

revised to refer to “full-time-equivalent” rather than “full-time”. This permitted compliance with the goal while not necessarily having the same teacher aide in the class all day - more than one aide could be used as long as a teacher aide was present during the entire time students were in class.

DOE Findings

DOE has performed a state-wide analysis of class size reduction efforts. The following data is reported for kindergarten through grade 3:

Selected Findings for Kindergarten

- There was a shift in the distribution of classes by membership count from fall 1995 to fall 1996. In fall 1995, 11.9% of kindergarten classes had 20 or fewer students. By fall 1996, 26.3% of all kindergarten classes had 20 or fewer students.
- From fall 1995 to fall 1996, the total number of regular kindergarten classes increased from 6,798 to 7,143, a 5.1 percent increase. By comparison, the total number of students in these classes actually decreased by 0.4 %.
- The proportion of kindergarten classes with 30 or more students decreased from 9.7% in fall 1995 to 5.5% in fall 1996.
- In fall 1995, the number of classes having 25 or fewer students exceeded the number with 26 or more by a count of 4,545 (66.9%) to 2,253 (33.1%). In fall 1996, the number of classes having 25 or fewer students exceeded the number with 26 or more by a count of 5,411 (75.8%) to 1,732 (24.2%).
- The midpoint (median) membership count fell from 24 in 1995 to 23 in 1996.
- For kindergarten classes counted in this study, the average class size fell from 24.40 in fall 1995 to 23.13 in fall 1996.

Selected Findings for First Grade

- There was a shift in the distribution of classes by membership count from fall 1994 to fall 1995, which continued from fall 1995 to fall 1996. In fall 1994, 10.6% of first-grade classes had 20 or fewer students. By fall 1995, 20.2% of all first-grade classes had 20 or fewer students. And by fall 1996, this figure was at 29.2% of all first-grade classes.
- From fall 1995 to fall 1996, the total number of regular first-grade classes increased from 7,009 to 7,331, a 4.6 % increase. By comparison, the total number of students in these classes increased by just 1.7 %.

- The proportion of first-grade classes with 30 or more students decreased from 6.1% in fall 1995 to 4.9% in fall 1996.
- In fall 1995, the number of classes having 25 or fewer students exceeded the number with 26 or more by a count of 4,977 (71.0%) to 2,032 (29.0%). In fall 1996, the number of classes having 25 or fewer students exceeded the number with 26 or more by a count of 5,575 (76.0%) to 1,756 (24.0%).
- The midpoint (median) membership count was 23 in both fall 1995 and fall 1996.
- For first-grade classes counted in this study, the average class size fell from 23.57 in fall 1995 to 22.92 in fall 1996.

Findings for Second-Grade Classes

For second-grade classes, membership counts varied little from fall 1995 to fall 1996, with slightly reduced class size. As noted earlier, applicable legislation assigned priority to reducing the size of kindergarten and first-grade classes, with second- and third-grade classes receiving the next levels of priority, respectively.

Total second-grade classes: October 1995: 6,409
October 1996: 6,617

Average class size: October 1995: 24.95
October 1996: 24.65

Data source: Fall survey data for October 1995 and 1996 as refined by districts in January 1996 and 1997.

Findings for Third-Grade Classes

For third-grade classes, as with second-grade classes, there was little change in membership counts from fall 1995 to fall 1996, with a slightly reduced average class size but slightly fewer classes with 20 or fewer students.

Total third-grade classes: October 1995: 6,183
October 1996: 6,342

Average class size: October 1995: 25.47
October 1996: 25.30

Data source: Fall survey data for October 1995 and 1996 as refined by districts in January 1996 and 1997.

Findings for Multi-Grade Classes

Multi-grade classes account for substantially fewer classes statewide than single-grade classes.

Total multi-grade classes (K-3): October 1995: 1,556
October 1996: 1,585

Average class size for multi-grade classes: October 1996: 23.53
(Not available for 1995.)

Data source: Fall survey data for October 1995 and 1996 as refined by districts in January 1996 and 1997.

Districts' Use of Appropriations in Reducing Class Size

Districts that indicated success in reducing class size used appropriations for that purpose in similar ways, depending on the size of the district. Certain larger districts, confronted with the problem of spreading allocations too thinly among large numbers of schools, made decisions about which schools and grade levels were to receive priority. Policies and procedures used by some of the larger districts include the following:

- giving primary (or all) attention to kindergarten and first-grade classes;
- giving top priority to schools with the highest percentage of students on free and reduced-price lunch;
- adding teachers to kindergarten and first grade, to the extent possible, based on vacant classrooms; and
- using allocations mostly for human resources (i.e., adding teachers and teacher aides)--which is considered more time- and dollar-efficient than constructing new classrooms and buildings.

Districts showed some variation in their strategy for hiring staff to meet the class size goal. Volusia County, for instance, concentrated on adding full-time-equivalent aides to classes to help meet a staff allocation of one teacher and one teacher aide for every twenty-six students in kindergarten and first grade. Certain districts, such as Sarasota County and Orange County, used the funding solely to hire new teachers, concentrating on establishing additional classes and thereby reducing the number of students per class, rather than hiring teacher aides for classes with more than 20 students. Other districts hired a mix of new teachers and teacher aides.

In Pasco County, with the state's largest number of multi-grade classes (K-3), decisions about the use of funds for new staff were made at the school level. Availability of classroom space was a key factor in determining whether teachers or teacher aides were hired. Schools in the district also

concentrated on the use of full-time-equivalent teacher aides, as distinguished from fractional-time aides, for many of their multi-grade classes.

Some districts (for example, Baker and Duval) have indicated that they added their own funds to the state-allocated funds in order to implement their plans to make classes smaller.

DOE Outlook

With continuing expansion of Florida's student population, the issue of crowding in classrooms is likely to remain a concern in the foreseeable future. Accommodating student population growth and limiting the size of classes in the primary grades will require not only funding for new staff and/or facilities, including funding to be used specifically for class-size reduction, but creative management of resources. Increasingly, schools and districts are having to employ innovative strategies in scheduling classes, such as block scheduling, to accommodate their growing student populations. Further innovations in the application of instructional technology--including computer-assisted instruction, the use of interactive media, and distance learning--may also provide part of the solution to the problem of crowding in Florida's public schools.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The committee substitute establishes legislative and school district goals regarding reductions in class size in elementary schools. Beginning with kindergarten in the 1998-99 school year, for kindergarten and grade 1 in the 1999-2000 school year, for kindergarten through grade 2 in the 2000-2001 school year, and kindergarten through grade 3 in the 2001-2002 school year, class sizes are not to exceed a ratio of 20 students per FTE teacher. Class sizes that exceed 20 students meet the goal if, for every 10 students above the base of 20, at least one FTE teacher aide is in the classroom for the same number of hours as the students. School districts must implement the provisions of the section to the extent that funds are provided through the General Appropriations Act.

Beginning January 1, 1999, DOE must annually report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House school district expenditures and class size reductions as a result of the act. DOE is required to perform a longitudinal study of the benefits to students and the impact on student achievement of small class size. The results of the study must be reported to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House by December 1, 2002.

School boards are encouraged to install secular character development programs, emphasizing qualities such as attentiveness, patience, and initiative, in elementary schools within the district.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The current Senate appropriations bill contains a \$100,000,000 allocation for class size reduction.

Since the installation of character development programs is encouraged rather than mandated, the cost of implementing such a program is indeterminate. Existing character development programs may be purchased for approximately \$35 per teacher, with additional charges for supplementary material.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
