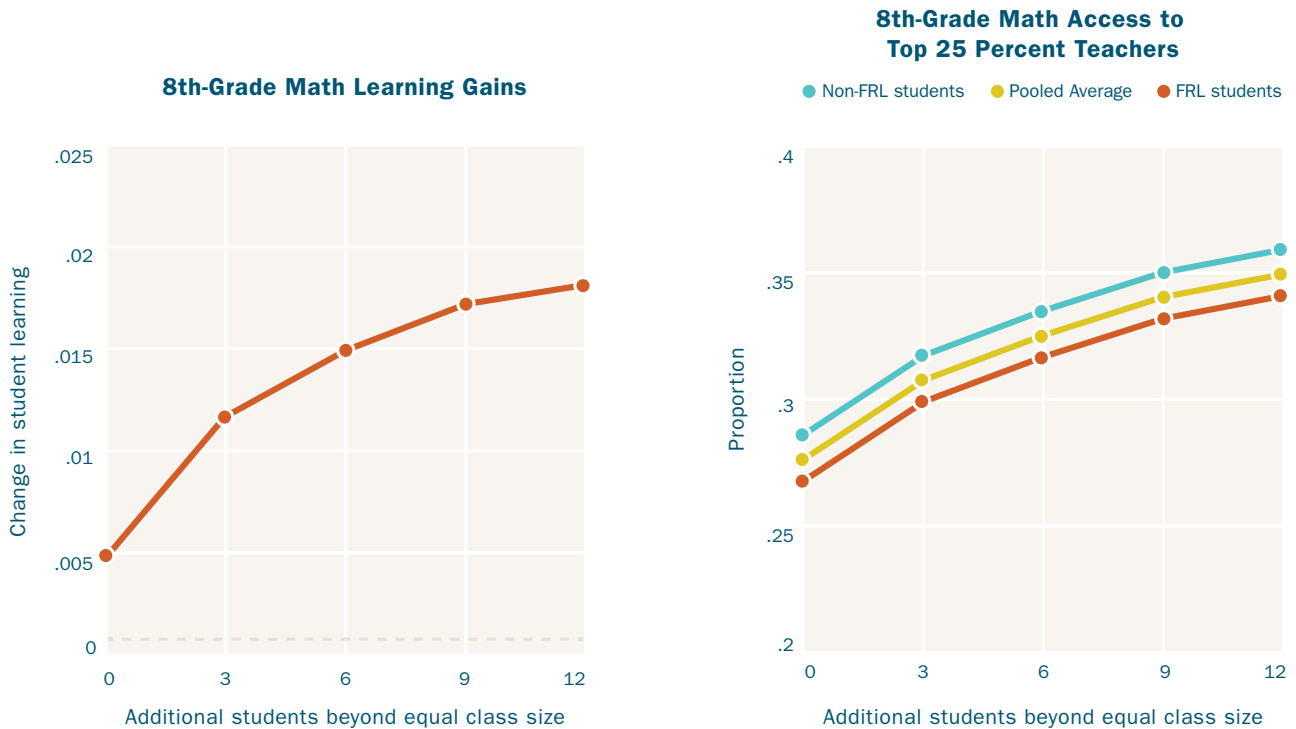
Using the North Carolina data, the study documents how students are actually assigned to teachers based on their prior performance across fifth- and eighth-grade classrooms. There is a very slight tendency to place more students in the classes of effective teachers; but still only about 25 percent of students are taught by the top 25 percent of teachers. Thus North Carolina appears to differen-

tiate class sizes based on teacher’s performance only to a very limited extent.

2. To what extent does a purposeful policy of allocating students to teachers on the basis of teacher effectiveness boost achievement?

