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Impactful Classrooms

Look at the education system that is currently being implemented in the United States. Students can enroll in public schools across the country. Some of these schools have implemented the STEM programs. Some of these public schools even offer IB, AP, and other advanced diploma programs throughout their education careers. These efforts are great, but they mean nothing when we live in a world where, still so few students have the equal access to these programs.

Think about everything that is going on in our world. A switch to online learning due to a global pandemic. Powerful protests for the Black Lives Matter Movement. The start of defunding of police departments. This is a tough time for a lot of people in America. Students everywhere are suffering mentally and financially. When students return to school this fall it is going to be a crucial time for unity and growth within our school systems. Schools should be a haven for students. A place to socialize and forget about problems at home. A place to use councilors and other recourses to get the help they need. A place to get the educational attention that student's homes may be lacking. A place to be taught equality and justice from a young age. How is this feasible? I think small classroom sizes and changes within public education hiring requirements is a start.

When I think of my educational background. I was lucky to have parents who were financially able to send me to a small Catholic School. They sent me to Saint Dominic's Elementary School from Pre-School until Eighth grade. It was a small school which allowed me to create lasting relationships with my classmates and the faculty. In our most developmental years, this environment allowed me to excel not only as a student, but as a human. I was never in

a class with more than 20 students. These small class sizes called for constant participation which pushed me to stay focused and driven. These small class sizes allowed for teachers to work one on one with students during normal class time as the rest of the class worked quietly alone. Being in a small and comfortable learning environment allowed me to ask questions, make presentations, and make mistakes without feeling stupid or judged. But beyond helping me with my education, these small classes taught me how to be a good person. Being under constant watch from a teacher made it so our actions and words toward other classmates were always monitored. I was taught to interact with other students with empathy, compassion, and understanding from a very young age and I think that was the biggest takeaway from my small intimate classrooms.

I knew I was lucky to have this experience and never wanted to stray from this environment but when it came time to graduate. So, I decided to attend Our Lady of Mercy Academy. This was a Catholic School, but it was larger than my old school. It was also an all-girls school. The thought of a larger grade with teenage girls was daunting, but it was encouraging to know that the school emphasized small class sizes. Going to school here was different than I could have ever imagined. I was surrounded by strong, inspirational, educated women that wanted to better the people around them. I was educated in small classrooms of girls that promoted my self-esteem and the best version of myself. I felt comfortable and supported by the faculty and was learning much from my teachers. But just as it was in elementary school, my most valuable lessons went beyond the curriculum. I was a young woman engaging in small classrooms with well-established women while being surrounded by other driven women. This created a feminist environment that instilled in me the importance of equal rights for all as well as the voice to speak up for injustice when I see it.

From a young age, I was given immense amount of attention in my education and I recognize how lucky I am to have that educational background. But the more I thought about the small classrooms and the lessons I learned, the more I realized that the lessons had nothing to do with the money that was in my school system. These lessons came from teachers that my school hired. These teachers were passionate about educating young people to be the best versions of themselves. These teachers wanted an inclusive and equal environment within classrooms with no judgment. These teachers wanted us to go on in the world spreading equality and speaking up for injustices, just as we had been demonstrated to do since Pre School.

So, smaller class sizes are not feasible for all schools financially. I hate to admit it, but it is the harsh reality. But hiring faculty to operate these classrooms will continue to happen. And what if these hiring processes make “passion for equal opportunity for all students in and outside of the classroom” a requirement. Fill the schools with teachers that teach more than the curriculum. Hire the people that treat being with justice and give the students a voice.

I hope the future brings change to the American education system. I hope that we will further be able to instill progressive thinking and actions in our younger generation through smaller class sizes and improved faculty. I hope the American education system sees the opportunity they have; The opportunity to shape the minds of future generations to act with love and integrity.

It costs nothing to be a decent human being.