



The Florida Senate

Interim Project Report 98-54

October 1998

Committee on Ways and Means

Senator Donald C. Sullivan, Chairman

CLASS SIZE REDUCTION

SUMMARY

Since 1995-96, the Legislature has appropriated a total of \$340 million to encourage school districts to lower class sizes in grades kindergarten through three to twenty (20) students. The 1998 Legislature went even further by requiring each district to lower class sizes to specified levels in at least one elementary school. Department of Education (DOE) data show that legislative efforts to reduce class size have been successful in many schools and that many other schools still have class sizes that remain higher than twenty (20). This report examines the way a small number of elementary schools used staff and facilities during the 1997-98 school year in an effort to learn more about why many schools have not yet successfully reached the twenty (20) student target for kindergarten and primary grades. The report recommends that the DOE work even more closely with school districts to encourage more uniform coding of student assignment data and that the state's student and staff databases ought to be linked with facilities data so it will be possible to more accurately track how districts use resources. The report recommends that the Legislature clarify whether districts can reach the target ratio of students to teachers with a combination of teachers and teacher aides. The report also recommends the following three options the Legislature could employ if it should decide to require lower class sizes: (1) the Legislature could restrict the allocation of class size reduction funds to schools that have obtained the target ratio of students to teachers, (2) the Legislature could restrict the allocation of PECO funds for elementary school construction to schools that would have kindergarten and primary rooms small enough to accommodate only twenty (20) student stations, and (3) the Legislature could require that all rooms listed in the Florida Inventory of School Houses (FISH) as kindergarten, primary or intermediate classrooms be used only for basic education classrooms unless the average class size in grades kindergarten through three classrooms in the school is less than or equal to twenty (20).

BACKGROUND

In the 1995-96 General Appropriations Act (GAA), the Legislature appropriated \$40 million to "achieve the goal that for each elementary school, class size for grades one, two and three shall not exceed 20 students, with a ratio of one teacher per 20 students."¹ Proviso language allowed districts to exceed 20 students in a class if the class had at least one full-time teacher aide and if there were no more than five (5) additional students in a class for each full-time aide. Proviso language also established reduction of class size in first grade as districts' first priority followed by reduction of class size in grade two (second priority) and reduction of class size in grade three (third priority). In October 1995, the DOE issued its first report on class size in response to legislative policy established in the budget for 1995-96. That report, issued for the purpose of establishing a benchmark against which to measure district progress toward the class size reduction goal, found that 11.3% of the state's *kindergarten* classes had 20 or fewer students; 10.6% of all *first grade* classes had 20 or fewer students; 9.8% of all *second grade* classes had 20 or fewer students; and 7.8% of all *third grade* classes had 20 or fewer students.

In the GAA for 1996-97 the Legislature provided a specific line item appropriation for class size reduction and increased funding for that purpose from \$40 million to \$100 million.² Proviso language for 1996-97 differed from the previous year's proviso in several ways. First, proviso allowed districts to meet the reduction goal if they employed one full-time aide for every *ten* students in excess of twenty in a classroom (proviso for 1995-96 had allowed only one full-time aide for every *five* additional students). Second, the highest priority for class size reduction became reduction of class size in both kindergarten and grade one, rather than in grade one only as specified in the 1995-96 proviso. Third, proviso required the Commissioner of Education to report on progress made by the districts toward the class size

¹Specific Appropriation 150 for the Florida Education Finance Program, C. 95.429, L.O.F.

²Specific Appropriation 140B, ch. 96-424, L.O.F.

reduction objective established by the Legislature. The Legislature appropriated \$100 million for the 1997-98 year and continued proviso language unchanged from the 1996-97 GAA.³ The Legislature continued a \$100 million appropriation for class size reduction in the GAA for 1998-99, bringing the total provided for that purpose to \$340 million.⁴ Also during its 1998 Session, the Legislature passed the “Florida Maximum Class Size Study Act.”⁵ That legislation required each school district to use funds provided in the GAA for class size reduction to reduce the teacher-to-student ratio to *one full-time equivalent teacher to 20 students* in grades kindergarten through three in at least one elementary school. If any district has a school that the Commissioner of Education has designated a critically low performing school, the district must select that school and must reduce the teacher-to-student ratio in that school to one full-time equivalent teacher to 15 students. The act also established priorities for class size reduction similar to, but in one significant way different from, proviso language in the GAA. The Maximum Class Size Study Act requires a reduction in the ratio of teachers to students, whereas budget proviso language allows a reduction in the ratio of teachers and teacher aides to students.

