

106TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1674

To promote small schools and smaller learning communities.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 30, 1999

Mr. BINGAMAN introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To promote small schools and smaller learning communities.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Small, Safe Schools
5 Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) Research related to school size indicates
9 that elementary and middle schools with 300–400
10 students, and secondary schools with 400–800 stu-
11 dents, are more effective than schools with larger
12 student populations.

1 (2) Smaller school size promotes learning and
2 improves students' grades and test scores, especially
3 for ethnic minority and low income students. Smaller
4 school size has been found to be the second most im-
5 portant factor, after high socioeconomic status, in
6 creating positive educational outcomes.

7 (3) Students who attend smaller schools have
8 more positive personal and academic self-concepts.
9 Students and staff at smaller schools have a strong-
10 er sense of personal efficacy, and the students take
11 more of the responsibility for their own learning,
12 which includes more individualized and experimental
13 learning relevant to the world outside of school.

14 (4) Studies on school dropout rates show a de-
15 crease in the rates as schools get smaller.

16 (5) Creating smaller schools and smaller learn-
17 ing communities within larger schools promotes
18 school safety. Behavioral problems, including tru-
19 ancy, classroom disruption, vandalism, aggressive be-
20 havior, theft, substance abuse, and gang participa-
21 tion are greater in larger schools. Teachers in small-
22 er schools learn of disagreements between students
23 and can resolve problems before problems become se-
24 vere.

1 (6) School size plays a very important role in
2 shaping the kinds of social relationships that form
3 within schools. Smaller schools and learning commu-
4 nities reduce the isolation that causes violence.
5 Smaller schools allow students to form closer rela-
6 tionships with their teachers and create a sense of
7 ownership and belonging to their school. Young peo-
8 ple who feel more connected to their school are less
9 likely to be involved in violence. Smaller schools and
10 learning communities are especially effective in re-
11 ducing the types of violence parents fear most, par-
12 ticularly gang activity and serious violent incidents.

13 (7) Students in smaller schools are less likely to
14 have problems with drugs or alcohol.

15 (8) Based on studies of secondary school vio-
16 lence, researchers have concluded that the first step
17 in ending school violence must be to break through
18 the impersonal atmosphere of larger secondary
19 schools by creating smaller communities of learning
20 within larger structures, where students and teach-
21 ers can come to know each other well.

22 (9) Research demonstrates that students at-
23 tending smaller schools are more likely to participate
24 in extracurricular activities. The students are also
25 involved in a greater variety of activities, while stu-

dents in larger schools tend to be polarized into a group that participates and a group that does not participate in any extracurricular activities. Because everyone in smaller schools is needed to populate teams, offices, and clubs, even shy and less able students are encouraged to participate and given a sense of belonging.

(10) Larger schools contribute to negative teacher attitudes and low staff morale.

(11) Smaller schools can be established cost effectively. Larger schools can be more expensive because the sheer size of the larger schools requires more administrative support. More importantly, additional bureaucracy translates into less flexibility and innovation.

SEC. 3. SMALL SCHOOLS AND SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES.

Title X of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 8001 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“Part L—Small Schools and Smaller Learning Communities

“SEC. 10995. DEFINITIONS.

“In this part:

1 “(1) ELIGIBLE APPLICANT.—The term ‘eligible
2 applicant’ means a local educational agency, an ele-
3 mentary school, a secondary school, or a Bureau
4 funded school (as defined in section 1146(3) of this
5 Act (25 U.S.C. 2026(3))) that is working independ-
6 ently or in partnership with other public agencies or
7 private non-profit organizations.

8 “(2) SMALL SCHOOL.—The term ‘small school’
9 means a school—

10 “(A) that has few enough students and
11 teachers so that all teachers are able to know
12 all students, and has a maximum student popu-
13 lation of—

14 “(i) 350 students in the case of an el-
15 ementary school; and

16 “(ii) 400 to 800 students in the case
17 of a secondary school;

18 “(B) in which teachers coordinate and co-
19 operate in developing and implementing cur-
20 ricula;

21 “(C) in which a sense of shared leadership
22 and ownership among teachers, administrators,
23 and staff exists; and

24 “(D) in which parents are considered a
25 valued part of the educational team.

1 “(3) SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITY.—The
 2 term ‘smaller learning community’ means a cohesive
 3 unit that—

4 “(A) exists within a larger school; and

5 “(B) meets the requirements of subpara-
 6 graphs (B) through (D) of paragraph (2).

7 **“SEC. 10996. SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES.**

8 “(a) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary is au-
 9 thorized to award grants to eligible applicants to enable
 10 eligible applicants to carry out the authorized activities de-
 11 scribed in subsection (c).

