

Overcrowded Classroom

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Children are the future of our society. Yet, they are plagued with many obstacles that aid in them failing and stands in the way of their greatness. Education is vital to one's life and learning is even more paramount. A child can be privileged to education but robbed of the opportunity to learn. In many of our classrooms, teaching is taking place, but the recipients are merely half full. This makes our children educationally malnourished and unfit to move on to the next grade. Millions of students are left behind academically because of overcrowded classrooms. I am advocating for smaller classroom sizes so that students can learn more and have one to one with their educator.

African, Hispanic, and Latino American children are mostly affected by overcrowded classrooms; they are also considered as minorities or children of color. These students are from low-income families, they attend public schools, they live in overpopulated demography, and are often living in shelters or even homeless. The families are not able to afford better quality education, so they are forced to send their children to these schools. “Nearly half of children ages 5 to 17 in the school district live with families living in poverty, according to census data. A majority of students are black or Latino, while just 2 percent identify as white. This is living prove that white children are rarely affect by overcrowded classroom when compared to children of color. “Atlantic City is also home to one of the worst graduation rates in New Jersey, with only about two-thirds of high-schoolers getting their diplomas” (Jenkins, 2015). The schools that

the minority children attend is overcrowded and short staff. “Philadelphia, for example, has eliminated thousands of staff positions in the past two or so years, and officials have warned that some campuses will have to pack as many as 40 students into a classroom” (Jerkins, 2015). It is impossible for students to learn in a classroom this large. I can only imagine how chaotic this is and how it affects children and their families.

Children and their families are affected in many ways by overcrowded classrooms. Classes can be so overcrowded that students do not have a seat. “...García, another one of the parents who filed the lawsuit, has her three children, ages 12, 13 and 17, in Upper Manhattan schools. She said that overcrowding there is so severe that her oldest daughter, in seventh grade, did not even have a chair to sit in for class” (Martinez, 2019). This is horrible and should not be accepted. A student should be comfortable enough to learn. Not having a chair is nowhere near comfort. Families are left with no choice but to spend extra money because their children are not learning enough. Children fall way behind in reading and Mathematics. “There was no progress in reading or math..., and I had to come up with money for tutoring,” said the Colombian-born mother (Martinez, 2019). Children are also labeled, they have less support, they are falling behind drastically, and it is hard to tailor the curriculum to their personal needs. “When there are too many students in a classroom, it is hard to personalize the education. They receive fewer services, less support, and every month they fall further behind, and that is unfair. They are being categorized as less capable or less intelligent, but the truth is that they have not received the support they deserve to stand out,” said García, who is Cuban” (Martinez, 2019). Children of color are further marginalized instead of getting the help they need to be their best selves.

One of the main causes of overcrowded classrooms is a lack of educators. Schools have attested that classes are overcrowded because educators are limited. “Many students across the

city are attending schools with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate staff and scarce resources, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers said this week. Conditions haven't changed much since public schools opened in September and staffing issue remains a serious, ongoing issue with about half of the academic year remaining, Jerry Jordan, president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers said. There are 160 vacant teacher positions and a staffing agency has fallen far short of target goals for filling temporary vacancies with substitute teachers" (Shamlin III, 2016). Schools highlighted all the vacancies they had for teachers and how they had to cancel their contract because of this shortage. "Northeast High School is running without two special education teachers, a Spanish teacher and a physical education teacher. Harding Middle School is coping with overcrowding in sixth- and seventh-grade classes, and has vacancies for a sixth grade teacher, an English teacher, a math teacher, and a physical education teacher. Wagner Middle School has vacancies for a life skills support teacher, a literacy teacher, two seventh-grade math teachers, two science teachers and a social studies teacher. Jordan said the staffing shortages have put a strain on the school employees and called on school district's leadership to cancel its contract with Source4Teachers, an out-of-state agency with a multimillion-dollar contract to supply substitute teachers" (Shamlin III, 2016). The needs are great, but our teachers are dwindling. Hence, depriving the minorities of quality education.

The work of an educator is of much importance. However, they have been a major decrease in teachers. One of the main reasons is the low salary rate. "Shortages have largely been blamed on low pay rates for US teachers. The issue has caused some to leave for better paying professions, while fewer people are choosing to become teachers" (Lynn, 2018). I believe a teacher plays a very significant role in the future of our country. However, the role they play is often looked down on or taken for granted. Since teachers are taken for granted and underpaid many stay clear of

this profession. “The non-profit Learning Policy Institute reported a 35% drop in the US of people studying to be teachers between 2009 and 2014” (Lynn, 2018). Many teachers work in schools that are also financially challenged. This makes it hard for teachers to feel safe and be of benefit to their pupils. “Worsening conditions caused by financial issues in some school systems – especially in large cities – have also made it difficult for some teachers to feel safe and effective in their jobs” (Lynn, 2018). Another reason for teacher shortage is the fact that each state has a different licensure system. “Teacher labor markets are pretty localized and each state has different licensure systems,” Goldhaber says. “So it's not like you can easily hire someone to teach in California who is a teacher in Massachusetts. We don't have that kind of a national teacher labor market” (Lynn, 2018). Different licensure systems can also cause teachers to leave the teaching profession. “Goldhaber says many teachers in this situation may decide to leave the profession because they would have to pay for additional classes and pass new certifications” (Lynn, 2018). Indeed, we never stop learning. However, I view this as oppression. Teachers are already underpaid and to get a job in another state they will have to for additional classes? I think we need to think long and hard about our children and families that are affected by overcrowded classrooms. Working under these conditions forces teachers to leave this field and prove rather detrimental to our children of color, still, they are ones affected by overcrowded classrooms.

