

**PROPOSAL MAY UNDERMINE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF  
EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA**

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## **PROPOSAL MAY UNDERMINE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA**

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In 1996 California passed a bill (SB 1777) that established a Class Size Reduction (CSR) program for kindergarten and grades 1 through 3 (K-3). The goal was to improve the quality of education in California, which by the mid-1990s had become a subject of concern. A current legislative proposal (AB 42), if enacted, may undermine the CSR program. The legislation would increase the average number of students per classroom for those school districts that participate in the Class Size Reduction (CSR) program.

Some of the changes AB 42 would make in the CSR program are subtle, but they could have potentially serious implications for the quality of education in California. The findings of the present study are that, if AB 42 is enacted, California will:

- Stand to lose approximately 6,000 teachers in K-3;
- Risk a setback in future teacher recruitment, which in turn could have an impact on the quality of education; and
- Lose substantial investments that have been made in recruiting, preparing, developing, and hiring new teachers.

### **Understanding the Legislation**

Let's first look at the proposed legislation, and what it means in terms of number of students per class. Under AB 42 all California school districts are authorized to determine the average class size on a schoolsite basis rather than on an individual class basis if the ratio of pupils to teacher in any class included in the average does not exceed the allowable 20 to 1 ratio by more than two. In simple terms that means that if the average class size for a schoolsite is 20 pupils per teacher, individual classes can be as large as 22 pupils per teacher.

To understand what the proposed legislation will mean, we first have to understand the existing legislation. Under current legislation, for all but a few small districts, districts that participate in the CSR program cannot have more than 20 pupils per teacher. To have no more than 20 pupils per teacher means that the average number of students per teacher for all districts has to be less than 20. Why is that so?

The primary reason that the average is less than 20 pupils per teacher is the growing population in California. If a district is growing, it must anticipate adding pupils while still staying within the limits of 20 pupils per teacher. To accomplish this, a district with a growing student population may limit its class sizes to about 18 pupils per teacher at the beginning of a school year, expecting that one or more students will transfer into each class in their school during the school year. Another factor deals just with simple arithmetic, i.e., it is generally not possible for schools to divide the number of students among the number of classrooms and come up with exactly 20 per classroom. Therefore it is necessary to have less than 20 per classroom to ensure that the 20 per classroom limit is not exceeded. Finally, a small proportion of school districts have classrooms with significantly less than 20 pupils per teacher, because of the nature of the district.

For these reasons and based on experience, funding of the CSR program was adjusted for an anticipated average of 18.8 students per class. Funds have been provided to school districts on this basis.

For 2001-02, the average for 970 districts and charter schools was actually 18.73<sup>1</sup> pupils per teacher. This is 1.27 fewer pupils per teacher than the 20 pupils per teacher average called for by AB 42. The proposed legislation, which would permit an average of 20 pupils per classroom, can therefore be expected to increase the number of pupils in a classroom by an average of approximately 1.27 pupils, or almost 7 percent. Because of the classroom size increase, the proposed legislation will also mean that California will have approximately 6,000 fewer K-3 classrooms and will therefore stand to lose approximately 6,000 K-3 teachers.<sup>2</sup> How this number is derived is shown below:

	Number of classrooms	Number of students	Students per classroom
Current CSR	98,528	1,845,205	18.73
AB 42	92,260	1,845,205	20.00
Difference	6,268	0	1.27

Based on the reasonable assumption that there is one teacher per classroom (teaching aides or substitutes are not counted), it can be seen from the above table that approximately 6,268 teachers could lose their jobs as a result of AB 42. The 6,268 number is an estimate of what may happen based on the time period evaluated, 2001-2002, the most recent academic year for which data are available.

### **Programs in Other States Show That Smaller Classes in K-3 Are Beneficial**

The well-known Tennessee STAR Project<sup>3</sup> and Wisconsin's SAGE Program<sup>4</sup> showed that reducing class size to 15 for kindergarten and grades 1 through 3 resulted in substantially higher levels of achievement than classes with 20 or more. These studies also indicated that gains were greater for students who are traditionally disadvantaged in education. Within this context, it would be accurate to say that the California Class Size Reduction program, with its limit of 20 pupils per teacher, was a move in the right direction.

Although there can be legitimate discussions about how best to implement a CSR program, it must be recognized that the net affect of AB 42 will be to increase class size and to reduce the pool of K-3 teachers. With California's growing population of those who would be traditionally disadvantaged in education<sup>5</sup>, an even more aggressive CSR program, i.e., one with smaller class size and one that addresses other issues such as special teacher training to take fuller advantage of CSR, would be desirable<sup>6</sup>. Thus AB 42 would appear to be a move in the wrong direction in terms of California's future needs.

