

NEWS NOTES

by Bob L. Taylor and Robert C. McKean

Research on Class Size

A report released by Educational Research Service, Arlington, Virginia, is based on a study of the available research on class size. The report was planned to assist school administrators, school boards, and others who need to make decisions on class size. The report includes a summary of research on class size and pupil achievement, classroom environment, teacher opinion, and public opinion on the importance of class size. In addition, material on the budgetary impact and policy implications of the problems are included.

While the findings of the report leave many unanswered questions, the following conclusions are among those drawn from the data:

1. The relationship between class size and pupil achievement is very complex.
2. The effects of class size on pupil achievement across all grade levels is contradictory and inconclusive.
3. There is no optimum class size in isolation from other factors such as subject area, nature and number of students in the classroom, nature of the learning objectives, availability of materials and facilities, instructional methods, ability of the teacher, availability of support staff, and budgetary constraints.
4. Smaller classes will of themselves not result in greater academic achievement.
5. Smaller classes increase reading and mathematics achieve-

ment of pupils in the early primary grades.

6. Smaller classes help pupils with lower academic ability learn.

7. Smaller classes help economically or socially disadvantaged pupils learn.

8. Certain teaching procedures and practices such as individualized instruction, creativity, group activity, and interpersonal regard occur more frequently in smaller classes than in larger ones.

9. Most teachers see large classes as a major factor that negatively influences teacher morale and job satisfaction as well as the academic performance, social development, and personal development of pupils.

10. With regard to pupil benefits, research findings do not justify overall reductions in class size by a school board merely as a matter of general policy without definite pupil-benefit objectives for specific groups of students.

Class Size: A Summary of Research is available from Educational Research Service, 1800 North Kent Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209.

New Materials

Several new materials available to curriculum workers have come to our attention in recent weeks. They are:

• *Focus: The Concern for Writing*, published by the Educational Testing Service, discusses the decline in writing ability of both students and adults. The 16-page booklet relates the dimen-

sions of the problem and the efforts of various agencies to cope with it. In addition, there is a description of new techniques that teachers can use to evaluate writing ability and to diagnose writing weaknesses. *The Concern for Writing* is available free of charge from FOCUS T-100 Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey 08541.

• Publishers Test Service, a service announced by CTB/McGraw-Hill, is aimed at helping schools respond to the demand for accountability. Publishers Test Service may help schools in these ways: screen the most effective tests from various publishers, select tests that meet high standards for the PTS catalogue, and distribute the catalogue nationwide so tests are readily available to schools.

Tests will be rigorously screened for inclusion in the CTB/McGraw-Hill catalogue so their quality is assured. The tests may be ordered from the catalogues which will be mailed to educators all over the country. Backing up Publishers Test Service is a staff of experts who will provide customized, personal assistance in the selection of the right testing program to meet individual measurement needs. For additional information on CTB/McGraw-Hill Publishers Test Service, contact Lorin Letendre, 2500 Garden Road, Monterey, California 93940.

• *Federal Funds for Reading* is a NAVA report on how the federal government will spend nearly \$5 billion to support 26 programs for developing and supporting reading skills. The programs

range from preschool through college.

The report includes charts showing the status of state legislation for basic competency and those states that have enacted laws to provide state-supported compensatory education programs. It also contains an up-to-date list of all state coordinators of federal programs, including addresses and telephone numbers. *Federal Funds for Reading: A NAVA Special Report* is available from NAVA, 3150 Spring Street, Fairfax, Virginia 22030.

• *Checklist to Assess Teacher Education Institutions*—M. I. and Bobbie El Laissi have developed a checklist to identify the progressive and personalistic orientations of teacher education institutions. The work is based on a study done at the University of Texas, and the materials on the checklist are available from M. I. El Laissi, Department of Secondary Education, School of Education, Georgia Southern College, Statesboro, Georgia 30458.

• *New TV Series on Economic Education—Trade-Offs* is a new TV series on economic education for children 9 to 13 years old. The series is being released by approximately 250 broadcasting stations. It is designed to increase the students' knowledge of economics, build skills for using eco-

nomic concepts, and motivate them to take a greater interest in their economic world. The 15 episodes will help students learn to think their way through economic problems and to understand how their economic decisions involve both costs and benefits to themselves and society. Using dramatization and special visuals, each episode deals with a fundamental economic problem stated in terms of events that are part of a child's daily life. The program is being sponsored by The Agency for Instructional Television, Joint Council on Economic Education, and Canadian Foundation for Economic Education. For additional information, call Dirk van den Heuvel at 212-582-5150 or Sheila Walker at 212-421-1650.

High School Students' Opinions of a Competency-Based Diploma

Most (80 percent) senior high school students in Kalamazoo indicated that they understood the idea of competency-based diplomas. A majority (59 percent) believed that a competency-based diploma was a good thing. These were two of the key findings of a study made by the student governments of Loy Norrix High School and Kalamazoo Central High

School under the direction of David E. Bartz, then assistant superintendent for instructional services.

The opinionnaire instrument was completed by 2,119 senior students in the two high schools, 70 percent of the total enrollment. When the absence rate was figured in, the researchers concluded that only 12 percent chose not to respond.

Most students believed, according to the report, that a competency-based test should be developed by teachers and students and that the test should be introduced at the ninth-grade level. To graduate with a diploma, 41 percent of the students thought that the skill level should be twelfth grade. The majority of students believed that they would pass a competency test if it had been given on the day the questionnaire was completed. The study also found that students agreed that reading, math, grammar, and spelling skills should be included in the test. It was interesting to note that almost one third of the students indicated that the diploma was *not* important to gain a life-long job.

To obtain copies of the report, write David E. Bartz, Assistant Professor, Eastern Illinois University, c/o Kalamazoo Public Schools, 1220 Howard Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008.

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