Many people are advocating for reduced class sizes. They have realized how important it is to have smaller classroom sizes. Some have had personal experiences with overcrowded classrooms and had to battle its negative effects. Unfortunately, those in high authority do see that there is a need but fail to make it a reality. Mark Treyger, Chair of Education Committee and also a former teacher was present at a Council Hearing along with others advocating for a change in classroom sizes. “When Chair Treyger asked her what number she would give to the

importance of class size from one to ten, she refused to say. She also said she didn't know if the DOE had ever tried to analyze the results to see if smaller classes were correlated with student success, and she did not know if Edustat or any of the other data systems that the DOE currently uses or plans to use in the future even capture class size as a critical factor" (Council hearing, 2020). This is not their number one priority since nothing concrete was said that proves that they are working to rectify the issue.

Kathleen Cashin a member of the NY State Board of Regents Brooklyn, and former NYC Superintendent is also advocating for the cause. Cashin knows how impactful smaller classroom sizes can be. "In 1999, when I was Superintendent of District 23 in Ocean Hill Brownsville, the fourth graders had to take a multi-faceted state test for the first time, including reading, writing and listening. The first thing I did was to reduce class size in that grade to 16 to 20 students per class. The results were astounding. The children in one of the poorest districts in the nation had the greatest growth of any district in the city. The key initiative that caused this substantial growth, I believe, was lowering their class size. Teachers were able to manage their classes better, which caused them to gain confidence, and encouraged them to collaborate with each other. This in turn, strengthened their professionalism and skills." She added, "When you reduce class size, everything changes. ***The world changes***" (Council hearing, 2020). I have firsthand experience with children in district 23. Children in this district are living in poverty and are very marginalized. I believe Cashin did what was needed when she had to power to make the changes. She gave a voice to the voiceless and that is what is needed.

State Senator, Robert Jackson did his part in helping to reduce classroom sizes. "Class size is one of the reasons I helped start the Campaign for Fiscal Equity back in 1993, seeing how

overcrowded the schools in District 6 were during my time as president of the board," said State Senator Robert Jackson. "I understand some of DOE's resistance to hiring more teachers comes from fiscal concerns. That's why I'm committed to fully funding the Foundation Aid formula at the state level. I've introduced a bill that adds a new bracket to increase income tax on New York's highest earners, generating an estimated \$4.5 billion in revenue. But the DOE has to commit to use that in adherence to the Contracts for Excellence," Senator Jackson added, which requires NYC to implement class size reduction" (Council hearing, 2020). Jackson made it his point of duty to allocate funds to aid in reducing classroom sizes.

Students are also advocating for a change in classroom sizes. They have also testified to the benefits of having smaller classroom sizes. "Tiffani Torres, a senior at Pace HS and a member of Teens Take Charge, said: "Having been in both small and large classes, I know firsthand the difference between both. In smaller classes, I can ask questions without fear of distracting 30 other students, and can receive more one-on-one help from my teachers." She talked about how many students had dropped out of her calculus class because it was too large, and how many of those who remained were confused because of the lack of focused feedback and support from her teacher. Both she and Lorraie Forbes, another student, said that they would give *class size a ten* for its importance for student learning and engagement" (Council hearing, 2020). Torres and Forbes having experienced both can advocate for others who are feeling the effects of an overcrowded classroom.

Jacqueline Shannon, an Associate Professor and the Department Chair of Early Childhood and Art Education at Brooklyn College as an advocate warned of how detrimental an overcrowded classroom can be. "In 2014, I helped write a letter to then-Chancellor Farina,

warning her that increases in class size that had occurred since 2007 in NYC public schools, particularly in the early grades, threatened to undermine the gains one might otherwise expect from the expansion of preK. Our letter was signed by over 70 professors of education, psychology, and sociology. Since then, the city has made very little progress in lowering class sizes. The number of children in Kindergarten in classes of 25 or more has risen by 68% since 2007, and the number of 1st through 3rd graders of thirty or more has increased by nearly 3000%. *While the Mayor should be thanked for expanding preK and now 3K, early childhood education does not end at age 5.* The city should now focus on lowering class sizes in our public schools” (Council hearing, 2020). PreK and 3K education are very important. The learning experience that a student receives in these classes can set the tone of how students function moving on to higher grades. These classes should be very inclusive and interactive for all students so that learning can take place.