### The Loss of Teachers is a Critical Issue

The potential loss of approximately 6,000 teachers if AB 42 becomes law is critical with respect to being able to recruit qualified teachers in the future and the corresponding impact on the quality of education in California. In the mid-to-late 1990s, California's teacher shortage became a prominent issue<sup>7</sup>. Several factors contributed to this shortage, including a rapidly growing student population, the implementation of the CSR program, a substantial teacher attrition rate, and retirement of veteran teachers<sup>8</sup>. Recognizing the problem, California made several significant and effective investments to address the shortage. Some of these investments created new programs while other strengthened existing programs. Table 1 below illustrates some of the State's investments over the past five years, for K-12, grouped in three basic categories: teacher recruitment, preparation, and induction.

**Table 1: California Investment in Teachers<sup>9</sup>**

*See Appendix for Details*

Nature of Investment	Budget Allocation (in millions)				
	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03
Teacher Recruitment	\$14.1	\$14.1	\$158.0	\$63.2	\$128.4
Teacher Preparation	\$100.6	\$90.2	\$94.6	\$117.3	\$100.7
Teacher Induction	\$74.5	\$94.8	\$120.7	\$128.2	\$125.5
Total	\$189.2	\$199.1	\$373.3	\$308.7	\$354.6

There are a myriad of programs working to reduce the nationwide teacher shortage, including federal programs, state programs, and local programs funded by block grants. Given the difficulty of obtaining and analyzing all relevant data, Table 1 reflects only the data that were readily available. Therefore, the amounts attributed to each category reflect just some of investments and programs initiated. Additionally, investments in professional development are not explicitly identified in Table 1, because it would be difficult to segregate the portion of professional development that might be reasonably assigned to recently recruited teachers. However, Table 5 (see appendix) is included to provide a sense of the cost of this effort.

Also not included in Table 1 are private investments made by teaching students and non-government organizations. For example, the amount attributed to teacher preparation only includes the amount subsidized by the government, not the amount invested by the students who are studying to be teachers to pay for their tuition, fees and books. In addition, there is an "opportunity cost" lost by these students as they forego other opportunities to study education in expectation of a secure career in teaching.

The investments identified in Table 1, which do not include professional development as well as other investments referred to above, still total over \$1.4 billion for the last five years. During that same period, all the various investments noted helped California bring 120,479 new teachers into the workforce.<sup>10</sup> Using the Table 1 figures, the average investment made per new teacher is about \$11,000, which again does not represent the total investment.

It can readily be concluded that California has made a substantial investment in recruiting and providing training to the approximately 6,000 teachers that would stand to be laid off if AB 42 becomes law. It should also be noted that since there is a shortage of well trained, certified teachers nationwide, the process of recruiting more qualified teachers has been difficult as well as expensive. States are currently competing with one another to attract well-trained, certified teachers.

### **California Stands to Lose the Benefits of Its Investment in Education**

Teachers who are laid off will not want to sit around, waiting and hoping to get re-hired. With families to support and financial responsibilities to meet, they will likely find alternative employment. Steve Lilly, Dean of Education at California State San Marcos, which will produce roughly 500 new teachers this year, expresses this concern, “We are in danger of losing some high-quality teacher talent out there. If people get their notice, they find alternative employment; it may be a 10 to 20-year decision if they stay in that new career field,” warned Lilly.<sup>11</sup>

Other experts also express concerns. The San Diego Union Tribune reports, “National University’s education dean Marie Shrub predicts this year’s budget crisis will have long-term effects on teacher training as well as the ultimate quality of schools. Some talented potential recruits might not want to gamble on the shaky ground that’s education right now, and seek other careers. And research shows that teacher quality is one of the most important ingredients in raising student achievement.”<sup>12</sup> Marie Shrub also stated: “When you have a disruption in the (teacher-training) pipeline, it will be harder to have fully qualified professionals in the field.”<sup>13</sup>

Teacher preparation institutions are already readying themselves for fewer applicants to the credentialing program over the next two years. Said National University spokesperson Hoyt Smith, “People are reading this (about teacher layoffs), and they’re going to freak out. It’s sending a conflicting message, because the fact is there are still teacher shortages and there will continue to be shortages.”<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, Margaret Gaston of the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning may have said it best: “Over the past several years we have invested hundreds of millions not only into new teachers, but also into developing and strengthening our teacher pipeline. The quantity as well as the quality of teachers in training is impressive. However, the message delivered by large teacher layoffs is one of instability, which could scare off many well-qualified potential educators. When teaching candidates see the state and districts climbing the walls for teachers one minute, and then issuing mass layoffs the next, how can they help but ask themselves, “Why should I pursue a career in which my employment is so insecure?”<sup>15</sup>

California is going to need many new teachers in the near future. The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning estimates that California will need nearly “210,000 new hires from 2002–03 to 2010–11.”<sup>16</sup> Among the reasons given are a continual rise in student enrollment and an expected increase in the number of teachers retiring in the next few years.

