

---

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SIZE LITERATURE REVIEW

---

*All of the research findings cited in this Brief refer to elementary schools. Some studies focus exclusively on elementary schools. Other studies present results on elementary schools in combination with secondary schools.*

*The findings cited in this Brief represent dozens of studies conducted in a range of settings. Kathleen Cotton reviewed 103 studies. Klonsky's review references at least 40 different studies.*

### FINDINGS

#### Recommended School Size

- On average, research indicates that an effective size for an elementary school is in the range of 300-400 students.<sup>1</sup>

#### Academic Achievement

- Student achievement in small schools is at least equal, and often superior, to student achievement in large schools.<sup>1 \*</sup>

#### Student Attitudes

- Student attitudes toward school in general and toward particular subjects are better in small schools compared to large ones.<sup>1</sup>

#### Student Behavior

- Small schools have lower incidences of negative social behavior than do large schools.<sup>1</sup>

#### Effects on Minority and Low-Income Students

- The effects of small schools on the **academic achievement** of ethnic minority students and students from low-income families are especially positive. In other words, large schools have a more negative impact on minority and low-income students than on students in general.<sup>1</sup>
- School size has a particularly strong influence on **student attitudes** about school among low-income and minority students.<sup>1</sup>
- The **social behavior** of ethnic minority and low-income students is even more positively impacted by small schools than that of other students.<sup>1</sup>

---

\* Achievement measures used in the research include school grades, test scores, honor roll membership, subject-area achievement, and assessment of higher-order thinking skills.

### **Teacher Attitudes**

- Compared to large schools, smaller schools cultivate better teacher and administrator attitudes toward their work and increase staff collaboration.<sup>1</sup>
- A survey of elementary school teachers in Chicago found that communications between teachers and administrators were better in small schools.<sup>2</sup> ♦

### **School Improvement**

- A study on the progress of the first five years of reform in Chicago elementary schools found school size the most significant characteristic of improving schools. According to the study, small schools (those with fewer than 350 students) are 1.25 times more likely to pursue a systematic approach to improvement compared with other schools.<sup>2</sup> ♥

### **School Climate, Leadership and Parental Involvement**

- A study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research found that in smaller elementary schools, "it is easier to maintain **personal interaction** and informal exchange between participants." Adversarial politics are less likely to be found.<sup>2</sup>
- A later Consortium study confirmed that "small elementary schools, where enrollment is less than 350 students, have consistently more positive reports on most measures of **school leadership, parental involvement, and professional community** and orientation."<sup>2</sup> ♠

## **REFERENCES**

<sup>1</sup> Cotton, Kathleen. School Size, School Climate and Student Performance, NWREL School Improvement Research Series, Close Up #2, May 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Klonsky, Michael (2006). Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story, Small Schools Workshop, <http://www.smallschoolsworkshop.org/klonsky.html>.

---

♦ Survey conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, published in 1992.

♥ Bryk, Easton, et al, (1993). Consortium on Chicago School Research .

♠ Bryk, Easton, et al, (1995). Consortium on Chicago School Research.