In April 1998, the DOE issued its most recent report on class size reduction. The Department found that by the fall of 1997, 47.8% of all *kindergarten* classes had met the GAA proviso language goal for class size reduction (which allows class size reduction to be achieved with a combination of teachers and teacher aides), and 36.4% of all *first grade* classes had achieved a class size of 20 or fewer students. Considerably fewer second and third grade classes had met the goal; 13.4% of all *second grade* classes had 20 or fewer students, and 9.8% of all *third grade* classes had 20 or fewer students. The report found that 31.2% of all *kindergarten* classes had met the “Maximum Class Size Study Act’s” class size reduction requirement for kindergarten classes (which allows class size reduction to be achieved only with teachers) and 31.3% of all *first grade* classes had met the requirement for maximum class size.

METHODOLOGY

The DOE was asked to select two small, two medium and two large districts for this report. Having selected the districts, the Department was then asked to examine current class size data for each school in those six districts in order to identify the school in each district that had the *smallest* average class size for grades kindergarten through three for 1997-98 and the school that had the *largest* average class size for grades kindergarten through three. Schools chosen for this report were Moore Haven Elementary in Glades County⁶, Hastings Elementary and Webster School in St. Johns County, Everglades School and Laurel Oak Elementary in Collier County, Beulah Elementary and A. K. Suter Elementary in Escambia County, S. D. Spady Elementary and Starlight Cove Elementary in Palm Beach County, and Azalea Elementary and Southern Oak Elementary in Pinellas County.

Through the DOE’s Office of Educational Facilities (OEF), each district was asked to submit schematic drawings of the two elementary schools chosen for this report. On those schematic drawings, districts were asked to write the specific use of every room that was used for student instruction during the 1997-98 year (e.g., “first grade” or “music” or “speech”). OEF staff provided 1998 Florida Inventory of School House (FISH) information for each school. For every room in a school, FISH inventory data include room numbers, room type, room size and the number of student stations in the room. The number of student stations is calculated based on the size of the room. The DOE requires 38 square feet of space for each student in grades kindergarten through three and 32 square feet of space for each student in grades four through six.

DOE staff responsible for maintaining the state’s staff and student databases cross matched staff and student data to provide a list of all instructional employees assigned to each of the eleven elementary schools included in this report together with (1) the number of students assigned to each instructional employee and (2) the number of teacher aides assigned to each instructional employee.

Finally, each school was contacted directly. Either the principal or a designee was asked to match every instructional employee assigned to the school with a particular room in the school. The results provide a relatively precise picture of how staff and space were

³Specific Appropriation 107, C. 97-152, L.O.F.

⁴Specific Appropriation 118, C.98-422, L.O.F.

⁵Section 236.687, F.S.

⁶Glades County is the state’s second smallest district (Franklin County has the fewest students) and has only one elementary school.

allocated in a small number of elementary schools during the 1997-98 school year.

FINDINGS

Glades County: Moore Haven Elementary

Moore Haven Elementary is the only elementary school in Glades County. Moore Haven Elementary served a total of 634.50 full-time-equivalent students in 1997-98; 78.6% in basic programs, 16.0% in exceptional child programs, and 5.4% in at-risk programs. Moore Haven Elementary did not use teacher aides to achieve the legislative goal of no more than 20 students in kindergarten and first grade classrooms. All five (5) of its *kindergarten* classes had fewer than 20 students; the average kindergarten class size was 16.0 students. With the exception of a single third grade classroom, all *first, second and third grade* classrooms exceeded the target ratio of 20 students to one teacher last year. Average class sizes were 22.0 for first grade, 22.3 for second grade, and 20.5 for third grade. The combined average class size for grades kindergarten through three was 20.1.

The average class size for grades four, five and six was significantly higher than the average class size for grades kindergarten through three (25.8 as compared with 20.1), which suggests that the district is specifically targeting the lower grades for a reduced class size. Most of the classrooms in Moore Haven Elementary are listed on the school house inventory as intermediate rooms with 27 student stations. The principal difference between the class sizes of primary and intermediate grades is that the number of students assigned to intermediate rooms is more nearly equal to the number of student stations assigned to those rooms. For example, there are 28 students assigned to each of three intermediate rooms used as fourth grade classrooms. Each of those rooms have space sufficient for 27 student stations. This is a strong contrast with the intermediate rooms used for kindergarten classes, to which only 15 or 16 students were assigned.

