

CTE Board of Directors Advocates Lower Class Size Limits for Teaching English

Board of Directors of the National Council of Teachers of English has voted a policy urging the adoption of lower class size limits for the teaching of secondary school English. Through this action, NCTE now advocates class sizes of "not more than 20 and a workload of not more than 80 for English language arts teachers." This is a downward revision of the Council's 1962 policy, which called for each English language arts teacher to have direct instructional responsibility for no more than 100 students in no more than four classes per day.

Members of NCTE's Secondary Section Steering Committee, who proposed the new policy, said it is impossible to fulfill today's higher expectations for teaching and learning the language when their teachers' heavy workloads exceed 80 students.

"A typical secondary teacher has 150 students each day," responded Dr. Myra Myers, executive director of NCTE. "If each student were given 10 minutes of individual attention each week - conferencing with a student on an essay, discussing readings with the student, reviewing test results - then the typical secondary teacher's work week would increase 25 hours. In other words, if students are to get the attention they need, then the student load assigned to teachers must be reduced."

Board of Directors action commits NCTE to encourage school districts and states to find ways to reduce class sizes to levels that enable teachers to use [such] methods to develop higher-level language and thinking abilities.

The new NCTE policy was prepared by a subcommittee headed by its newly elected chair, Jackie E. Swensson of Meritt Hutton Junior High School, Thornton, Colorado. It reads as follows:

Whereas in its 1962 Resolution on Class Size and Teacher Workload in Secondary Schools, the National Council of Teachers of English pronounced its conviction that the teacher of English should have direct instructional responsibility for no more than 100 students in no more than four classes per day;

Whereas a rapidly expanding body of research and theory makes it clear that the past recommendations from NCTE are inadequate to fulfill current expectations and recommendations for effective language arts instruction and to develop the increasing levels of literacy society demands; and

Whereas the landmark English Coalition Conference held in 1987 recommended "the normal teaching load of teachers of English as four classes of twenty students";

Therefore be it moved that NCTE develop a program to encourage schools, districts, and states to adopt plans and to implement activities resulting in class sizes of not more than 20 and a workload of not more than 80 for English language arts teachers by the year 2000.

Further be it moved that NCTE official policy recommend class sizes of not more than 20 and workload of not more than 80 for English language arts teachers.

Further be it moved that NCTE undertake activities to introduce legislation that requires school districts (or local education agencies) applying for categorical funds to have a plan to reduce class size and teacher load for English language arts classes to reflect the official NCTE policy.

Serving with Swensson on the Secondary Section Class Size Subcommittee were Karolyn Burkett, Newark High School, Ohio; Carol Compton, Hudson High School, Massachusetts; Richard W. Luckert, Olathe School District, Kansas; and outgoing Secondary Section Chair Faith Z. Schullstrom, Guilderland Central School District, New York.

For a free single copy of "Lost in the Crowd," a brochure that discusses the 1990 class size policy (available around March 1, 1991), send a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your request to Membership Service Representative, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.