

May 2, 2017

Letter to the Editor
Winnipeg Free Press
1355 Mountain Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R2X 3B6

Dear Editor:

As Dan Lett quite rightly notes in his recent analysis [Province fails education financing math](#), “there is no absolute consensus” on the relationship between smaller class size and improved student achievement. There is, however, a wealth of research on the subject, and that research shouldn’t be ignored. One of the best sources of information is the U.S.-based [Center for Public Education](#), which has analyzed the findings from 19 studies on the subject.

This analysis revealed that smaller classes in the early grades (K-3) definitely can boost student academic achievement. However, it also revealed that a class size of no more than 18 students per teacher is required to produce the greatest benefits, and that the students who benefit most from smaller class size are minority or low-income students. This latter finding speaks to a point raised by Mr. Lett in relation to Manitoba’s standings in the OECD PISA rankings: Manitoba’s lower scores [in relation to those of other provinces] are quite predictable, given the high rate of child poverty in relation to other provinces.”

Manitoba’s class-size reduction initiative ran counter to the research in two important ways. First, it mandated a class size of 20 students, which is still higher than that found to affect positively student achievement. Second, it was a blanket policy, meaning that every classroom in the province was bound by the same set of rules. While this policy may have treated students equally, it didn’t necessarily treat them fairly or equitably, as it didn’t take into account students’ individual needs. Those needs must be assessed by the teachers and educational leaders in each school and school division. Educators can then work with school boards to ensure that the supports needed to help each student succeed—which may include smaller classes—are available.

This approach may not cost any less in the long-run than the recently-discarded provincial policy, but it will bear measurable results in terms of improved learning outcomes, and when it comes to education, isn’t that what we all want?

Sincerely,



Ken Cameron
President