In addition to its basic classrooms for grades kindergarten through six, Moore Haven Elementary used classrooms listed on the school house inventory as basic education classrooms for exceptional education (3), ESOL (1), dropout prevention (1), migrant education (1) pre-kindergarten (2), technology (1), and discipline (1). If it became necessary or highly desirable, school officials could use one or more of these other rooms as basic education classrooms.

St. Johns County: Hastings Elementary and Webster Elementary

St. Johns County does not have a specific district policy governing class size for grades kindergarten through three. The county does strive, however, to maintain a class size of 20 students for kindergarten and grade one, a class size that ranges from 22 to 25 students in grades two and three, and a class size that ranges from 22 to 27 in grades four and five.

Hastings Elementary is a small school (290.33 full-time-equivalent students). Most of its students (81.6%) are enrolled in basic programs; the remaining students (18.4%) are enrolled in exceptional child programs. In contrast, Webster School is a large elementary school (841.32 students) which has a student population that is almost evenly divided between basic and exceptional programs (50.6% of its students are enrolled in basic programs and 49.4% are enrolled in exceptional child programs).

Consistent with the district's policy, the average number of Webster School students assigned to grades kindergarten through three classrooms was 23.2 and the average number of Hastings Elementary students assigned to grades kindergarten through three classrooms was 18.6. Because Webster School assigned seven (7) teacher aides to its classrooms and Hastings Elementary did not have teacher aides, Webster School had a smaller ratio of students to classroom adults (teachers and aides), 15.8 for Webster School as compared with 18.6 for Hastings Elementary. Because the number of students assigned to several kindergarten rooms is equal to the number of student stations designated for those rooms (25), assignment of teacher aides to the rooms becomes an efficient way to lower the ratio of students to classroom adults. Another device used by Webster School to control class size is the use of split classes. Kindergarten and first grade students were assigned to the same room and first and second grade students were assigned to the same room.

Webster School's large program for exceptional students is another factor limiting the availability of basic education classroom space. Webster School's exceptional student enrollment was 50.6% of its total enrollment; however, its exceptional education program used 60.8% of the school's available classroom space. The average class size for exceptional education classes was 10.6 students. In addition to the 11 rooms designated for part-time exceptional students and the four rooms designated as exceptional education self-contained classrooms, Webster School used one kindergarten room, one primary room and two intermediate rooms for its exceptional child

program. Even those areas were not sufficient. Part of the dining room was also used as a classroom for profoundly handicapped students, and six relocatable classrooms were necessary to accommodate its exceptional education classroom needs.

Kindergarten classrooms in Hastings have 761 square feet each, which is space sufficient for only 20 student stations. Primary classrooms in Hastings Elementary also have only 20 student stations and intermediate classrooms have only 21 student stations. Smaller room size also helps to explain why the average number of students assigned to fourth and fifth grade classrooms was also low; the average fourth grade class size was 18.0 students and the average fifth grade class size was 18.5 students.

Hastings Elementary used two classrooms for exceptional student education; these two rooms had an average class size of 10.5 students. Hastings Elementary also used rooms designated in the school house inventory as basic education classrooms for other purposes. One intermediate room was used as a reading lab, another was used as a resource room for exceptional education and a third intermediate classroom was used as a workroom for teacher aides.

Collier County: Everglades School and Laurel Oaks Elementary

Collier County's policy relating to class size is reflected in the district's staffing formula. That formula allocates one teacher for every 20 students in kindergarten and grade one; one teacher for every 25 students in grade two, one teacher for every 26 students in grade three, and one teacher for every 29 students in grades four and five.

Everglades School is a small school (245.53 full-time-equivalent students) for students in grades kindergarten through twelve. Most of its students (73.2%) were enrolled in basic programs; 19.4% of its students are enrolled in exceptional education programs, and small numbers of students are enrolled in at-risk, vocational and adult programs (2.8%, 2.9% and 1.7%, respectively). Everglades School used only one classroom for each grade (kindergarten through fifth). In contrast, Laurel Oaks Elementary is a large elementary school (1,070.00 full-time-equivalent students) Almost three quarters of Laurel Oak Elementary's student population was enrolled in basic education programs (71.6%); 19.3% of the school's students was enrolled in exceptional education programs and 9.1% was enrolled in at-risk programs. The average number of students in grades kindergarten through three classrooms in Laurel Oak Elementary was 24.3, and the average number of students in grades

kindergarten through three classrooms in Everglades School was 20.0. Neither school assigned teacher aides to its elementary classrooms, so the ratio of students to teachers and the ratio of students to classroom adults were the same.

