

August 18, 2011

(1) Why are Florida's school districts and schools required to reduce the number of students per classroom?

In November 2002, Florida's voters approved a state constitutional amendment (Section I, Article IX) setting limits for the maximum number of students in a classroom by the start of the 2010-11 school year. These limits (class-size maximums) apply to individual classes, so that, by fall 2010, no classroom in which a core course is taught may contain more students than allowed by the constitutional limits. The class-size limits apply to classes in three grade groupings as follows:

Grade Group	Maximum Number of Students Allowed in a Core Class by Fall 2010
K – 3	18
4 – 8	22
9 – 12	25

The amendment requires the Florida Legislature to provide the necessary funding for school districts and schools to comply with the class-size requirements. While school districts had until fall 2010 to reach full compliance, the amendment has required districts with class sizes exceeding the limits to demonstrate measurable progress toward reducing class size since the 2003-04 school year.

The full text of the Class Size Reduction constitutional amendment is provided at:
<http://www.fldoe.org/ClassSize/pdf/amendment.pdf>

In its 2010 session, the legislature proposed an amendment revising the existing class size amendment to make compliance with class size requirements more manageable for school districts. This proposal, Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 2, was presented to Florida voters on the November 2010 ballot and failed to pass by the necessary 60 percent margin.

The full text of SJR 2 is provided at:
<http://www.flsenate.gov/data/session/2010/Senate/bills/billtext/pdf/s0002er.pdf>

The 2011 legislature amended Section 1003.03, Florida Statutes (F.S.), (Section 15, Chapter 2011-55, Laws of Florida), by providing class size flexibility to schools that enroll students after the October student membership survey. If a district school board determines that it is impractical, educationally unsound, or disruptive to student learning, students may be temporarily assigned to a class that exceeds the maximums cited above. Up to three students may be assigned to a teacher in grade group K-3. Up to five students may be assigned to a teacher in grade groups 4-8 and 9-12. The district school board must develop a plan that provides that the school will be in full compliance by the next October student survey.

(2) What legal authority guides implementation of Florida's class-size reduction?

In 2003, the Florida Legislature enacted Senate Bill 30A (Chapter 2003-391, Laws of Florida), which implements the provisions of the class-size amendment and defines the progress that districts must make in reducing class size. The law substantially revised Section 1003.03, F.S., and created Section 1011.685, F.S., which established the class size operating categorical fund. Other sections of law were amended to fully implement the constitutional requirement.

(3) What progress must schools and districts demonstrate in reducing class size?

Districts with class sizes that exceed the constitutional class-size maximums had to reduce class size by at least two students per year until 2010-11 (or until reaching compliance with the constitutional maximums) according to the following schedule and measures:

- **2003-04 to 2005-06**
Progress toward class-size reduction was measured using average class size for grade groups K-3, 4-8, and 9-12 at the district level. Districts with average class sizes exceeding the constitutional maximums must have reduced the average class size for each applicable grade grouping by at least two students per year until their class-size averages no longer exceeded the constitutional maximums.
- **2006-07 to 2009-10**
Progress toward class-size reduction was measured at the school level. Each school with average class sizes exceeding the constitutional maximums must have reduced its average class size for each applicable grade grouping by at least two students per year or until its class-size averages no longer exceeded the constitutional maximums.
- **2010-11**
Class-size reduction was measured at the classroom level. Class-size counts documented classrooms in which the number of students exceeded the constitutional maximums and included the number of students in excess of the constitutional maximums for each of these classes. Required progress for each school was based on these counts.

(4) How is “class” defined for purposes of calculating class size?

A class is identified as a course/section combination with one or more teachers scheduled in a particular room, in a particular school, in a specified term, and during a specific period and day of the week. The count of students meeting for that class section constitutes the class size.

(5) Which courses/classes are considered in the calculation of class size?

Courses in academic areas that are defined as core curricula classes are included in the class-size calculation. Chapter 2011-55, Laws of Florida, amended Subsections (14) and (15) of Section 1003.01, F.S., to re-define core-curricular courses by grade groups. The following definitions are currently in Section 1003.01, F.S.:

(14) “Core-curricula courses” means:

- (a) Courses in language arts/reading, mathematics, social studies, and science in prekindergarten through grade 3, excluding any extracurricular courses pursuant to subsection (15);
- (b) Courses in grades 4 through 8 in subjects that are measured by state assessment at any grade level and courses required for middle school promotion, excluding any extracurricular courses pursuant to subsection (15);
- (c) Courses in grades 9 through 12 in subjects that are measured by state assessment at any grade level and courses that are specifically identified by name in statute as required for high school graduation and that are not measured by state assessment, excluding any extracurricular courses pursuant to subsection (15);
- (d) Exceptional student education courses; and
- (e) English for Speakers of Other Languages courses.

The term is limited in meaning and used for the sole purpose of designating classes that are subject to the maximum class size requirements established in Section 1, Article IX

of the State Constitution. This term does not include courses offered under Sections 1002.37, 1002.415, and 1002.45, F.S.

- (15) “Extracurricular courses” means all courses that are not defined as “core-curricula courses,” which may include, but are not limited to, physical education, fine arts, performing fine arts, career education, and courses that may result in college credit. The term is limited in meaning and used for the sole purpose of designating classes that are not subject to the maximum class size requirements established in Section 1, Article IX of the State Constitution.

(6) What is meant by “average class size” for districts and schools?

“Average class size” means the average number of students per class for a specified group of classes. Average class size is measured by adding the number of students assigned to each class in a specified group of classes and dividing this compiled number of students by the number of classes in the group. (For a detailed explanation of the calculation, see the answer to question 11.)

(7) How does average class size differ from a student/teacher ratio?