The results show that relatively minor changes in the way that students are assigned to teachers can lead to significant learning gains. But the size of these gains depends on grade level, with eighth grade more promising than fifth grade. Intensively reallocating eighth-grade students—so that the most effective teachers have up to twelve more pupils than the average classroom—may produce gains equivalent to adding roughly two-and-a-half extra weeks of school (see Figure ES-1). Even adding a handful of students to the most effective eighth-grade teachers (up to six more than the school’s average) produces gains in math and science akin to extending the school year by

FIG. ES-1 SHIFTING STUDENTS TO MORE EFFECTIVE TEACHERS CAN INCREASE LEARNING AND ACCESS TO EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION



How to read this figure: The simulations incrementally allocate more and more students (above the average) into the classrooms of the most effective teachers in a school. These two graphs show potential learning gains in eighth-grade math arising from these changes in class size (on the left) and the proportion of eighth-grade students assigned to teachers in the top 25 percent of value-added performance (on the right).



nearly two weeks or, equivalently, to removing the lowest 5 percent of teachers from the classroom. (And these class size differences are, incidentally, similar to those actually observed in the North Carolina data set.) The potential impacts on learning are more modest in fifth grade, where the large majority of teachers are in self-contained classrooms. Even the most intensive shifts in fifth-grade class size—in which up to twelve additional students may be allocated to effective teachers—are equivalent to extending the school year by just two days.

3. To what extent do these simulated classrooms affect students' access to effective teachers?

Results show that the class size-shifting strategy shows an overall improvement in student access to effective

teaching, yet *gaps in access* for economically disadvantaged students persist. For instance, disadvantaged eighth-grade students are about 8 percent less likely than nondisadvantaged peers to be assigned to a teacher in the top 25 percent of performance. This gap in access changes little in spite of the policy putting more students in front of effective teachers because the pool of available teachers in high-poverty schools does not change under this strategy. Thus, this policy alone shows little promise in reducing achievement gaps.

As for costs, these depend, of course, on what is done with weak teachers and how much is added to the salaries of strong teachers. However, the changes *can* be feasibly made at no net cost to taxpayers (i.e., within current budgets). The study concludes by considering these issues, and offers rough calculations of long-run benefits.

Can student learning improve by simply reallocating the distribution of students among teachers? The results of this investigation say yes, although the extent of the achievement gain and the price tag depend on grade level and a suite of human resource policy decisions. Perhaps most important, this analysis makes clear that universally shrinking class sizes may be counterproductive in terms of pupil achievement and that purposefully expanding some of them can be more efficacious. ■

This article is an excerpt from a report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The entire report may be viewed online at edexcellence.net.

Job Searching This Spring? Check Out AAE's Job Bank!

AAE is introducing a new benefit for our student and job-seeking members! We're selecting the very best job listings and passing them onto our members.

This new AAE Job Bank is about quality, not quantity! Unlike most job listings for teachers that list any and all openings, this member-only exclusive benefit seeks to connect our members with schools and districts that match our ethics. We recognize and commend your commitment as an AAE member to professionalism and strive to connect you with the best fit possible.

Email us at profdev@aaeteachers.org to be included on the list or to make any recommendations of schools with job openings. ■



National Charter Schools Appreciation Week: May 4-10, 2014



This May, AAE is excited to celebrate National Charter Schools Week, May 4th-10th. AAE believes charter schools are a vital component of the education reform movement. With charter schools' teachers and administrators as our fastest growing sector of membership, AAE is proud to play an integral role in the charter school movement, through partnerships with several charter school advocacy groups and associations, and by supporting countless charter school teachers and administrators.

National Charter Schools Week gives the charter school community the opportunity to highlight and share successes, lessons learned, and achievements on behalf of the nearly 6,500 schools and more than 2.5 million students they serve. Below are just two examples of charter school success—one from a student and one from an AAE member teacher.

Zyaire Taylor, Charter School Student

“Coming from the 6th grade into 7th—that was the hardest transition I’ve ever had to make,” says 10th-grade student Zyaire Taylor. “I used to argue and not trust people. I had to learn to be something different.”

Zyaire, a student at Democracy Prep Public Charter School (DPCS) located in Harlem, New York City, used to attend a traditional public school in the South Bronx, but she wasn’t challenged in her classes and her boredom began to express itself in negative ways. That’s when Zyaire’s mother enrolled her in the lottery at DPCS.