Collier County's staffing formula for kindergarten and first grade did not achieve the target class size for those grades of 20 students. Kindergarten classrooms in Laurel Oak Elementary are large (1,142 square feet each). Their size is sufficient for 25 student stations in each room, and 24 students were actually assigned to each room. In similar fashion, the number of students assigned to first, second and third grade classrooms was virtually the same as the number of students stations designated for each room. For example, 179 first grade students were assigned to eight first grade classrooms that had a total of 191 student stations.

Significantly higher average class sizes were found in Laurel Oak Elementary fourth and fifth grade classrooms (30.6 and 33.0, respectively). Once again, average class sizes for grades four and five exceeded the size targeted by the district's staffing formula (29 students). For example, 165 students were assigned to six fifth-grade classrooms that had a total of 150 student stations.

Laurel Oaks Elementary used two classrooms for exceptional student education, and the average class size in those rooms was 10.5 students. Laurel Oaks Elementary did not use classrooms listed in the school house inventory as basic education classrooms for its exceptional student education program.

Like Laurel Oaks Elementary, Everglades School has large classrooms. The average size of its six basic education classrooms is 1,062 square feet, and the number of students assigned to those rooms was less than the designated number of those rooms' student stations. For example, 21 kindergarten students were assigned to a kindergarten room with 24 student stations. Only thirteen (13) students were assigned to the school's fifth grade classroom, which has space sufficient for 30 student stations.

Everglades School used two classrooms for exceptional education, and the average class size in those rooms was 16.5 students. Eleven classrooms were used for the middle school and high school programs. Rooms listed in the school house inventory as exceptional education classrooms were used for math and language arts instruction; a room designated in the school house inventory as a typing lab was used for language arts

instruction; and industrial lab classrooms were used as computer labs. Two smaller exceptional student resource rooms were used for in-school suspension and ROTC.

Escambia County: Beulah Elementary and Starlight Cove Elementary

Escambia County's policy relating to class size is also reflected in the district's staffing formula. That formula allocates one teacher for every 24 students in kindergarten and grade one; one teacher for every 25 students in grade two; one teacher for every 26 students in grade three; one teacher for every 28 students in grade four; and one teacher for every 29 students in grade five.

A. K. Suter Elementary is a small school (279.69 full-time-equivalent students). Most of its students (71.7%) were enrolled in basic programs; the remaining students (26.9% of the total student population) were enrolled in exceptional child programs and at-risk programs (1.4% of the total student population). In contrast, Beulah Elementary is a much larger elementary school (650.37 students) and operates as a year round school. Almost three-quarters (73.7%) of the student population were enrolled in basic education programs, 18.6% of the school's students were enrolled in exceptional education programs, and 7.7% of the student population were enrolled in at-risk programs.

The average number of Beulah Elementary students in grades kindergarten through three classrooms was 25.8, and the average number of A. K. Suter Elementary students in grades kindergarten through three classrooms was 19.9. The ratio of students to teachers and teacher aides was virtually the same in both schools, 19.9:1 for A. K. Suter Elementary and 20.0:1 for Beulah Elementary. This is because A. K. Suter Elementary did not have any teacher aides and Beulah Elementary assigned a teacher aide to every kindergarten class and a small percentage of an aide's time to first, second and third grade classrooms.

The average class size for kindergarten rooms in A. K. Suter Elementary was 19.5 students, and the average size for first grade rooms was only 16.0 students. Average class sizes for grades two through five were higher because the number of students assigned to those rooms was approximately the same as the number of student stations designated for those rooms based on their size (23.5, 21.7, 23.5, and 24.0, respectively). For example, there were 47 students in second grade assigned to two classrooms that had a total of 48 student stations.

A. K. Suter Elementary's exceptional education program was limited to a single class for 40 gifted students, which was assigned to the largest classroom in the school (1,184 square feet). There were no classrooms in A. K. Suter Elementary that are used for other purposes, and one fourth grade class and one fifth grade class were assigned to a relocatable classroom.

