"Reducing class size is the single most important thing we can do to improve student outcomes..."
— Cherry Creek teacher Cathy Keller
TEACHER VOICES:
Teachers Know what their Schools and Students Need

Introduction

Too often when talking about education, the voices of teachers are left out. It’s time to listen when teachers tell us what their schools need to be successful.

We trust teachers to prepare our children to be successful in their academic, professional, and personal lives. Teachers have the best understanding of what their students and schools need.

Because Colorado underfunds public education by over half a billion dollars per year, the Colorado Education Association wanted to ask teachers a simple question: What are the greatest needs identified by teachers for schools in Colorado?

Their answers show they know exactly what their students and schools need: 74% of teachers in Colorado report that schools need to reduce class sizes and allow staff time to collaborate if we want to provide students with the education they deserve.

CEA collected data from over 700 licensed educators. The needs are clear.

- 74% of educators need smaller class sizes.
- 63% of educators need more time for planning and professional collaboration.

If we’re serious about every child’s future, we must create a learning environment with class sizes that enable teachers to connect one-on-one with each student.
BACKGROUND

The 74% of teachers who insist their schools need smaller class sizes have decades of research on their side. Evaluation of years of education studies, both experimental and longitudinal, are clear: decreasing class size is perhaps the most effective way to raise student achievement, standardized test scores, graduation rates, self-esteem, and engagement. Lower class sizes also improve classroom culture and decrease discipline issues. Decreasing class size has an even greater positive impact on low-income students and students of color. In fact, lowering class size is so beneficial that decreasing class size may be the most cost-effective way to improve student performance.

https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Mathis%20RBOPM-9%20Class%20Size.pdf

We know that a quality public education is crucial to a thriving community and economy. But for nearly ten years, Colorado has not fully funded public education. K-12 education was underfunded by $828 million in the 2017-18 school year. Instead, in the past decade tax incentives for corporations in Colorado mean that the state has lost out on over a billion dollars that could have gone to fund public education. This underfunding has contributed to 3,000 unfilled positions across the state, and districts are coping by packing more kids in teachers’ classes. This means more work for teachers with fewer resources.


Corporate-backed education research falsely claims that class size reductions have no effect on student outcomes. They also falsely assume that reducing class size by hiring more teachers is too expensive. Just ask any educator with 30+ students if class size matters. Teachers’ own experience and the vast majority of high-quality education research tells us the opposite: reducing class size should be a priority for Colorado because doing so will improve student outcomes and pay for itself by creating healthier, more economically-productive citizens in the long-run.

(https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/does-class-size-matter;
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2040354/)

1 http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/27/AR2011022702876.html;
https://redmondcity.blogspot.com/2011/03/bill-gates-provides-guideposts-for.html;
https://www.brookings.edu/research/class-size-what-research-says-and-what-it-means-for-state-policy/. The National Education Policy Center studies expose the flaws in studies that claim class size reduction is unimportant or too expensive.
THE DATA

Methodology

Colorado educators and community members have been reporting their needs on the My School My Voice survey for over a year. CEA sent the My School My Voice Checklist to CEA members in September 2018. Respondents filled out the 32-item My School My Voice checklist, which asks teachers to identify what their school is missing (http://pages.email.nea.org/your-school-checklist/). The survey is divided into categories: Community, Healthy Students in Modern Schools, Well-Rounded Curriculum, School Climate, and Quality Educators.

Results

Mesa County teacher Christy Anderson, who has been an educator for 19 years, put it best. “Anyone who says that class size doesn’t matter,” she explains, “does not understand teaching.” Her largest class had 32 kindergarteners.

742 Colorado educators filled out the survey, representing more than 80 districts and over 400 schools. There were nine items (over a quarter of the checklist) in which over fifty percent of respondents said their schools lack. Only five respondents reported their school had everything it needed. The average number of needs per teacher was 13.

74% of teachers reported that their schools need “class sizes that allow for one-on-one attention,” and 63% need “time to collaborate” to better meet the needs of their students.
Top Teacher-Identified School Needs

- Class sizes that allow for one-on-one attention (70%)
- Staff that has time to collaborate (60%)
- Active community involvement (55%)
- Relevant, timely professional development (55%)
- A community free from bullying and harassment (50%)
- All staff trained in positive behavioral supports and bullying prevention (50%)
- Use of early warning systems to keep students on track (50%)
- Professional counselors and other education support professionals (45%)
- A policy of restorative practices to create an environment of respect and collective responsibility (40%)

Number of Needs Per Teacher

The chart shows the distribution of the number of needs per teacher, with the x-axis representing the number of needs (ranging from 0 to 32) and the y-axis showing the number of respondents (ranging from 0 to 60). The data indicates a wide variation in the number of needs reported by teachers, with some teachers identifying as few as 0 needs and others identifying up to 32 needs. The majority of teachers fall within the range of 1 to 10 needs.
Cathy Keller, a Cherry Creek teacher who has had up to 36 students in a World History class, explained, “The bigger my class sizes, the harder it is to provide individual attention. The harder it is to have time to grade their written work. [Decreasing class size] is, in my opinion, the single most important thing we could address to improve educational outcomes, and it’s the thing constantly ignored.”

Denver teacher Suzette Montera-Smith has had to manage 36 kindergarteners in one class, most of whom were English language learners. She reflected, “it is more like crowd control rather than differentiated instruction when there are more than 18 five-year-olds in a classroom. With larger class sizes it is very difficult to meet my students’ needs.” She noted that her students’ test results were almost always higher when she had fewer students.

**CONCLUSIONS**

It should come as no surprise that teachers know what is best for students. We trust other professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, to know what they need to do their job effectively, and it is past time we give teachers the same respect.

This survey, combined with educational research, shows that decreasing class size matters for students. Reducing class sizes, along with giving staff more time to collaborate, should be the top priorities for school districts and policy makers at the local and state level.

Education funding is a fundamental issue and can close the gap for what teachers need. Increased funding going directly to the classroom can hire more teachers for student support and give staff more time to collaborate on the best learning outcomes. This survey starts by listening to teachers. We can show them the respect they deserve by doing something about it.

Let's get serious about doing what works. This means funding all schools so students have the one-on-one attention they need and staff have the time and resources to develop as educators.

**ABOUT CEA**

The Colorado Education Association is a union that represents 35,000 Colorado educators. The CEA promise to our students and communities is that the members of the Association will lead the way in guaranteeing every student access to the best public education. By working collectively with all education stakeholders, we will provide the best public education for every student and assure Colorado’s standing as an excellent state in which to learn, live, work, and raise a family.

For more information, contact the Colorado Education Association at comm@coloradoea.org.