Zyaire admits, “I had good grades before but I didn’t have to work for them. When I first got here, I had seven Ds. I never ever get seven Ds! So that’s how I learned I had to work a lot harder.”

Strong-willed and passionate, Zyaire has learned to fight for what she believes in and has since become a national championship debater.

DPCS first opened its doors in August 2006. By 2010 it became the highest performing middle school in all of New York City.



Rhonda Lochiatto, Charter School Educator

Rhonda has been a classroom teacher for 16 years. After 12 years spent in a traditional public school, she felt the need to join the growing charter school movement in her home state of Florida. “Florida is a leader in education reform and I wanted to join a staff that I knew needed me most,” she stated. Rhonda now feels at home at her Orlando-area school in a big way. “I know I’m in the right place. The flexibility, autonomy, and administrator buy-in are second to none. I can’t believe I didn’t make the switch earlier. I love charter schools!” Rhonda’s charter school focuses on student-centered instruction and technology innovation. “I know I’m needed here and I feel like I’m making a huge difference for my students.” ■

Read more at publiccharters.org.

School Spotlight: Career Path High Provides Innovative Education Model

According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center just over half—54.1 percent—of first-time college students starting school in 2006 graduated within six years. Career Path High (CPH), located in Kaysville, Utah, recognizes this problem, and is providing a solution via an innovative approach to education.

If you were given directions to Career Path High, you might be confused when you arrived at the campus of Davis Applied Technology College (DATC). However, you would not be misdirected. This tuition-free, public charter school, serving grades 9-12, is strategically located on the campus of one of Utah's best career and technical colleges.

As you toured the collegiate-like high school, you might notice students working individually on their laptops, a teacher meeting one-on-one with a student, or a student watching a lesson on his laptop. You might notice an absence of a bell, requirements for in-classroom time, or a formal dismissal, as students come and go at various points during the day. With the goal—to

provide an individualized path for students where they can use their strengths, rather than be dictated by a traditional classroom delivery method—directing every aspect of CPH, this unique, flexible environment is anything but coincidental.

Career Path High uses a blended learning model, combining digital curriculum and instruction with a face-to-face teacher component, housed in a setting similar to a college classroom. Students choose according to their needs whether to work remotely at any location or in person within the walls of a Learning Center. Through CPH's unique model, each student develops the essential ability to identify and capitalize on personalized, preferred learning styles. The model also enables students to create a plan, which supports their individual learning and gives them control over time, place, path, and pace. This simultaneous immersion in both a high school completion track and a college environment equips students with problem-solving skills, higher order and critical thinking skills, and career awareness, unlike any other school.



“With our model the teacher’s role is transcended. Rather than spending time delivering curriculum in traditional classroom style, the curriculum is delivered online, freeing up the teacher to provide focused, one-on-one instruction and customized learning to every student,” explained Robyn Bagley, Career Path High’s principal.

Empowered over their own learning, and supported in personal responsibility and decision-making, students are expected to graduate from Career Path High with a high school diploma and a completed industry-based technical certificate. They also have the option to simultaneously earn college credits that matriculate to an Associate of Applied Science degree at the nearby state university. ■



AAE Member Testimonials

Our members are buzzing about the exemplary services offered by AAE's legal department and network of top attorneys! With the upcoming small dues increase in July, rest assured that your investment is going directly to your protection and professionalism. The following testimonials are genuine proof that our legal team is second to none!



"Thank you once again for your valuable guidance and support on my legal issue. I intend to re-up my AAE membership and communicate to other teachers what a great alternative it is to AFT membership."

—AAE Member, Dulce, NM

"The AAE legal service department people that I spoke with were very personable and helped calm my fears. Thanks for your help AAE!"

—AAE Member, Dawsonville, GA

"Being able to talk with you folks during this difficult time was so comforting. Thank you again for supporting me. I am SO GLAD I joined the AAE!"

