Reducing class size in the nation’s schools has been a top priority for policymakers, educators, and parents. More than 20 states have adopted class size reduction (CSR) policies in the past decade. However, CSR, as generally implemented, can be expensive. In California, the current costs are upwards of $1.5 billion a year (Stecher and Bornstedt (eds.), 2002; Brewer et al., 1999, “Estimating the Cost of National Class Size Reductions Under Different Policy Alternatives,” Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 20:2; Grissmer, D., 1999, “Class Size Effects: Assessing the Evidence, Its Policy Implications, and Future Research Agenda,” Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 20:2; Grissmer et al., 2000, Improving Student Achievement: What State NAEP Scores Tell Us, Santa Monica, CA: RAND). Because the most rigorous research on the effects of CSR has been done on grades K–3, our recommendations focus on these grades.

**Focus class size reductions on minority and disadvantaged students in K–3 and reduce class size to 15–16 students per class.** Minority and disadvantaged students in classes of 15 to 16 have shown larger achievement gains than more-advantaged students in experimental or quasi-experimental studies. Classroom observations show that teachers in these smaller classes have fewer disciplinary problems and concentrate more on instruction and needs of individual students.

**Provide local flexibility in meeting class size objectives to increase efficiency.** Rigid state-wide rules on class size that apply to each classroom can increase costs significantly with little additional benefit. Setting average class size targets across grades or across all schools in a district results in a more efficient program.

**Phase in CSR, starting with the earliest grades, to help avoid teacher shortages and to be more efficient.** Rapid implementation of CSR for all K–3 grades in California resulted in significant shortages of certified teachers.

**Target early implementation in selected schools.** This allows for a more rigorous evaluation and provides information on implementation problems and on the effects of CSR that can be used to improve the efficiency of the program.

**Initiate experiments to evaluate the relative effectiveness of CSR versus alternative policies designed to improve student achievement.** For example, CSR has been shown to be more cost-effective than teacher aides. More research is needed to compare CSR to other policies, as well as to measure CSR effects in class sizes below 15, in higher grades, and among advantaged students. Only then can we ensure that money on CSR is well-spent.

Three newly released briefs authored by Sheila Kirby and colleagues at RAND provide evidence on the condition of Title I schools on the eve of the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. The briefs examine identification of schools as needing improvement, services and programs offered in Title I schools to promote student learning, and professional development for teachers and teacher aides as of school year 1999–2000.

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