Kindergarten classes in Beulah Elementary were assigned to rooms with space sufficient for 24 student stations. The average number of students assigned to each kindergarten classroom was 29.0, and the ratio of students to teachers and teacher aides was 14.5. One teacher aide was assigned to each kindergarten classroom. Although the number of students assigned to *first grade* classes was much lower than the number of students assigned to *kindergarten* classrooms (21-23 as compared with 28-30), the first grade ratio of students to teachers and teacher aides was much higher because only a fractional part of one aide was assigned to first grade classrooms.

The emphasis on lower class size in Beulah Elementary was limited to kindergarten and first grade. The average numbers of students assigned to second, third, fourth and fifth grade classrooms were 25.3, 28.3, 27.5, and 25.0, respectively. The number of students assigned to second and third grade classrooms consistently exceeded the number of student stations designated for those rooms based on their size. For example, there were a total of 91 student stations designated for Beulah Elementary's four third-grade classrooms, and 113 students were assigned to those rooms. The numbers of students assigned to fourth and fifth grade classroom were nearly equal to the numbers of student stations designated for those rooms.

There were no other kindergarten, primary or intermediate classrooms used for purposes other than basic education. Beulah Elementary used only two exceptional education resource rooms for its exceptional education program.

Palm Beach County: Starlight Cove Elementary and S. D. Spady Elementary

Palm Beach County's policy relating to class size is also reflected in its staffing formula. That formula allocates one teacher for every 26 students in kindergarten, first grade and second grade; and one teacher for every 29.5 students in grades three, four and five.

S. D. Spady Elementary is a Montessori magnet school that served 561.03 full-time-equivalent students. Almost all of its students (87.9%) were enrolled in basic programs; the remaining students (10.6% of the total) were enrolled in exceptional child programs and at-risk programs (1.5% of the total). In contrast, Starlight Cove Elementary is a much larger elementary school (1,210.86 full-time-equivalent students). Almost three-quarters (68.4%) of its student population were enrolled in basic education programs, and the remaining students were enrolled in exceptional education programs (14.4% of the total) and at-risk programs (17.2% of the total). The average number of Starlight Cove Elementary students assigned to grades kindergarten through three classrooms was 30.8 and the average number of S. D. Spady Elementary students assigned to grades kindergarten through three classrooms was 24.0. The ratio of students to teachers and teachers aides for those grades was 22.5:1 for Starlight Cove Elementary and 12.9:1 for S. D. Spady Elementary.

S. D. Spady Elementary's status as a magnet school explains its unusually low average class size for kindergarten classrooms. Kindergarten classrooms are large (approximately 1,800 square feet), and two teachers, one teacher aide and approximately 40 pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students were assigned to each kindergarten room.

A combination of first, second and third grade students were assigned to each primary classroom. One teacher, one teacher aide and an average of 26.5 students were assigned to each of these primary classrooms. The average ratio of students to teachers and teacher aides in those rooms was 13.9:1. The larger average class size in these primary classrooms reflects the fact that most rooms used as primary classrooms are sufficiently large to have the capacity for 30-39 student stations, and a larger number of students are assigned to those larger rooms.

Students in grades four, five and six were grouped together and assigned to relocatable intermediate classrooms. One teacher, one teacher aide and an average of 30.0 students were assigned to each room. The ratio of students to teachers and teacher aides in these rooms was 16.7:1.

S. D. Spady Elementary does not list self-contained exceptional education classrooms in its inventory of school space. It's exceptional students are served by resource teachers who move from room to room or who work with students one-on-one or in small groups "pulled

out" of regular classrooms. There were only two rooms listed as basic education classrooms in the school's inventory of space that were not used as regular kindergarten, primary or intermediate rooms; one was used as a computer lab and the other was used as a reading resource room.

At Starlight Cove Elementary, there were a total of 193 kindergarten students assigned to six classrooms. Every room was assigned 6-9 more students than the number of student stations designated for the room. One teacher aide was assigned to each kindergarten classroom. The average number of students assigned to each kindergarten classroom was 32.2, and the ratio of students to teachers and teacher aides was 16.1:1.

