

A simple truth: 22-1 classroom ratio works

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When a family hits a financial rough patch, they are forced to prioritize by separating the wants from the must-haves. State government is no different.

This session, the Texas Legislature will wrestle with how to close a record-breaking \$27 billion budget shortfall. In an effort to reduce spending, numerous critical [state services](#) will face the chopping block, including [education](#), criminal justice, and health and human services.

As the Legislature weighs unprecedented budget cuts, it too must prioritize: What areas of state funding should be reduced before others? What are the moral priorities for the state, and how can they best be pursued given the severe limitations?

We believe the education of our children is priority one for most Texans. After all, the achievement of our state depends on our ability to educate future generations.

Part of Texas' educational success is attributable to reforms passed in 1984, including a statewide requirement to reduce kindergarten through fourth-grade [class sizes](#) to no more than 22 [students](#) per teacher. Unfortunately, there is a concerted effort in [Austin](#) to weaken the 22-1 cap with a 22-student class size average. While that sounds like a minor change, it would actually gut the landmark kindergarten-[fourth grade](#) reform that has served as a foundation for Texas' educational improvement. It would also inevitably lead to teacher layoffs, crammed classrooms and, eventually, poorer student performance.

The simple truth is that the 22-1 ratio has been on the books for a quarter-century because it works. In fact, despite the rhetoric of those trying to jettison this cornerstone of Texas' [school reform](#), study after study has proven that smaller class sizes lead to better results. The reason is simple: Smaller classes give teachers more one-on-one time with students and allow them to create more customized instruction and assignments to meet individual students' needs. A 2009 study in the [American Journal of Education](#) concluded that smaller classes in early grades have significant positive effects through grade eight and help to close the achievement gap between low- and high-achieving students. The more kids in a class, the more difficult it becomes for teachers to know their students better and recognize problems and special needs early.

The impact of replacing the 22-1 limit with a 22-class-size average would be immediate and touch every family with a child in elementary school. Undoubtedly, many kindergarten through fourth-grade classes would grow significantly, as some classes, particularly those with special needs students, are notably smaller than 22. In other words, one class could have 10 school kids,

while another could be jammed to the gills with 34 students, yet the school would meet the requirements of the "reform." Is that what we really want for our children?

Eliminating 22-1 would likely force almost 12,000 teachers to lose their jobs. With Texas' unemployment rate already higher than 8 percent, the loss of such a dramatic number of jobs would be felt in communities throughout the state. And we shouldn't kid ourselves that only the so-called "bad teachers" would be the ones given pink slips. Changing 22-1 is about budget savings first and foremost, so the incentive will be to lay off the more experienced, higher paid educators.

The truth is school districts truly struggling with the 22-1 limit can already request a waiver from the Texas Education Agency. Some 3,000 waivers have been granted, while only five requests have been rejected since the law was implemented in 1984.

Times are tough and the budget crisis is real, but throwing out what we know works for our children for short-term savings is penny-wise and pound-foolish. Smaller class sizes are an important, proven part of a quality education, and the state should work to strengthen them, not gut them.

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