

Quick Facts: Understanding Class Size Chaos

Click for a printable version of Class Size fact sheet.

OVERVIEW

The North Carolina General Assembly included new class size restrictions for grades K-3 in the 2017-18 budget, requiring school districts to reduce those class sizes while simultaneously taking away the funding flexibility districts have long relied upon to fund enhancement teachers for art, music, PE and world languages in those schools. The only funding for those positions was districts' flexibility to use the classroom teacher allotment for enhancement teachers. The combined effect is a massive unfunded mandate that would have required larger districts to find new classroom space and teachers and districts of all sizes to reduce their enhancement staffing. Legislative analysts warned lawmakers that these complications would arise if class sizes and allotment usage were restricted in this manner.

In the ensuing months, as school districts commenced planning for the 2017-18 academic year, the problem became less theoretical and districts were on the verge of layoffs and staff restructurings that were unpopular with parents. The NC House unanimously passed a bill ([HB13](#)) that would have allowed average district-wide class sizes up to three students above the funded student-teacher ratio, and individual classes of up to six students above the new limits in order to restore the flexibility districts historically used to fund enhancement positions. However, Senate leaders accused districts of having misspent "tens of millions of dollars" (though clearly no House members shared those concerns) and refused to vote on the bill. Instead, the new legislative budget simply delayed the class size restrictions for one year and imposed onerous, duplicative reporting requirements on district officials.

In October 2017, lawmakers returned to Raleigh for a special session to pass budget corrections and override vetoes. The House included the original HB13's class size flexibility in its budget corrections bill, but the Senate did not, and it was the Senate version that ultimately passed both chambers.

SPECIAL SESSION

NCGA members returned to Raleigh on **January 10, 2018 for a special session and did not take any action**. Citizens made their concerns about the [Class Size](#) mandates clear when the NCGA returned to Raleigh January 10th. Legislators were greeted by hundreds of citizens who were intent on finding solutions to the Class Size dilemma facing our school districts. Citizens emailed, tweeted, made phone calls, and visited the General Assembly for face-to-face conversations with legislators. *(For a historical overview on K-3 class size issues, see [here](#))*

During the January special session, Senator Chaudhuri introduced [SB703](#) which would allow more local flexibility in the K-3 class sizes and mimics the intent of the original [HB13](#). SB703 is similar to the action taken by the House to restore flexibility in October 2017.

The Senate leadership did not take up SB 703 during the special session. Speaking to the media, [Senator Barefoot](#) reported that the Senate was waiting for more data due in February before making any funding decisions. While the NCGA has already received information from the NCDPI, the Senate requested more information from school districts as part of the bill passed last year delaying the class size changes for a year. It is still uncertain as to whether a change based on the anticipated February enrollment data release would include more funding for enhancement teachers or yield another delay to K-3 class size restrictions (set to start with the 2018-19 school year).

While the Senate would not consider SB 703, Senator Alexander and Representative Craig Horn both signaled

a [possible resolution in March](#).

Further adding to the [speculation of a March resolution](#), Senators Alexander and Barringer met with Wake County school board members to discuss the class size issue. Both Senators confirmed they were drafting a new bill for consideration in March. How this bill aligns with the work done so far by Representative Horn and Senator Chaudhuri is unknown.

Responding to the media about Senator Alexander's plan to introduce a new bill in March, Senator Rabon [indicated](#) that a specific timeline to appropriate funds for the Class Size mandate had not been determined by Senate leadership. In all, members of the House and the Senate reported different views on how and when the class size mandate would be addressed by the Senate.

We continue to hear from the community! You want to know, where do we stand with a fix to the class size crisis and when will the NCGA act? Good question.

The **answers** are unclear. The Senate seems set to wait for more data but they could return and make decisions about funding or extending the deadline in March or in April. The Senate could also wait until the legislative short session starts in May before making a final decision.

We do know that the time is approaching that schools districts must present a budget to their local county commissioners without the information they need to draft a sound budgetary plan. Local school boards are still working to set budget and staffing plans with inadequate information. Without the information they need to draft a sound budgetary plan, school districts face the possibility of layoffs and increasing upper grade class sizes. School districts are worried about paying for art, music, PE and world language teachers without knowing how much the state will pay for these important positions. Legislators stated their intent to fund enhancement positions but offered no dollar amounts or guarantees. Art, music and PE are essential to a well-rounded public education. They are required subjects in the state-mandated curriculum.

What's next? Stay Tuned! We will be monitoring this issue daily and we will report back to you immediately on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#).

In the meantime, [talk to YOUR legislators](#) and let them hear your views. Share with them what is happening at your school. Stay on topic, be vigilant but be polite! Many legislators have a sincere interest in fixing this issue. Stay in contact with your legislators and work together to make this happen!

WHAT DO SCHOOL DISTRICTS WANT?

Restoration of provisions in the original HB13 bill, more time, and flexibility!

- Local school districts want the NCGA to restore the [original HB13 bill](#) to allow more local flexibility in K-3 class sizes.
- School districts are asking to have the enhancement teachers FULLY funded in January to allow time for local budgeting and to avoid lay-offs.
- School districts need an option for **obtaining hardship waivers to allow for more time to deal with these unfunded mandates**. Legislators could provide waiver mechanisms for the many districts that simply cannot reconcile K-3 class size restrictions with offering a robust, well-rounded education for all children. A hardship waiver for school districts that can justify the need for more time to find qualified teachers and additional classroom space should be allowed.
- Restore the 4th and 5th grade class size caps that were removed in 2013. **Class size matters at all K-12 age levels. We are putting the burden of lowering class sizes in K-3 on the shoulders of our 4th**

and 5th grade students as they prepare for middle school.

RESOURCES are ok but change the last date updated. Later Jen is supposed to add resources. Maybe the top ten ? BUT they can be added later POST this now.

Resources

- [Quick Facts: Understanding Class Size Chaos](#)
- [K-3 Class Size Mandate](#), Wake PTA & PSFNC, Dec. 13, 2017
- [K-3 Class Size Webinar](#) NCPTA & PSFNC, Dec. 7, 2017
- [K-3 Class Size Conversation \(Facebook Live\)](#), NC Justice Center & PSFNC, Dec. 18, 2017
- [Top 10 class size chaos talking points](#) by Kris Nordstrom, Dec. 18, 2017
- [NC School Board Association Resolution Regarding K-3 Class Size Reduction Implementation](#), Nov. 12, 2017
- [The Unraveling: Poorly Crafted Education Policies Are Failing North Carolina's Children](#) (NC Justice Center report includes analysis of multiple failures in mandating K-3 class size reductions), Dec. 2017
- [Class Size Chaos Report by The Education & Law Project](#)

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