

## Reducing Class Size: What do we Know? – Q & A Document

Smaller class sizes can benefit students and teachers, particularly if accompanied by other policy and practice initiatives that enhance teaching and learning. Reducing class size is not a “magic bullet.”

### 1. What does the research say?

- The research confirms that class size reduction does provide the environment in which teachers can teach differently. In smaller classes, they interact with individual students more frequently and use a greater variety of instructional strategies. Teachers can create more opportunities for students to take greater control of their learning. They also may spend out-of-classroom work time on more creative planning (and less on routine marking), and they may interact more frequently with other teachers and adults in support of classroom teaching.
- How class size reduction is implemented matters greatly in terms of factors that support innovative practice. Effective implementation requires policies and procedures that take into account differences in student skills and supports and provide effective learning opportunities for diverse groups of students.
- But the research also suggests that the full gains of class size reduction cannot be achieved if it is implemented without paying attention to other factors that support innovative practice. Some of the most important factors include the ways in which teachers and students work together; the curriculum in use; and teachers' opportunities to learn new teaching strategies.

### 2. What does the research say about the impact of small classes on student achievement?

- In smaller classes, students learn more academically and socially; they are more engaged and less disruptive. Even when it is not evident that teachers have significantly changed their instructional activities, student learning may improve, engagement may increase, and “behavioural problems” may decrease. These improvements may be partially explained by an increase in physical classroom space per student, providing more opportunities for movement, different grouping strategies, and interaction among students and between students and teachers.
- The evidence suggests that students learn more, are more engaged, and are less disruptive. Parents of children in smaller classes perceive improvements in their children's school experiences.

### 3. What are the costs associated with reducing class size?

- Reducing class size is costly, running into hundreds of millions of dollars each year in a large province, and it is important to compare this strategy with other alternatives for improving student outcomes. Failing to account for these costs can compromise the experience for involved students and teachers, and may even cause problems in other areas. Quality classroom space, opportunities for teachers to work and plan together easily; opportunities for teachers to learn new instructional strategies; and instructional resources (both materials and human expertise) are all crucial.