

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. Now, as planning for the 2018-19 school year approaches, the unfunded mandate is threatening districts once again.

SPECIAL SESSION

NCGA members will return to Raleigh on **January 10, 2018 for a special session**. **When they return, we are asking legislators to solve #ClassSizeChaos!** It is not fair for parents, teachers and school leaders to continue to worry about keeping their enhancement teachers as they try to meet mandated classroom space and staffing needs. Local district leaders cannot meet the fiscal or space requirements and have started to resort to worst case scenarios, including strategies like capping schools, laying-off teachers, doubling up classes, enhancement classes in hallways. This is on top of significantly increasing class sizes in grades 4 and 5, and potentially eliminating course offerings in middle school. All of this is just to find extra classroom space and money needed to keep their enhancement teachers. Obviously, this is not just a K-3 issue; it is a PreK-12 issue. This is not an urban district issue—it is a statewide issue, affecting small and rural districts as well.

School districts all across NC 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.

How will school districts find the physical space to house the additional classrooms needed to lower K-3 class size? Wake County reports they will need to create space for 559 new classrooms—the equivalent of 14 additional schools to meet the mandate!

Where are school boards going to find enough teachers? Considering that North Carolina has had a teacher shortage for years, are we instead going to have larger numbers of untrained teachers or temporary and unqualified substitutes in our classrooms?

For school districts that do have extra space, will plans to expand the number of Pre-K classrooms in the school district have to be shelved? Large districts do not have the space the restrictions will necessitate, and smaller, economically disadvantaged districts do not have the funds for both the extra K-3 classes and their current programming.

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.**

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- **Email your legislators** using the #ClassSizeChaos hashtag – show your support for making changes to class size restrictions and the implementation process. Here is a link for legislators and their contact information: <https://www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/engage/get-involved/>. Tell them **school districts need guaranteed funding and more time!**
- **Sign our petition:** www.publicschoolsfirstnc.org/current-petitions/
- Join the **Tweetstorm on January 9, 2018** from 4 pm - 6 pm (See our Facebook Event Page.)
- Join us on **January 10, 2018- Advocacy Day** at the NC General Assembly from 9 am to 1pm (come anytime you can) – we will visit legislators to talk about solving the #ClassSizeChaos. (See our Facebook Event Page.)
- **Stay Informed!**
 - Check our **website** frequently for updates on legislative meetings/actions that impact class size and other critical public education funding matters.
 - You can also sign up for our **newsletter** via our website.
 - When education news breaks, we tweet it! Follow us (@PS1NC)!
 - We post daily so like us on Facebook (facebook.com/publicschoolsfirstnc), this is the fastest way to stay current on all NC public education issues.

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