

Class Size Reduction in Florida's Public Schools

Questions and Answers

Why are Florida's school districts required to reduce the number of students per classroom?

In November 2002, Florida's voters passed a state constitutional amendment* setting limits for the maximum allowable number of students in a class by the start of the 2010-11 school year. The limits (class-size maximums) will apply to individual classes. That is, 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 ranges as follows:

Grade Range	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 funding needed by school districts to comply with the requirements for reducing class size. While school districts have until fall 2010 to reach full compliance, the amendment requires districts with class sizes that currently exceed the limits to demonstrate measurable progress toward reducing class size beginning with the 2003-04 school year.

(The text of the amendment is provided at <http://firn.edu/doe/arm/pdf/amendment.pdf>.)

*Article IX, Section 1 of the Florida Constitution.

What legal authority will guide implementation of Florida's class-size reduction?

In 2003, the Florida Legislature enacted Senate Bill 30A, which implements the provisions of the class-size amendment and defines the progress that districts must make in reducing class size.

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

Districts with class sizes that exceed the constitutional class-size maximums must reduce class size by two students per year until 2010-2011 (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 will be measured using average class size for grade groupings K-3, 4-8, and 9-12 at the district level. Districts with average class sizes exceeding the constitutional maximums must reduce the average class size for each applicable grade grouping by two students per year or until their class-size averages no longer exceed the constitutional maximums.

2006-07 to 2007-08

Progress toward class-size reduction will be measured at the school level. Each school with average class sizes exceeding the constitutional maximums must reduce their average class size for each applicable grade grouping by two students per year or until their class-size averages no longer exceed the constitutional maximums.

2008-09 to 2009-10

Progress toward class-size reduction will be measured at the classroom level. Class-size counts will document classrooms in which the number of students exceeds the constitutional maximums and will include the number of students in excess of the constitutional maximums for each of these classes. Required progress for each school will be based on these counts.

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. (See a more detailed explanation of the calculation under the question “How is ‘class size’ calculated?”.)

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 merely 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.

What about class size for a particular class? How is a class defined for purposes of calculating class size?

The size of a class means the count of students meeting in a particular classroom for a class session. 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, during a specific period and day of the week.

What courses/classes are considered in the calculation of class size?

The core curricula courses for class size are those belonging to following areas:

Language Arts/Reading
Mathematics
Science
Social Studies
Foreign Languages
Self-Contained (e.g., kindergarten, first grade, etc.)
Exceptional Student Education
English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

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

Yes, ESE courses are considered core curricula courses.

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

The amendment pertains to core courses as specified above. Courses outside the core curriculum (such as physical education classes or fine arts classes, for example) are not included. An elective course could, in some cases, be a core course—but it would have to be included among the classifications listed above.

How is class size 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.

Does the number of teacher aides affect class size calculations?

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

How is “class size” calculated?

The steps for calculating class size are summarized below:

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 the main course is a “core” course.
5. Determine the numerator. For each class, determine the total unduplicated count of students based on the main grade of each class for which the main course is “core”. Total these student counts for all classes.
6. Determine the denominator. Count all classes in which the main course is “core”.
7. Calculate the class size average for each grade range of the school (PK-3, 4-8, 9-12) by dividing the numerator (student count) by the denominator (class count).

Why not use the average class size data presented in the Florida School Indicators Report?

The most recent data on class size provided by the Florida School Indicators Report (FSIR) is from school year 2001-02. More current data is needed for assessing class size for implementing the provisions of the constitutional amendment. In addition, while the average class size figures presented in the FSIR were calculated with the most accurate method and data available at that time, the available data did not account for multiple teachers in one classroom, multiple courses taught in one classroom, and multiple sections in one classroom. Hence, additional data elements and formats have been implemented in order to obtain the most accurate classroom size information.

When will funds be available to assist districts with meeting the requirements for the Class Size Reduction Amendment?

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

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 CSR Amendment. The district must be able to provide appropriate documentation for auditors to review if they use federal funds for this purpose.

How will compliance with this amendment be determined?

The Department of Education (DOE), in cooperation with the Governor's Office and the Legislature, will work to ensure that districts have accurate information for implementation of the class size reduction requirements. The DOE will collect data and monitor 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 will be a cooperative process involving both the Bureau of Education Information and Accountability Services and local district MIS and facilities staff. Schools and classes will be randomly selected and districts will be notified as to the selections. District staff will be 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 will also be expected to provide evidence that data on the assignment of students to particular classes is accurate—i.e., that the students are being taught in the classrooms for which they have been reported as enrolled.

How will funding for the Class Size Reduction Amendment be addressed?

The Legislature adopted a policy and funding formula for calculating the amount of state funds appropriated to pay the cost of reducing the statewide average number of students in each of the three grade grouping by two students per year.

Additional information on funding is available from the Office of Funding and Financial Reporting at (850) 245-0405.

What does FISH stand for and what is its function?

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

What are districts doing to address the new class size amendment?

District compliance will be based upon “district” class size averages through 2005-2006, and on “school” class size averages in 2006-07 and 2007-08. In 2008-2009 and thereafter, class size will be determined at the individual classroom level.

The baseline “district” class size has been established for the 2003-2004 school year. This baseline will be instrumental in assisting districts with planning and analyses of their class size averages to ensure compliance with the individual class size maximums.

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

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

What measures/options are available to districts for implementing the class size amendment (in Senate Bill 30A)?

Districts will have the flexibility to implement a number of measures designed to reduce classroom crowding. These include the following options:

- Provide dual enrollment courses at 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 scheduling planning periods, deploying district employees that have professional certification to the classrooms, and using adjunct educators.
- Use innovative methods to reduce the cost of school construction.
- Use joint-use facilities through partnerships with 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 additional use of 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.

What will be the consequences for districts of not meeting the two-student reduction in a given year?

If a district fails to meet the reduction requirement, a portion of its class size reduction operating categorical fund will be transferred to the district's class size reduction capital outlay fund.

Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, if a district not has complied with the required reduction of class size, it will be required to implement one or more statutorily prescribed measures for class-size reduction.

Beginning in the 2006-2007 school year, if a district has not complied with the required reduction of class size, it forfeits more of its flexibility in the use of class-size reduction funding and must implement a constitutional compliance plan developed by the Department of Education until the district class size complies with the constitutional requirements in 2010-2011.

Districts not in compliance must implement prescribed policies for reducing class size and will be required to implement one of the following policies:

- Year-round schools
- Double sessions
- Rezoning
- Maximizing use of instructional staff