12 “(b) APPLICATIONS.—Each eligible applicant desir-
 13 ing a grant under this section shall submit an application
 14 to the Secretary at such time, in such manner, and accom-
 15 panied by such information as the Secretary may require.
 16 Each such application shall describe—

17 “(1) strategies and methods the eligible appli-
 18 cant will use to create the smaller learning commu-
 19 nity;

20 “(2) curriculum and instructional practices, in-
 21 cluding any particular themes or emphases, to be
 22 used in the learning environment;

23 “(3) the extent of involvement of teachers and
 24 other school personnel in investigating, designing,

1 implementing, and sustaining the smaller learning
2 community;

3 “(4) the process to be used for involving stu-
4 dents, parents, and other stakeholders in the devel-
5 opment and implementation of the smaller learning
6 community;

7 “(5) any cooperation or collaboration among
8 community agencies, organizations, businesses, and
9 others to develop or implement a plan to create the
10 smaller learning community;

11 “(6) the training and professional development
12 activities that will be offered to teachers and others
13 involved in the activities assisted under this section;

14 “(7) the goals and objectives of the activities
15 assisted under this section, including a description of
16 how such activities will better enable all students to
17 reach challenging State content standards and State
18 student performance standards;

19 “(8) the methods by which the eligible applicant
20 will assess progress in meeting such goals and objec-
21 tives;

22 “(9) if the smaller learning community exists as
23 a school-within-a-school, the relationship, including
24 governance and administration, of the smaller learn-
25 ing community to the rest of the school;

1 “(10) a description of the administrative and
2 managerial relationship between the eligible appli-
3 cant and the smaller learning community, including
4 how such eligible applicant will demonstrate a com-
5 mitment to the continuity of the smaller learning
6 community, including the continuity of student and
7 teacher assignment to a particular learning commu-
8 nity;

9 “(11) how the eligible applicant will coordinate
10 or use funds provided under this section with other
11 funds provided under this Act or other Federal laws;

12 “(12) grade levels or ages of students who will
13 participate in the smaller learning community; and

14 “(13) the method of placing students in the
15 smaller learning community, such that students are
16 not placed according to ability, performance, or any
17 other measure, so that students are placed at ran-
18 dom or by their own choice, not pursuant to testing
19 or other judgments.

20 “(c) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.—Funds under this
21 section may be used—

22 “(1) to study the feasibility of creating the
23 smaller learning community as well as effective and
24 innovative organizational and instructional strategies
25 that will be used in the smaller learning community;

1 “(2) to research, develop, and implement strate-
 2 gies for creating the smaller learning community, as
 3 well as effective and innovative changes in cur-
 4 riculum and instruction, geared to high State con-
 5 tent standards and State student performance
 6 standards;

7 “(3) to provide professional development for
 8 school staff in innovative teaching methods that
 9 challenge and engage students and will be used in
 10 the smaller learning community; and

11 “(4) to develop and implement strategies to in-
 12 clude parents, business representatives, local institu-
 13 tions of higher education, community-based organi-
 14 zations, and other community members in the small-
 15 er learning communities as facilitators of activities
 16 that enable teachers—

17 “(A) to participate in professional develop-
 18 ment activities; and

19 “(B) to provide links between students and
 20 their community.

21 “(d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
 22 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
 23 \$10,000,000 for fiscal year 2000 and such sums as may
 24 be necessary for each of the 3 succeeding fiscal years.

1 **“SEC. 10997. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.**

2 “(a) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary is au-
3 thorized to provide technical assistance to eligible appli-
4 cants seeking to create smaller learning communities in
5 the elementary schools or secondary schools served by the
6 eligible applicants.

7 “(b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
8 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
9 \$1,500,000 for fiscal year 2001 and such sums as may
10 be necessary for each of the 3 succeeding fiscal years.

11 **“SEC. 10998. SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION.**

12 “(a) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—The Secretary is au-
13 thorized to award grants to eligible applicants to enable
14 the eligible applicants to carry out construction described
15 in paragraph (c), or renovation described in paragraph
16 (d), of elementary schools or secondary schools.

17 “(b) APPLICATIONS.—

18 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Each eligible applicant de-
19 siring a grant under this section shall submit an ap-
20 plication to the Secretary at such time, in such man-
21 ner, and accompanied by such information as the
22 Secretary may require.

23 “(2) INCREASING THE NUMBER OF SMALL
24 SCHOOLS AND SMALLER LEARNING ENVIRON-
25 MENTS.—Each such application shall describe how
26 the construction or renovation assisted under this

1 section will enable more students to be educated in
2 a small school or smaller learning environment than
3 would otherwise be possible without funds made
4 available under this section.

5 “(3) PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall give pri-
6 ority to an application submitted under this sub-
7 section that demonstrates—

8 “(A) that the eligible applicant is located
9 in an area densely populated with school-aged
10 children; or

11 “(B) that more students will be educated
12 in the small school or smaller learning environ-
13 ment than would otherwise be possible without
14 funds made available under this section.

15 “(c) CONSTRUCTION.—The Secretary shall only
16 award grants under subsection (a) for construction of ele-
17 mentary schools or secondary schools that have the fol-
18 lowing maximum student capacities:

19 “(1) 350 students in the case of an elementary
20 school.

21 “(2) 400 students in the case of a middle
22 school.

23 “(3) 800 students in the case of a secondary
24 school.

1 “(d) RENOVATION.—The Secretary shall only award
2 a grant under subsection (a) for renovation of an elemen-
3 tary school or a secondary school, that has the maximum
4 student capacity described in subsection (b), related to the
5 creation of small schools, or smaller learning environ-
6 ments, within a larger school.

7 “(e) REPORT.—Each recipient of funds under this
8 section shall provide the Secretary with an annual report
9 that contains a capital budget for the construction or ren-
10 ovation to be assisted under this section. Such report shall
11 include a description of—

12 “(1) the proposed uses for grant funds author-
13 ized under this section; and

14 “(2) the actual uses of grant funds received
15 under this section in a preceding year.

16 “(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
17 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
18 \$50,000,000 for fiscal year 2000 and such sums as may
19 be necessary for each of the 3 succeeding fiscal years.”.

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