

March 8, 2022

Pat Ryan, Chairman
Yes for Okaloosa Schools
252 Olde Post Road
Niceville, FL 32578

Dear Mr. Ryan:

I am a teacher in Okaloosa County, and I would like to take a moment of your time to call your attention to overcrowded classes and the adverse effects they have on students, parents, teachers and education as a whole. I believe it is important for you to have a full understanding of the daily circumstances students and teachers have to contend with and the lack of remedies for parents or teachers to address them. It is also important to understand the ways Florida governors and legislators have conspired to work against the will of the people by quietly changing laws which result in making classrooms conditions more difficult for students and teachers.

Recognizing the relevance of smaller class sizes, twenty years ago Florida voters voted into law the class size amendment to the Florida Constitution. The amendment mandated class sizes to be no more than eighteen students in pre-k through third grade, twenty-two students in fourth grade through eighth grade, and twenty-five students in ninth grade through twelfth grade in core subject areas. Attached for your review is an August 11, 2020 Orlando Sentinel editorial by Scott Maxwell. It follows how the class size amendment came to be, its intentions, how the past and present Florida governors and legislatures have ignored the wishes of their constituents and circumvented Florida's Constitution.

No one disputes the educational, social, and psychological benefits students have with smaller class sizes. Overcrowded classrooms place students and teachers in an unfavorable learning and teaching environment. They create a noisy, stressful and frustrating environment for students and teachers. Overcrowding increases discipline issues. Teachers are compelled to direct their attention to disruptive students, taking away from valuable teaching time while struggling students fall further behind as teachers have limited time to give them the support they need. Smaller class sizes address all of these issues and more. Increased one-on-one time between student and teacher makes it easier for teachers to identify and address student learning or behavior issues. Students are more engaged to learn without distractions. Small class sizes provide more time for enhanced educational activities such as hands-on activities, guest speakers, field trips, etc. Most importantly smaller class sizes foster more understandable, meaningful and long-lasting relationships between students and teachers.

I have been teaching core subjects for many years and my colleagues and I have never had classes with a population that fell within the voter-approved class size amendment with the exception of three years after its implementation into the Florida State Constitution. My current classes range between 17-23% above the voter-approved class size amendment.

Parents and teachers have no recourse with respect to enforcement of the class size amendment. Overcrowded classrooms are systemic throughout the district, preventing parents from transferring their child to a school with smaller class sizes. Teachers have no one advocating for them. Teacher annual employment contracts discourages them from stepping forward publicly or privately to voice their concerns noted in this letter to their supervisors or the school board. To do so they are fearful of not having their annual contracts renewed and losing their jobs. It is pointless for parents and teachers to appeal to their state legislatures or the governor to voice their concerns of classroom overcrowding, as they are the ones perpetuating the practice of overcrowding as made clear in Mr. Maxwell's editorial.

Teacher morale, burnout, and retention are noticeable adverse effects of overcrowded classrooms. Complying with the Florida voter-approved constitutional amendment, limiting class sizes is not impossible to achieve. St. Johns County District Schools' compliance with the constitutional amendment is used as a teacher recruiting tool in the attached St. Johns' website. Okaloosa County was able to achieve this for three years before the amendment was modified unknowingly to voters.

Teaching educational standards and providing a quality education to students are state mandates teachers must follow whether or not their classrooms are overcrowded. It is unfair to require high-performance from students and teachers when the environment keeps changing in unfavorable ways.

The voters of twenty years ago who voted for the class size amendment have moved on with their lives. They were confident and felt a sense of satisfaction in believing and participating in the democratic system where their votes counted for something and made a difference for generations of students to come. Unfortunately, today's students, parents, and teachers are contending with Florida statutes being manipulated by past and present governors and legislators ignoring the will of their constituents for smaller class sizes. No student has benefited from their practice of turning a blind eye toward their constituents' mandate, and the betrayal to voters has trickled down to the local school district. Governor DeSantis has visited Okaloosa schools on multiple occasions over the years, yet the district's superintendent and board members have not spoken out against the statute's manipulation of the class size amendment and its adverse impacts upon students, parents and teachers, and have instead embraced it.

Forgive me for contacting you anonymously for the reasons previously noted. I hope my anonymity does not take away your interest in pursuing facts presented in this letter and you agree that smaller class sizes is a worthwhile topic to pursue. Given the current conditions of overcrowded classrooms and reflecting upon this district's current and past views and policies and overall lack of effort to reduce class sizes, I am not confident I will be able to continue teaching until I am able to retire.

Thank you for taking the initiative to address problems facing Okaloosa schools. I have been following your Facebook and website, and the mention of small class sizes in these platforms would provide parents, my colleagues and me a measure of confidence that someone is looking into this overlooked and ignored topic. I look forward to you bringing to light to the public problems of overcrowded classrooms and the benefits smaller class sizes have for students, parents, teachers and the educational process.

Sincerely,

Hopeful Teacher

Cc: Tom McLaughlin, NWF Daily News
Tanner Stewart, 3 WEAR TV

Florida ignored voter mandate for small classes. Now social-distancing is even tougher | Commentary

By SCOTT MAXWELL

ORLANDO SENTINEL | AUG 11, 2020 AT 5:53 PM

All over Florida, schools are struggling to find the safest way to resume — hoping to provide small class sizes to allow for social distancing between students and staff.

Unfortunately, in Florida, that's a much bigger challenge than it should be.

Why? Because Florida lawmakers never shrunk class sizes down the way voters demanded nearly two decades ago.

While voters were crystal clear in 2002 — demanding no more than 18 students per class until third grade; no more than 22 students for grades 4 through 8; and no more than 25 students in high school — legislators basically ignored that mandate, leaving many classes packed with more kids.

