



Success

Timely tips for OSBA student achievement liaisons

July 2008

Are you smarter than a ... You could stage an academic challenge between the board and a group of fifth-graders, or save public embarrassment (just ask those who attended the Northwest Region Spring Conference in March) by visiting the “Dare to Compare” Web site. Sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics, the site lets you test your knowledge of civics, economics, geography, history, math and science against American fourth-, eighth-, ninth- and 12th-graders. If you are up for the challenge, visit <http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/eyk/index.asp>.

Your summer reading Summer is a great time to catch up on technology issues that face your district. If you want to learn more about technology and how it affects your students, pick up your July copy of the *American School Board Journal*. If you don't have a subscription, visit www.asbj.com.

Finding parent resources One key to student success is parental involvement. The National PTA offers a wealth of resources for parents. Encourage your district parents to visit www.pta.org/pr_category_details_1122916501015.html or create a parents' resource page on your Web site with a link to this page.

Was NCLB a plan to fail? A recent *Time* magazine story supports the theory that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was created to show public education's weaknesses and foster school choice. To read what the former assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education during **George W. Bush's** first term, **Susan Neuman**, now a professor of education at the University of Michigan, reveals in the story, visit www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1812758,00.html.

Hot links for Success If you have trouble typing the exact string of characters in the URLs listed in *Success* each month, go to www.osba-ohio.org/sa.htm to download an electronic version that has hot links. Simply clicking on the URLs in the electronic version takes you to the Web page mentioned.

Student achievement research brief

Each month, *Success* brings you a research brief to share with fellow board members.

What is the relationship between smaller class sizes and student achievement?

For many teachers, parents and policymakers, small class sizes have always been a supposed key to raising student achievement. But do test scores really rise when the number of students in a classroom goes down?

The majority of educational research in this area does support that small classes are beneficial, but that research also suggests that the “where” and “when” decisions are key.

A landmark study done over a four-year period in Tennessee, called the Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) Study, looked at nearly 12,000 K-3 students and 1,300 teachers in 42 different Tennessee districts. That study indicated that smaller classes did indeed lead to significantly higher reading and math scores, and that benefits were even greater for students who were placed in small classes early in their educational careers (kindergarten or first grade). The study defined a class as “small” when it had 13-17 students per teacher.

The state of Wisconsin built on the STAR project with one of its own, and its findings indicated that benefits continued to increase for minority students or those attending inner-city schools. Smaller class sizes for these groups of students led to higher achievement, lower drop-out rates, fewer disciplinary actions and greater numbers of students taking college entrance exams.

The benefits for students attending school in smaller classes seems to diminish in later grades, but students who attended smaller classes in kindergarten and first grade who move on to larger classes in later years continue to achieve at higher levels than those who didn't.

Costs to reduce class size can be considerable, and include additional teacher salaries, physical space or both. Even recognizing the benefits, the up-front costs to reduce all classes for young students can be prohibitive. Some districts have managed the additional costs through reallocation of current resources (e.g., “pull-out” specialists or other interventionists), finding that additional full-time teachers in smaller classes lead to fewer students needing intervention.

There seems to be little argument that smaller class sizes can yield achievement benefits, particularly for very young, minority or inner-city students. Argument does occur about how beneficial they are, and whether the benefit meets or outweighs the significant costs for many districts. In times of scarce resources, boards of education must weigh the challenges of class size against other valuable uses for the same dollars.

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