

Legislation Modifying K-3 Class Size Reduction Gains House Approval; Moves To Senate

By Adam Pridemore for NCASA

[House Bill 13](#) aimed at modifying the maximum average class size and individual class size maximum for kindergarten through third grade was approved by the full House this morning in a unanimous 114-0 vote. The bill now heads to the Senate, where its fate is uncertain.

The legislation modifies a mandate in the 2016 state budget requiring all districts to comply with funded allotment ratios for grades K-3 and thereby reduce class sizes in those grades. While smaller class sizes are a goal all public schools and administrators support, the current mandate will create unintended consequences if not adjusted further by the General Assembly prior to the 2017-18 school year.

The issue of K-3 class size has become a very political issue this legislative session. Some political blogs and commentators, as well as some lawmakers, have accused the public education community of using this issue for political purposes with plans to accuse lawmakers of raising class size during the next round of elections if the current mandate is relaxed. This is a false assumption for the following reasons. First, NCASA does not have a Political Action Committee (PAC), does not donate money to candidates, does not endorse candidates, and otherwise stays out of elections and works only in a non-partisan manner with lawmakers and other state leaders. Secondly, the fix as written in House Bill 13 continues to reduce class size rather than raise it, although would allow a slower pace for lowering class sizes than now mandated in the 2016 state budget law.

Some lawmakers, as well as outside political blogs and commentators, also are accusing administrators of misusing funds the General Assembly provided districts for reducing class sizes in K-3 in recent years. To that end, the General Assembly's non-partisan Fiscal Research Division requested NCASA to send out a survey asking districts to identify how classroom teacher funding is being used at the local level. In the spirit of cooperation with lawmakers, NCASA sent the survey to all 115 local school districts on Sunday, February 5th. The collected data shows the vast majority of school districts are using their teacher allotment funds in the lawful manner that complies with the guidance on allowable uses provided by the Department of Public Instruction. For example, many districts have expended some of the increased teacher allotment funding aimed at reducing K-3 class size for other allowable and lawful purposes, such as retaining teacher assistants and funding enhancement teachers that also are critical resources for students in early grades.

NCASA will continue to work with the House and Senate to seek improvements on the K-3 class size issue, which is time-sensitive due to the fast-approaching spring hiring and county budget season.

To help NCASA to advocate effectively on this issue, it is important that school administrators not become adversarial, but instead recognize recent significant investments by the legislature in efforts to lower K-3 class sizes, as well as increase teacher pay, and their willingness to work with us on the best way to reduce class sizes moving forward. NCASA will

continue to keep our members up to date on this issue in future editions of *In The Know* as developments occur.