A student/teacher ratio does not provide class-size information insofar as the ratio is derived by dividing the number of a school’s (or district’s) students in membership by the number of staff who are classified as teachers at the school (or district). Student/teacher ratios do not account for the number of classes taught during the day or how many students are assigned to each of the classes. Thus, student/teacher ratios do not provide information based on class-level data.

Average class size, on the other hand, is based on counts of students assigned to specific classes.

(8) Are exceptional student education (ESE) classes considered “core” classes?

Yes. ESE courses are considered core-curricula classes.

(9) Does the class-size amendment pertain to both academic and elective courses?

The amendment pertains to core courses. Courses outside the core curriculum, such as physical education classes and fine arts classes, are not included. An elective course can be a core course if it falls under one of the classifications listed in the response to question 5. In Section 15, Chapter 2011-55, Laws of Florida, the 2011 legislature assigned responsibility to the Department of Education (DOE) to specify core-curricula courses.

(10) Are charter schools subject to compliance with the class-size reduction law?

Yes. The 2010 legislature clarified that charter schools must comply with Section 1003.03, F.S., relating to maximum class size, except that the calculation for compliance is for the school average by grade group.

(11) How is class size calculated?

The steps for calculating class size are summarized as follows:

1. Count the number of students in each class (course/section) for a room.

2. For students reported multiple times in a single room/period combination, count each student only once. Students are occasionally assigned to more than one course for a class, e.g., ESE students enrolled in both an ESE course and mainstream course for a given class session.
3. Determine the main grade and main course taught in each classroom based on how the majority of students are assigned.
4. Determine whether or not the main course is a “core” course.
5. Determine the numerator by compiling the total unduplicated count of students based on the main grade of each class for which the main course is “core,” then total these student counts for all classes.
6. Determine the denominator by counting all classes in which the main course is “core.”
7. Calculate the class size for each class in a grade range of the school (K-3, 4-8, 9-12) by dividing the numerator (student count) by the denominator (class count).

(12) How is the class-size calculation affected by multiple teachers in the same classroom?

If more than one teacher is responsible for *all* of the students in a classroom, the total number of students in the classroom is divided by the number of teachers assigned to these students to determine class size.

(13) Does the number of teacher aides affect class-size calculations?

No. Teacher aides are not counted in the class-size calculation.

(14) How is compliance with this amendment determined?

The DOE, in cooperation with the governor’s office and the legislature, works to ensure that districts have accurate information for implementation of the class-size reduction requirements. The DOE collects data and monitors the reporting of data to ensure a proper accounting of the status of each school district in relation to the class-size reduction requirement.

The monitoring activities are a cooperative process involving both the DOE’s Education Information and Accountability Services staff and local district Management Information Systems and facilities staff. Schools and classes are randomly selected, and districts are notified as to the selections. District staff is expected to provide documentation, such as class rosters, teachers’ grade books, and other such items to verify the accurate reporting of the student and teacher information used to calculate the class size. District staff is also expected to provide evidence that data on the assignment of students to particular classes are accurate; that is, students are taught in the classrooms for which they have been reported as enrolled.

(15) How will changes in class size be determined at the classroom level?

Class-size data at the classroom level were obtained using the same procedures that were used to compile data for the calculation of school and district average class size. Class-size counts documented classrooms in which the number of students exceeded the constitutional maximums and included the number of students in excess of the constitutional maximums for each of these classes. Required compliance for each school will be based on these counts.

(16) What measures/options does Section 1003.03(3), F.S., offer districts for implementing the class size amendment?

- Provide dual enrollment courses at state/community colleges.

- Provide for enrollment in courses offered by the Florida Virtual School.
- Repeal school board policies that require students to have more than the state-required level of 24 credits to graduate from high school.
- Allow students to graduate from high school as soon as they pass the grade 10 FCAT and complete the courses required for high school graduation.
- Use methods to maximize use of instructional staff, such as changing required teaching loads and scheduled planning periods, deploying district employees that have professional certification to the classrooms, and using adjunct educators.
- Use methods to reduce the cost of school construction.
- Use joint-use facilities through partnerships with state/community colleges, state universities, and private colleges and universities.
- Adopt alternative methods of class scheduling, such as block scheduling.
- Redraw school attendance zones to maximize use of facilities while minimizing the need for transportation.
- Operate schools beyond the normal operating hours to provide classes in the evening or operate more than one session of school during the day.
- Use year-round schools and other nontraditional calendars that do not adversely impact annual assessment of student achievement.
- Review and consider amending any collective bargaining contracts that hinder the implementation of class size reduction.
- Use any other approach not prohibited by law.

(17) Are funds available to assist districts with meeting the requirements for the class size reduction amendment?

The payment of costs associated with meeting the class-size requirements is the responsibility of the state and not of the local school districts. Since the 2003-04 fiscal year, the legislature has provided funds to reduce the average number of students in each classroom by at least two students per year until no classroom exceeds the class-size requirements.

(18) Can federal funds be used for class size reduction requirements?

Federal funds may be used to supplement, *not supplant*, state and local funds to meet the requirements of the class-size reduction amendment. The district must be able to provide appropriate documentation for auditors to review if federal funds are used for this purpose.

(19) What is FISH?

FISH stands for Florida Inventory of School Houses. A FISH number is assigned to each physical classroom in which students are taught. The class-size calculation utilizes FISH numbers to identify classrooms. The Educational Facilities Information System (EFIS) assigns and coordinates the FISH identification numbers for all classrooms.

(20) What is the maximum class size requirement for school-year Voluntary Prekindergarten Programs?

Response is circulating in a separate issue brief. A summary of the brief will be added when it has been approved.