The impact of teacher layoffs under AB 42 will be most apparent as California attempts to recruit teachers to meet its growing population. The State will have to replace the approximately 6,000

experienced teachers it will have lost. Those it will be able to attract will likely be less experienced and, given the present and anticipated shortage of qualified teachers, will likely be less qualified.

### **School Districts Are Facing Difficult Choices**

Because of the shortage of funds, each California school district must decide whether to continue with the CSR program, whether AB 42 becomes law or not. School districts that opt out of the CSR program will further contribute to the loss of teachers statewide, well beyond the losses that would be expected under AB 42.

Although it is understandable that school districts are currently making choices driven by the need to operate with reduced funds, the decision to lay off teachers would appear to be shortsighted. The decision by some districts to opt out of the CSR program will unfortunately affect all districts in California, since the problem of teacher recruitment is a statewide issue. It would seem prudent for school districts to seek solutions other than opting out.

### **Conclusions**

If AB 42 becomes law, K-3 class sizes will increase in California schools. Because of the classroom size increase, the proposed legislation would also mean that California will stand to lose approximately 6,000 K-3 teachers. If school districts decide to opt out of the CSR program, the increase in class size and the consequent loss of K-3 teachers will be even greater. The implications are that the quality of education in California will be negatively impacted for some time into the future. While the current budget crisis requires responsible cost-containment measures, decisions need to be made with care so as to not exacerbate the impact of the crisis. For example, it would not appear to make sense either from a standpoint of quality of education or finance for the State to negate its investment in recruiting, preparing, developing and hiring new teachers, only to let them go and begin the process all over again. California may need to spend much more to recruit the number of teachers needed to replace those that were laid off because many laid-off teachers are likely to leave the profession and others may be reluctant to take jobs in a state with a history of major layoffs. If California hopes to emulate the successes of the STAR and SAGE programs, it should be thinking in terms of further class size reductions rather than increasing class sizes and laying off teachers. AB 42 would appear to be a move in the wrong direction.

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## References

### Study Contributor

Brian Tanner of Capital Resources Group in Sacramento, California, contributed to the research for the study.

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<sup>1</sup> Pupils per teacher in grades K-3 is derived by simple division using the totals of 1,845,205 eligible students and 98,528 classrooms in the 970 districts plus charter school (1,845,205 students divided by 98,528 classrooms equals 18.27 students per classroom, and therefore, based on the assumption of one teacher per classroom, 18.27 students per teacher). Information on the numbers of students and classrooms was taken from a database constructed from the California Department of Education report of the Primary Class Size Reduction Program allocations made for the 2001-02 school year.

<sup>2</sup> If we take the total number of eligible students (1,845,205) in grades K-3 and divide by 20 students per classroom (the average number allowed by AB 42), the result is that 92,260 classrooms will be required. That means that 6,268 fewer classrooms will be required (the 2001-2002 total of 98,528 classrooms minus 92,260 classrooms equals 6,268 fewer classrooms). Using the assumption that each classroom has one teacher, this means that 6,268 K-3 teachers could lose their jobs. The 6,268 number is an estimate of what may happen based on the time period evaluated, and without adjustment for variables in the application of the CSR program. In order not to give the impression that the number is exact, the estimate has been rounded down to 6,000 classrooms/teachers.

<sup>3</sup> Word E, Johnson J, Bain HP, Fulton DB, Zaharias JB, Lintz MN, Achilles CM, Folger J, Breda C. Student/teacher achievement ratio (STAR): Tennessee's K-3 class-size study. Nashville, TN: Tennessee State Department of Education, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Molnar A, Smith P, Zahorik J, Palmer A, Halbaach A, Ehrle K (1999) Evaluating the SAGE program: A pilot program in targeted pupil-teacher reduction in Wisconsin. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 1999; 21(2):165-177.

<sup>5</sup> Children at Risk: State Trends 1990-2000, California. Annie E. Casey Foundation.  
<http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/c2ss/>

<sup>6</sup> Recommendation no.4, Executive Summary, Capstone Report, 2002, CSR Research Consortium.

<sup>7</sup> The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. "California's Teaching Force: Key Issues and Trends 2002." p. 4. <http://www.cftl.org/keyissues2002/keyissues.html>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 5

<sup>9</sup> Table 1 is a summary of the more detailed tables found in the Appendix. In Table 1, the amounts attributed to teacher recruitment are compiled by the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. The amounts attributed to teacher preparation are compiled from figures provided by the California State University system, the University of California, and the California Commission on Teaching and Credentialing. The Center of the Future of Teaching and Learning provided the amounts for teacher induction.