Leonie Haimson is the founder and Executive Director of Class Size Matter, a non-profit organization. This Organization is based in New York City and advocates for smaller classroom sizes. “...the same reformers that say they care about improving opportunities for poor kids have been absolutely opposed to reducing class size. From Bill gates to Michelle Rhee, they come out on record saying they think it's a waste of money even though in many cases they sent their own kids to private schools where class sizes are very small" (Herbert, 2014). There have been many oppositions to reducing class size. Yet still, the same people opposing have children that are benefiting from small class size. Is it not reduced class sizes good for everyone? They should be equality for everyone. Each child has the right to quality education and the right to learn. “...I think in order to give a fair shot to our kids we have to make sure that there are truly equitable

conditions in our schools ,and that if anything poor kids need smaller classes and more attention from their teachers than middle class and wealthy children” (Herbert, 2014).

Overcrowded class size is an issue that must be addressed now. Low incomes families are the ones most affected by this issue. Children of color are at the front line of it all. They are plagued with a myriad of issues, struggling in an overcrowded classroom should not have to be one of those issues. These children and their families are oppressed and marginalized and the only way to elevate them from this lifestyle is to educate them so that they can be marketable and of use to the society instead of being a burden. “Overcrowded classrooms have an extremely negative impact on teachers and students alike. Overcrowded classes directly affect students' test scores, attendance rates, academic performance, and desire to learn. Overcrowded classes also increase a teacher's stress levels and workload, because they worry about meeting the needs of more students. They make it harder for students and teachers to connect and lowers morale. It also strains teachers' already limited resources" (Binford-Ross, 2018). Our children are failing, they have lost the joy that comes with learning and our teachers are been burn out and are forced to make something out of nothing. Each minute that we squander instead of resolving the issue we are losing an educator and a student living in poverty is further pauperized and robbed of the opportunity of rising against the odds.

I believe the interventions needed for this issue is building more schools, reducing size classes, giving public schools more funding, giving a voice to our teachers since they are experienced, and paying them more. Since public schools are overpopulated there needs to be more construction for schools. Constructing more schools will provide more space and allow for smaller class sizes. This will aid in children receiving more one to one time with their teachers

and allow teachers to make an inclusive curriculum that addresses the needs of all students. Public schools need more funding as they are serving families that are living in poverty. These children often having learning disabilities because of overcrowded classrooms. Private schools are receiving way more subsidies than they do not need. Children attending these schools are linked to having affluent families. While children in our public schools are failing and are falling behind because they are not provided with the quality education they deserve. Public school teachers are being blamed for the failure of students when they are overworked with fewer resources and less pay. Increasing pay for teachers is increased this will attract new teachers to the field and retain those who are already in the field. Teachers are forced to focus on other issues instead of executing their lesson plans and educating. A teacher must try extra hard to keep the student's attention since there are more distractions and noise in an overcrowded classroom. More children will start acting up out of frustration and lack of attention and the teacher will have to rectify those issues causing them to stray further from the topic at hand.

I believe that the people of the United States are aware of how overcrowded classrooms are but not many thinks of the negative repercussion since they are not affected. I think children can be more effective than adults when it comes on to conveying a message. One way is to have a program aired on national television that is geared toward interviewing the children who are affected by overcrowded classrooms. Advocates have been advocating for change for years now and yet still we are faced with the same issue today. I believe the Department of Education is more in favor of the private school since the needs of the public school are continuously neglected. Advocates like Leonie Haimson and Mark Treyger have been appealing to the Department of Education and effects have proven unsuccessful. They should be aiming to create quality education for all instead they are creating biases. I strongly believe that all the advocates,

principals, teachers, and parents affiliated with public schools should take a more extreme stand. A letter should be written with the signatures of all the principals, teachers, students, and parents and sent to the government for them to see the severity of the issue. I know the government can help since the Department of Education refuses to help. A law should be passed that only allow ten students per school providing that they raise teacher's pay to encourage more people in the field and construct new buildings for the school.

I am passionate about this topic because I have the first-hand experience of being a part of an overcrowded classroom. I was once a part of a class that had fifty students to one teacher. I never had a one-to-one with my teacher. The only time that happens was when the teacher was taking attendance and she would call my name or if I were asked a question that I often did not know the answer to. I can remember being afraid to ask a question because of the fear of ridicule from other students and the fact that I know that my teacher does not have time to be focusing on me solely. I was left behind many times and the side effects followed me in my education. I can also remember how overwhelmed my teachers were due to the large workload. This issue harms my pedagogy. The sources that I chose to use helps to bring across the points I am making and let others to realize that overcrowded classroom is a real issue. I want to be able to tailor the curriculum for the needs of my students and be able to have a one-to-one with my students. This is highly impossible if you have an overcrowded classroom. I want to be able to provide students with the quality education they deserved instead of having to choose whom to save and whom to neglect. Until classroom sizes are reduced educators will not be able to perform effectively and students of color will continue to fail and recreate the cycle of poverty and marginalization.

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Part Two

The link below is my video informing the class about my Advocacy Project entitled, 'Advocating for Smaller Classroom Size.' Please copy and paste the link.

<https://youtu.be/bS3NGXAcxDg>