

EDUCATION WEEK

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Budget cuts lead to larger classes in Mo., Kan.

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OLATHE, Kan. (AP) — Danielle Wagner is teaching 25 fourth-graders this year at Sunnyside Elementary in Olathe.

That's a bigger class than last year, and next year could be bigger yet.

"This is the first year I've had a lot of kids," Wagner said. "I feel like I am still able to teach the same way, although I don't know if I'm quite able to do one on one as much as I would like."

That's a growing concern as Kansas and Missouri districts cuts millions of dollars from their budgets. Fewer teachers means bigger classes — and teachers aren't the only ones who are worried.

Parents fear that growing class sizes could mean less attention for their children and more stress on the teachers, making them less effective.

"I've talked to parents who are concerned about the situation," said Lauren Meyer, the president of the Shawnee Mission area PTA council. "There's a lot of conversation about this."

Parents already are talking about ways they can volunteer more as the teaching and support staff dwindles.

Class sizes are widely considered a signal of the quality of education. Although some people may remember sitting with 30 classmates in elementary school decades ago, the optimum class size is 17, according to many experts.

Class sizes in many area districts are in the low 20s and growing. Some will be near 30 next year.

In the 2007-08 school year, the national average was 20.3 students per elementary class and 23 for secondary classes, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

That puts the United States about in the middle among the world's schools.

Class sizes will continue to be a concern as education money dries up.

Kansas school districts have seen the state cut \$200 million over the past year, while Missouri has cut \$30.3 million for elementary and secondary education.

Consequently, many school districts have been cutting budgets and staff.

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