

Dear Sponsors of HB 591/SB 808 -

Two years ago, parents in Miami-Dade county began to notice that class sizes were larger than prior years (In re: Parents, teachers question class-size loophole. Miami Herald, 20, February 2015) contrary to a constitutional amendment, passed in 2002, to limit class sizes for core classes. An attempt by the legislature to amend it in 2010, via a referendum, to utilize a school-wide average to determine class size failed to pass.

The constitutional amendment has over the years been whittled down by the legislature by various means including defining most classes to be extracurricular classes instead of core classes if they may result in college credit (AP, IB and dual enrollment classes) or if they aren't named graduation requirements such as anything beyond algebra 2. The legislature then exempted in 2013 magnet and charter schools ("schools of choice") from strict class size requirements, and allowed them to utilize a school-wide average for calculating class size.

School districts then re-designated all of their schools to be schools of choice to utilize this exception. But labeling their schools as choice schools had attenuating problems.

For the past few years, districts have attempted to pass legislation to codify a school-wide average standard for all schools on the weak rationale that the constitutional amendment does not include a penalty provision, so the legislature is free to formulate a penalty it chooses even if contrary to the constitutional mandate.

A version of the prior maximum class size bills (HB 591/SB 808) is winding its way through the legislature again this year. In this version, however, the requirement of the districts to report to the Florida Department of Education the actual numbers of students per core class has been eliminated. The only way for the public to know whether the districts are in compliance with the class size amendment is to pursue a public records request for each individual school in the state.

The public has a right to know whether the districts are complying with the constitutional class size mandate on a classroom basis, not on a school-wide average basis. The legislature is not free to eliminate strict reporting requirements. This provision is contrary to the idea of transparency and accountability in government.

(signature)

PreK-12 Appropriations Committee

Manny.Diaz@myfloridahouse.gov, Jake.Raburn@myfloridahouse.gov,
Larry.Lee@myfloridahouse.gov, bruce.antone@myfloridahouse.gov,
Byron.Donalds@myfloridahouse.gov,
Randy.Fine@myfloridahouse.gov, Jason.Fischer@myfloridahouse.gov,
Roy.Hardemon@myfloridahouse.gov, Chris.Latvala@myfloridahouse.gov,
Ralph.Massullo@myfloridahouse.gov, Stan.McClain@myfloridahouse.gov,
Newt.Newton@myfloridahouse.gov,
Paul.Renner@myfloridahouse.gov, Jennifer.Sullivan@myfloridahouse.gov

Florida Senate Education Committee

hukill.dorothy@flsenate.gov, mayfield.debbie@flsenate.gov,
farmer.gary@flsenate.gov, galvano.bill@flsenate.gov, lee.tom@flsenate.gov,
simmons.david@flsenate.gov, simpson.wilton@flsenate.gov,
stewart.linda@flsenate.gov, thurston.perry@flsenate.gov