

The Facilitating Outstanding Classrooms Using Size Reduction (FOCUS) Act of 2011

Sponsored by Senator Patty Murray

The Importance of Reducing Class Size

- Decades of educational studies show a strong connection between students who participate in smaller classes in early grades and increased academic performance.
- In 2011 a study examining students who participated in smaller classes in early grades found that they continued to exhibit increased performance even as they participated in larger classes in subsequent years.
- Research further shows that at the end of fifth grade, students who were in small classes in first through third grades were about half a school year ahead of students from larger classes in all core subjects--reading, language arts, math, and science.
- The US Department of Education, Economic Policy Institute, RAND, Educational Testing Service, American Institutes of Research, and many other respected organizations have all supported these conclusions.
- In smaller classes, teachers spend more time on instruction and less time on discipline, reporting that smaller classes lead to better identification of students who need special help, increased student participation and engagement, improved student behavior, and reduced retention of students in the same grade.
- Outcomes associated with small classes are the foundation of safe schools: improved student behavior and human relations skills, increased participation in schooling, increased sense of community in small classes, and generally improved school climate where students, teachers, and parents can thrive.

The FOCUS Act of 2011

Purpose: The FOCUS Act of 2011 would assist states in lowering class sizes across the early grade levels in order to provide students and teachers with an educational environment that encourages maximum student academic growth.

The bill would:

- Create a grant program to reduce class sizes to 18 students in kindergarten through third grade and beyond.
- States would receive funding to allocate to local educational agencies to hire new teachers and to create a continuum of small classes for students from kindergarten through third grade.
- Create a separate authorization for class size reduction efforts to prevent them from competing with teacher professional development and training funds in Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act.
- Provide districts with the ability to recruit highly qualified teachers to these new classrooms and provide the professional development needed to promote educator retention and implement high-quality instructional practices.
- Increase accurate data, research, and resources available nationally on class size.
- Create an evaluation of the class size reduction program to assess and report on the program's effectiveness.