

Update

Making Students Visible: Comparing Different Student Subgroup Sizes for Accountability

CORE-PACE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

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Summary and policy implications

In May 2016, we released a policy memo comparing the effect of reporting subgroups at an n-size of 20+ compared to 100+. In response to this original memo, the U.S. Department of Education released a rule notice proposing changes to ESSA regulation §200.17 allowing states “to establish a range of n-sizes, not to exceed 30.” To support state-level policymaking under these new requirements, this update to the original policy memo will illustrate the trade-offs between subgroup sizes of 20+ and 30+. In this supplementary analysis, we show that:

- The effect of moving from a subgroup size of 30+ to 20+ is not as stark as the effect of moving from a subgroup size of 100+ to 20+. However, substantially more students are made visible at a subgroup size of 20+ as compared to 30+, suggesting that 20+ may be more advantageous for highlighting the performance of specified subgroups.
- A substantially higher percentage of student data is reported at smaller subgroup sizes. For example, when the subgroup size is reduced to 20+ from 30+, 39 percent more schools report results for students with disabilities.
- At a subgroup size of 20+, approximately 38 percent more schools report results for *all student subgroups* than at a subgroup size of 30+.
- The lowest performing racial/ethnic subgroup in the school is often excluded from schools reporting at the higher subgroup size. In 24 percent of the schools, the lowest performing racial-ethnic group changes when the subgroup size is reduced from 30+ to 20+.

Supplemental policy analysis

In May 2016, we released a policy memo¹ comparing the effect of reporting subgroups at an n-size of 20+ compared to 100+. This memo revealed that setting the n-size for school-level reporting at 20 greatly increases the number of schools that report results for specific student subgroups, particularly students with disabilities and African American students. In response to this initial memo, the U.S. Department of Education released a rule notice proposing changes to ESSA regulation §200.17 allowing states “to establish a range of n-sizes, not to exceed 30, so that States may select an n-size that is both valid and reliable.”² To support state-level policymaking under these new requirements, this supplemental policy analysis will illustrate the trade-offs between subgroup sizes of 20+ and 30+.

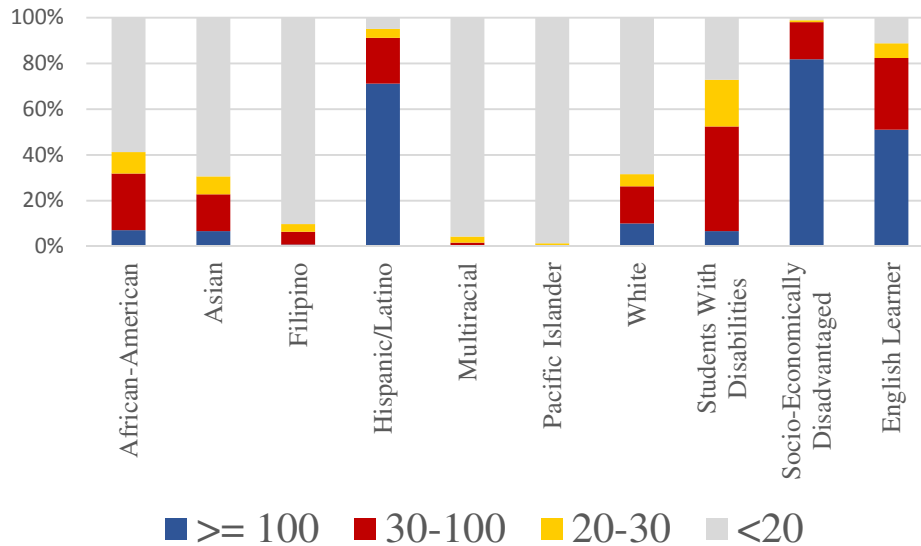
The analyses here are based on data from the CORE Districts, including Fresno, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and Santa Ana Unified School Districts. The analysis includes 1,030 schools, representing 12 percent of California’s student population. While the SQII represents a multiple-metric approach to measuring school performance encompassing both academic and social emotional factors, in this analysis we focus only on mathematics performance as measured by the SBAC in 2015.

We find that the choice between setting minimum subgroup size at 20+ or 30+ has significant implications for how many schools report subgroups at the 30+ vs. 20+ thresholds. As shown in the chart below, only 32 percent of schools report an African American subgroup when the subgroup size is 30+, but this number reaches 41 percent when the subgroup size is decreased to 20+. To put this another way, 29 percent more schools report African American subgroups when the subgroup size is decreased from 30+ to 20+. The effect is even bigger for students with disabilities. Only 52 percent of schools report students with disabilities as a subgroup when the subgroup size is 30+, but this number reaches 73 percent when the subgroup size is decreased to 20+, an increase of 39 percent.

¹ <http://www.edpolicyinca.org/publications/making-students-visible-comparing-different-student-subgroup-sizes-accountability>

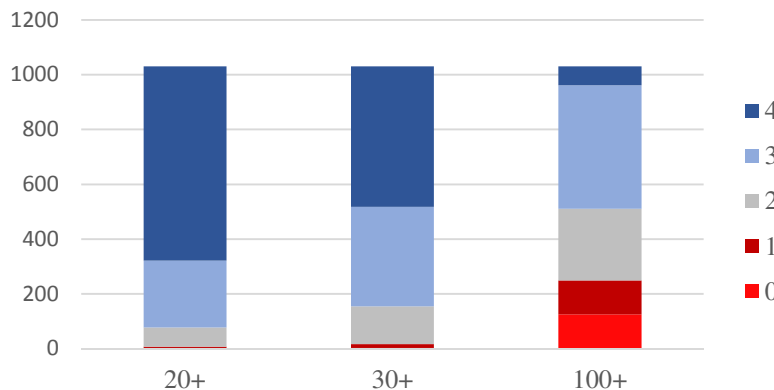
² <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2016/05/31/2016-12451/elementary-and-secondary-education-act-of-1965-as-amended-by-the-every-student-succeeds#footnotes>

Percent of Schools Reporting, by Subgroup Threshold



The CORE Districts report four subgroup categories in the School Quality Improvement Index (SQII): the “lowest performing racial/ethnic group” (LPRG), disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English learners. There is a significant difference in the number of the four CORE SQII subgroups reported by schools at a threshold of 20+ vs. 30+ vs. 100+. As shown below, changing the subgroup size from 100+ to 30+ to 20+ increases the count of schools with all four math index subgroups from 68 at a subgroup size of 100+ (7 percent) to 512 at 30+ (50 percent) to 708 at 20+ (69 percent). At a subgroup size of 20+, approximately 38 percent more schools report results for all student subgroups than at a subgroup size of 30+.

Number of Subgroups by School



As shown below, the identification of the lowest performing racial/ethnic group (LPRG) changes significantly depending on what subgroup size threshold is employed. When we compare 20+ to 30+, we now see very few schools that report no LPRG at either threshold. However, 24% of schools identify different subgroups as the LPRG when the subgroup size is increased from 20+ to 30+. The changing of the LPRG when subgroup size is decreased indicates that the schools' most vulnerable populations are often the students masked by the higher subgroup size.

20+ vs. 30+