On the one hand, the average number of students in Starlight Cove *first grade* classrooms was smaller than the average number of students assigned to *kindergarten* classrooms (28.1 as compared with 32.2). On the other hand, there were fewer teacher aides assigned to first grade classes than to kindergarten classes (four aides for seven classrooms, as compared with six aides for six classrooms). As a result, the ratio of first grade students to teachers and teacher aides is higher than the ratio of kindergarten students to teacher and aides (17.9:1 as compared with 16.1:1). Second and third grade classrooms did not benefit either from fewer students or more teacher aides. More students were assigned to second and third grade classrooms, and no aides were assigned to those rooms. The average number of students assigned to second grade rooms was 32.9, and the average number of students assigned to third grade rooms was 30.1 Also, classrooms were consistently assigned more students than the rooms had designated student stations. For example, there were a total of 230 second grade students assigned to seven classrooms that had a total of 174 student stations. The average class size for fourth grade classrooms was not much different than the average size for third grade (30.2); however, the average class size for fifth grade classrooms jumped to 40.5.

Starlight Cove Elementary used three exceptional education classrooms, an elementary resource room, and an intermediate relocatable classroom for its exceptional student education program. The average number of students assigned to these rooms was 10.5. Starlight Cove Elementary also used three rooms of classroom size as computer labs and three other similarly sized rooms as art and music labs. Starlight Cove Elementary also employed nine language arts teachers who functioned as ESOL teachers and who occupied two elementary resource rooms and seven exceptional student education classrooms. The extensive nature of this ESOL program

might represent a resource constraint associated with a high average class size in basic education classrooms.

Pinellas County: Azalea Elementary and Southern Oak Elementary

Pinellas County's policy relating to class size is also reflected in its staffing formula. That formula allocates one teacher for every 23 students in kindergarten through third grade; and one teacher for every 30 students in grades four, five and six.

Azalea Elementary and Southern Oak Elementary were virtually the same size; Azalea had a total of 740.32 full-time-equivalent students and Southern Oak had 690.08 full-time-equivalent students. Most of both schools' students (70.1% for Azalea and 73.2% for Southern Oak) were enrolled in basic programs; the remaining students were enrolled in exceptional child programs (27.5% of Azalea's students and 24.2% of Southern Oak's students) and at-risk programs (2.5% of Azalea's students and 2.6% of Southern Oaks's students). The average number of Azalea Elementary students in grades kindergarten through three classrooms was 24.4 and the average number of Southern Oak Elementary students in grades kindergarten through three classrooms was 20.2. The ratio of students to teachers and teacher aides for Southern Oak Elementary was 19.1:1; Azalea Elementary did not use any teacher aides.

Southern Oak operated its kindergarten program in rooms that are sufficiently large to allow 24 and 25 student stations; five of a total of six kindergarten rooms were assigned 18 students and the sixth was assigned 19 students. An average of 22 students were assigned to first grade classrooms, and average class sizes for second and third grade classrooms were 20.8 and 21.0, respectively. In contrast, the average class size of fourth and fifth grade classrooms rose to 24.7. However, because Southern Oak Elementary intermediate rooms are sufficiently large to accommodate 29 student stations in each room, the number of students actually assigned to each classroom was less than the number of student stations designated for the room. The seven classrooms used for fourth and fifth grades were sufficient for 203 student stations, and only 173 students were actually assigned to those rooms.

Southern Oak Elementary's exceptional student education program used two primary classrooms and one intermediate classroom. The stage area near the school's dining room was used also for instructional purposes by a speech pathologist and by an educable mentally handicapped teacher. The average number of students per teacher for Southern Oak Elementary's six exceptional

education classrooms was 16.3. The ratio of students to exceptional education teachers and teacher aides was 10.9:1. Two other classroom spaces, one designated in the school house inventory as a language arts lab and the other designated as a primary classroom, were used as dropout prevention program classrooms with an average classroom size of 21.0 students.

The average number of students in all grades kindergarten through three classrooms is relatively high (24.4) because the average class size for second grade was 28.5 and the average class size for third grade was 26.0. Intermediate rooms were used for second and third grade classrooms, most of which have 960 square feet, which is sufficient to generate 30 student stations in each room. The number of students assigned to those rooms closely matched the number of student stations designated for the rooms, and no teacher aides were assigned to the rooms to lower the ratio of students to classroom adults.