<sup>10</sup> California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit. The 120,476 is the cumulative of the annual "# of First Year Teachers" as reported in the annual "Statewide Classroom Teacher Credential and Experience Report" for the years 1997-98 through 2001-02.

<sup>11</sup> San Diego Union Tribune "New Jobs for New Teachers?" April 6, 2003

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Telephone interview of Ms. Gaston by Brian Tanner, April 11, 2003

<sup>16</sup> The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. "California's Teaching Force: Key Issues and Trends 2002." p. 5. <http://www.cftl.org/keyissues2002/keyissues.html>

**APPENDIX**

**Table 2: California Investment in Teacher Recruitment<sup>17</sup>**

Program	Description	Budget Allocation (in millions)				
		98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03
California Center for Teaching Careers	Career center, outreach and advertising	\$2	\$2	\$11	\$11	\$2
Cal Grant T	Provides tuition and fee assistance to students in teacher preparation programs	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$6
Teacher Recruitment Incentive Program	Six regional teacher recruitment centers			\$9	\$9	\$9
Teaching as a Priority Block Grant Program	Block grants to districts for recruitment activities			\$119	\$0	\$89
Governor's Teaching Fellowship	Provides tuition and fee assistance to students in teacher preparation programs			\$4	\$21	\$0
Assumption Program of Loans for Education	Assumes student loans of teachers who agree to teach in shortage subjects or designated schools	\$2.1*	\$2.1*	\$5.0*	\$12	\$22
Annual Totals		\$14.1	\$14.1	\$158	\$63	\$128

*Note 1: \* Represents expenditures not budget allocations*

*Note 2: Blank lines in the tables indicate no allocation for the respective period.*

**Table 3: California Investment in Teacher Preparation<sup>18</sup>**

Programs	Budget Allocation (in millions)				
	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03
California State University	\$86.1	\$79.5	\$82.7	\$102.5	\$88.7
University of California	\$14.5	\$10.7	\$11.9	\$14.8	\$12.0
Total: Selected Annual Investments	\$100.1	\$90.2	\$94.6	\$117.3	\$100.7

**Table 4: California Investment in Teacher Induction (Partial list)<sup>19</sup>**

Programs	Budget Allocation (in millions)				
	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03
BTSA	\$66.0	\$72.0	\$87.4	\$84.6	\$88.1
<i>Estimated # of new teachers supported</i>	12,330	22,156	24,186	22,253	-
<i>Investment per teacher (in thousands)</i>	\$5,353	\$3,250	\$3,614	\$3,802	
Intern programs	\$6.5	\$11.0	\$21.5	\$31.8	\$25.6
<i>Number of interns served</i>	4,340	4,827	5,649	7,146	-
<i>Investment per intern (in thousands)</i>	\$1,498	\$2,279	\$3,806	\$4,450	-
Pre-intern programs	\$2.0	\$11.8	\$11.8	\$11.8	\$11.8
<i>Number of preinterns served</i>	955	5,800	7,694	9,871	-
<i>Investment per preintern (in thousands)</i>	\$2,094	\$2,034	\$1,534	\$1,195	-
<b>Total: Selected Annual Investments</b>	<b>\$74.5</b>	<b>\$94.8</b>	<b>\$120.7</b>	<b>\$128.2</b>	<b>\$125.5</b>

Source: Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning

**Table 5: California Investment in Professional Development (Partial list)<sup>20</sup>**

Programs	Budget Allocations		
	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
<i>State Programs</i>			
Subject Matter Projects	\$35	\$35	\$20
Professional Development Institutes	\$62	\$51	
<i>District Level Programs</i>			
Math and Reading Professional Development Programs			\$64
Peer Assistance and Review Programs	\$125	\$125	\$87
Instructional Time and Staff Development Reform program		\$259	\$230
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$222</b>	<b>\$470</b>	<b>\$401</b>

California invested over \$1 billion annually into professional development programs which are administered by all levels of government.<sup>21</sup> Table 5 provides only a partial listing, but it should provide a sense of the nature of professional development as applied to teachers in California. While the three categories included in Table 1 (in the body of the report) are directed toward new teachers, professional development programs are directed toward a wide range of teachers, including veteran as well as new teachers. The availability and quality of professional development programs may be an important attracting in recruiting teachers, as well as being an element in teacher retention. As stated in the report, it would be difficult to segregate the portion of professional development that might be reasonably assigned to recently recruited teachers.

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<sup>17</sup> The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. "California's Teaching Force: Key Issues and Trends 2002." <http://www.cftl.org/keyissues2002/keyissues.html>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. "The Status Of The Teaching Profession 2001," page 133, Table 6-2