—AAE Member, South Bend, IN

"AAE was more than helpful to me, and everyone was very courteous and genuinely helpful. The legal department was exceptional. AAE has retained an exemplary staff. Thank you for everything."

—AAE Member, Omaha, NE

"Just being able to talk with someone who clearly stated my rights and suggested actions that would protect me was so reassuring and encouraging. Thank you AAE!"

—AAE Member, South Bend, IN

"Thank you so much. You have given great comfort that I have support in my corner."

—George Tolbert, Anchorage, AK

"The legal team was wonderful in helping me out. I am so appreciative of the support they provided me."

—AAE Member, Grand Marais, MI

"AAE attorneys are excellent! I love working with them. I was in a jam at my first teaching assignment. I had done no wrong and the legal services were able to show that. The school and I settled out of court. I am pleased. AAE is the reason I am still teaching."

—AAE Member, Winfield, KS

"Thank you for helping. I really appreciate everything. It is priceless to have someone in your corner."

—AAE Member, Jacksonville, AR

"Thank you so much for hanging in there with me and getting through all the craziness that I've had in my school life over the last two years. You all have been great! Even though I enjoyed getting to know you all, and please don't take this wrong, I hope I never have to contact you again! Thanks again!"

—AAE member, Syracuse, UT



“I will never be able to adequately convey how thankful I am that I was able to speak to the AAE legal services department and receive the help that they have been able to give me along the way concerning the matter I am dealing with. They have always been polite, professional, and timely in their responses and interactions with me.”

—AAE Member, Paragould, AR

“I want to thank you for all of your help. I have been very pleased with AAE and now have one more reason to be very happy I am a member. I will tell you, when I was in the union, it took weeks to even hear from them when I had any sort of issue. It was easier to handle issues on my own. Be assured, I will continue to encourage my colleagues to join AAE.”

—AAE Member, Albuquerque, NM

“AAE was more than helpful to me, everyone was very courteous and genuinely helpful. The legal department was exceptional AAE has retained an exemplary staff. Thank you for everything.”

—AAE Member, Omaha, NE

“Thank you so much! I appreciate everything you and AAE have done to help me out in this situation! Hoping to have it resolved quickly!”

—AAE Member, Deltona, FL ■

AAE Introduces New Discount Program for Members

AAE is proud to serve thousands of professional educators every day. To show our appreciation for your dedication and membership, we are pleased to offer you a new exciting benefit—a Member Discount Program!

AAE members now have the opportunity to enjoy an elite collection of local and national perks and discounts, comparison shopping, and concierge services from thousands of hotels, restaurants, movie theaters, spas, theme parks, and more!

With over 150,000 available discounts, popular offers include:

- 25 percent off at Papa John’s Pizza
- 30 percent off Regal Theater eTickets, available on demand for \$7.50
- A FREE pair of eye-glasses from Coastal.com
- 15 percent off oil changes, tires & maintenance from Firestone Complete Auto Care

Additional vendors offering discounts include Costco, Olive Garden, AMC Theaters, Sam’s Club, Jiffy Lube, Macaroni Grill, The Men’s Wearhouse, Brooks Brothers, LA Fitness, DirecTV, Bally’s Total Fitness, Target.com, and Red Lobster. Over 150 national attractions

and theme parks are also participating in the program including the Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Studios, SeaWorld, Cirque du Soleil, and Six Flags!

Visit our website, aaeteachers.org/discounts to register and login to the program. New offers are added and updated weekly, so be sure to check the program frequently! ■





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Teacher Appreciation Week: May 5-9, 2014

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the entire Association of American Educators staff, we would like to take this opportunity to thank and recognize our hardworking members as part of National Teacher Appreciation Week. Thank you for helping to mold the next generation, for being role models to your students, and for giving so much of your time and effort toward one of the most demanding yet rewarding careers. AAE is proud to support teachers across the country, this week and always. Happy Teacher Appreciation Week to our talented and inspiring members across the country! We appreciate YOU!

Warm Regards,
AAE Staff