A priority for Azalea Elementary was its exceptional education program. Two kindergarten rooms were used as pre-kindergarten handicapped classrooms for 7 students each, and six permanent and four relocatable intermediate rooms were used for emotionally handicapped, severely emotionally disturbed, autistic and specific learning disability classrooms. The average number of students assigned to these exceptional student education classrooms was 10.5. The ratio of exceptional students to teachers and teacher aides in these rooms was 5.9:1. In addition to the twelve classrooms used as self-contained exceptional student education classrooms, one intermediate classroom was used as a resource room for severely emotionally handicapped students, one was used as a resource room for a gifted teacher, and one intermediate room was used as a classroom for 19 dropout prevention program students. One intermediate room each was used as a music lab and an art lab, and one intermediate room was used for the school's Literacy Success Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Option #1: Restrict the allocation of incentive funds. Most school districts have staffing formulas that allocate staff to schools based on the school's student enrollment. In the districts included in this report, staffing ratios for grades kindergarten through three vary. For example, St. Johns County allocates one kindergarten teacher for every twenty (20) kindergarten students, whereas Palm Beach County allocates one kindergarten teacher for every twenty-six (26) students. Therefore, one of the most direct ways for state action to influence

elementary school class size is to influence district allocation formulas and class size policies. If the Legislature should decide to go beyond its current incentive funding approach and to *require* lower class sizes, proviso language such as the following could be added to current proviso language in the GAA: “Funds in Specific Appropriation 118 for Class Size Reduction shall not be allocated to any district in which there is an elementary school that has an average class size in grades kindergarten through three that exceeds twenty (20) students.”

Policy Option #2: Require district to build smaller elementary classrooms. Data reviewed in this report strongly suggest that the size of a classroom is directly related to the number of students assigned to that room. Rooms with 25 or 30 student stations are much more likely to have more than 20 students assigned to them than are classrooms specifically designed for 20 students. If the Legislature should decide to *require* lower class sizes, the Legislature should consider limiting the distribution of PECO funds for construction of elementary schools only to schools built with kindergarten and primary classrooms small enough to accommodate no more than twenty (20) student stations.

Policy Option #3: Establish kindergarten, first, second and third grade classes as the highest priority for the use of kindergarten and primary rooms. Data reviewed in this report also suggest that a one-to-one correspondence does not exist between a school district’s staffing formula and the ratio of students to teachers in kindergarten and primary grades. Just because an allocation formula provides one teacher for every 20 kindergarten students, for example, does not mean that there are no more than 20 kindergarten students in every kindergarten classroom. Student enrollments fluctuate daily and weekly as families move into and out of a district, and other exigencies affect a school’s ability to control class sizes. Also, schools have program priorities. Data support the observation that special populations are served in classrooms with lower class sizes than kindergarten and primary classes. Exceptional student education, English for speakers of other languages, and at-risk programs all have fewer students than kindergarten or primary classes. For example, it is not uncommon for an intermediate classroom with 25 or more student stations to be utilized as a classroom for 6-12 exceptional students. The larger the number of special students the schools serves, the greater the likelihood that additional space for kindergarten or primary classes will

become increasingly scarce. Some schools must use the stage in a dining area or convert a room intended as an art or music room for use as a classroom. Schools also use smaller resource rooms as classrooms. If the Legislature should decide that reduction of class size should be schools’ highest priority, the Legislature could require that any room designated in the school house inventory as a kindergarten, primary, or intermediate classroom must be used as a basic education classroom unless the average class size for grades kindergarten through three is less than 20 students. New construction, remodeling and relocatable classrooms would continue to be optional ways to provide necessary expansion space for other programs.

Staff Recommendation #1: Require verification of current staff and student assignment data, require more uniform student schedule coding, and link facilities data with student and staff data. It is recommended that the DOE should work with districts to verify both staff and student assignment data. For example, the databases should more clearly show which students are assigned to a specific teacher and should provide for special situations such as year round schools and students who are assigned to teachers for only a part of the day. The Department should also work with districts to revise the current staff and student databases as necessary in order to link data about facilities with data about staff and students. To shape a class size reduction state policy, it would be helpful to easily and reliably access the state’s databases to learn how many students and teacher aides are assigned to a particular teacher as well as to know the type and size of room to which they are assigned. The DOE should also require districts to achieve greater uniformity in the coding of student assignment data so it will be possible with greater accuracy to know how many students are assigned to each teacher.

Staff Recommendation #2: Achieve consistency between legislative proviso and substantive law. Legislative proviso continues to ask districts to reduce class size with a combination teachers and teacher aides. The Maximum Class Size Study Act of 1998 addresses only the ratio of students to classroom teachers. Either proviso should be changed to be consistent with the Class Size Study Act or the reverse should occur so districts will know clearly the standard against which they are judged.

COMMITTEE(S) INVOLVED IN REPORT (*Contact first committee for more information.*)

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MEMBER OVERSIGHT

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