

Class Size Matters
Mecklenburg Area Coming Together for Schools
(Mecklenburg ACTS)

As CMS faces the challenges of educating all of its students to high levels, Mecklenburg ACTS believes that the linked issues of class size and teacher quality must be at the forefront of the district's efforts.

Decades of research have made it abundantly clear that small classes (15-17 students) taught by well-qualified teachers can make a profound and lasting difference in student achievement, especially for economically disadvantaged students. While most class size research has focused on the benefits of small classes in early grades, there is also evidence that class size matters at higher levels as well.

It is also clear that guaranteed small classes are an especially effective tool for recruiting teachers to high-poverty schools, because they provide better teaching experiences and greater prospects for success. Small classes can thus play an important role in CMS's crucial efforts to provide the same quality of instruction at all of its schools.

Reducing class size at schools facing the challenges of poverty was a cornerstone of past CMS equity efforts. Although these efforts did not go as far as they needed to, they made a significant difference at many schools.

This progress, however, has been undercut by the new Weighted Student Staffing plan adopted by CMS last year. The plan reduced teacher numbers, and thus raised class sizes, at many schools with challenging levels of poverty (45 percent and above).

This course must be reversed. CMS must provide the schools that face the greatest educational challenges with the tools that will allow them to meet these challenges. The most important tools are not scripted instructional programs or computer assessments. Rather, they are quality teachers working in environments that allow them to provide all their students with the guidance and inspiration that they need.

This essential effort cannot be decentralized to area offices. Class size is one of the equity baselines that CMS needs to guarantee across the system. It is the best way to support students who are eager to learn, as well as the teachers who put their hearts into preparing those students to lead productive and successful lives.

Please join us as we raise these issues with CMS staff at three upcoming events: March 6 (Community Forum, First Ward School, 6-7:30 p.m.) March 12 (Community Forum, Eastway Middle School, 6:30-8 p.m.) and March 13 (School Board Meeting, Government Center, starting at 6 p.m.)

Further information on research into the significance of small classes can be found at: <http://www.heros-inc.org/star.htm#Overview>.