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Florida's Class-Size Reduction Mandate Did Not Improve Student Achievement, According to Harvard University Study

CAMBRIDGE, MA – A new study finds that Florida's 2002 constitutional amendment mandating a reduction in the size of classes in school districts throughout the state had no discernible impact upon student achievement, either positive or negative.

Florida's constitutional amendment, which forced districts to use state funds for class reduction unless they had already reduced class sizes to an acceptable level, had no impact on average student performance. Students in schools where districts were not forced to spend their money on class size reduction improved as much on state tests as those attending schools in districts subject to the constitutional mandate. The study also found no significantly different impact on the average performance of ethnic and racial groups or between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students.

The study, conducted by **Matthew M. Chingos, a research fellow at Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG)**, analyzed student-level data provided by the Florida Department of Education to follow all students in grades four through eight who took the state reading and math tests between 2001 and 2007. During this time, average class size was reduced by about three students. Chingos found that students attending schools that were required to reduce class size did no better on state math and reading tests than students attending schools that were given funding to spend as they saw fit. The study also showed no discernible impact on student absenteeism and behavior problems.

"We do not know from this study whether giving districts more unrestricted state funds has positive effects or not," Chingos said, "but the study strongly suggests that monies restricted for the purpose of funding class-size reduction mandates are not a productive use of limited educational resources."

The class size amendment is estimated to have cost about \$20 billion over the first eight years of the program and \$4 billion per year subsequently. Florida's voters will be asked this coming November whether or not they wish to revise the constitution's class size requirement to apply to average class size in each school rather than the size of every individual classroom.

"This study is extraordinarily important given the great strain that Florida's class-size reduction policy is putting on the Florida state budget," commented Paul E. Peterson, director PEPG. "I hope this study serves as a wake-up call to state legislatures across the nation as they make tough budgetary decisions," he added. In recent years, twenty-four states have mandated class-size reduction policies.

Access the study on the website: http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/PEPG10-03_Chingos.pdf