We're talking classes with **30, 35 and more**.

So while other countries have provided road maps to re-opening with strict, small-class guidelines — no more than **10 or 12 students** per class in Denmark, Germany and Belgium, for instance — Florida won't be anywhere close.

In fact, most local school districts aren't setting *any* kind of specific, smaller class-size goals. That's for one simple reason: They don't have enough teachers.

The state never helped hire as many as it should have after the class-size amendment passed. So now, we're facing even bigger problems in the pandemic age.

This mess started the way so many Florida messes start — with the politicians. Left or right, they never put enough money into public education.

Floridians tried to fix things, first voting to create the state's "Education Lottery." But lawmakers played shell games with that mandate. In fact, 20 years after the lottery debuted, the state actually spent a lower percentage of its budget on public education.

So voters tried again — this time with a class-size amendment. Citizens thought: *If we change the constitution to specifically say no more than 25 students in every class, the state will to comply, right?*

Wrong. Lawmakers immediately began looking for loopholes.

First, they tried to repeal the class-size mandate ... and failed.

Then they started playing wickedly creative word games, redefining basic words ... like "core."

See, voters had tried to be reasonable by approving amendment language that said the class-size caps would only apply to *core* classes, not extracurriculars. That made sense, since parents weren't really worried about a band or chorus class with 30 or 40 students. They were worried about math, science and English.

But in 2011, Gov. Rick Scott and the Legislature passed a new law reducing the number of classes that qualified as "core" from 849 all the way down to 304.

Suddenly everything from pre-calculus and trigonometry to American literature and marine science was considered "extracurricular" or exempt from class-size rules. That included every single AP class in the state.

Voters had attempted to allow for flexibility and common sense. Florida politicians made them pay for it.

And the politicians didn't stop there. Lawmakers also decided to redefine what the word "each" meant.

The amendment clearly said that class-size caps should apply to “each teacher.” But lawmakers rewrote the rules to say that the caps could instead apply to school-wide averages at most districts.

A core English class that was supposed to have no more than 25 students could now have 35 students ... as long as some other class in the school had 15.

Thanks to all these political word games, Florida’s class sizes remained large.

And now, most local school districts say that, while they will try to keep class sizes as small as possible, the only firm commitment they can make is to adhere to Florida’s existing, loosey-goosey pre-pandemic standards.

One saving grace — with regard to social-distancing and in-person learning, anyway — is that most families so far seem to be opting for online learning. In other words: We’ll have fewer bodies in schools because fewer families are comfortable being there.

But there will also be fewer teachers for those classrooms since many, if not most, teachers are switching to online teaching as well. Seminole County Superintendent Walt Griffin said staffing challenges will be “complex.”

The bottom line: There weren’t enough teachers when everyone was healthy. There certainly aren’t enough now.

Obviously, class size is just one aspect of safely reopening schools.

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention **says** smaller class sizes “are generally associated with less transmission in schools,” the health organization stresses other safe practices — including sanitation, keeping sick people home and operating classes as “cohorts” where the same group of students stay together for most of the day and teachers swap out.

But Florida is starting from behind — with more students in classrooms than voters demanded nearly two decades ago.

All because lawmakers thought it’d be funny to play games with the state’s constitution. I don’t know anyone who’s laughing now.

smaxwell@orlandosentinel.com



Staff Recruitment

St. Johns County School District

[I'm Ready To Apply!](#)[Home](#) [A Great Place to...](#) [Live](#) [Work](#) [Play](#)

Class Size Amendment Information

You are here: [Home](#) » [Staff Recruitment](#) » [Class Size Amendment Information](#)



Why SJCS?



Florida's Class Size Reduction Amendment History

In 2002, citizens approved an amendment to the Florida Constitution that set limits on the number of students in core classes (Math, English, Science, etc.) in the state's public schools. Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, the maximum number of students in each core class would be:

- 18 students in prekindergarten through grade 3;
- 22 students in grades 4 through 8; and
- 25 students in grades 9 through 12.

In 2003, the Florida Legislature enacted Chapter 2003-391, Laws of Florida which implemented the amendment by requiring the number

Recruitment Events

[Upcoming Recruitment Fairs](#)[Photos from Past Recruitment Fairs](#)

Teaching in Florida

[Benefits of Teaching in Florida from Out-of-State](#)[Class Size Amendment Information](#)[Florida's Professional Code of Conduct](#)[Teacher Discounts](#)

of students in each classroom to be reduced by at least two students per year beginning in the 2003-04 school year, until the maximum number of students per classroom did not exceed the requirements in law. Compliance with the amendment would be determined as follows:

- 2003-2004, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 at the district level
- 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 at the school level
 - o The 2009 Legislature extended the calculation at the school level for an additional year to include 2009-2010.
- 2010-2011 and subsequent years at the classroom level

For more information, visit the [FLDOE Website](#) or the [FL Department of State Website](#)

St. Johns County and the Class Size Amendment

St. Johns County schools are in compliance with the class size amendment. In classes where enrollment is above the allotted number, an associate teacher is placed in the classroom as support for the lead teacher. For secondary schools, this amendment is only for core classes like Science, Math, English, and Social Studies. It does not hold for AP, IB, AICE, or elective courses. However, our schools ensure that the number of students does not exceed a number that ensures optimal learning for those courses.

- 18 students in prekindergarten through grade 3;
- 22 students in grades 4 through 8; and
- 25 students in grades 9 through 12.

Resources for New Teachers

[Bring Your Own Device \(BYOD\)](#)

[Acronyms Used in St. Johns County Schools](#)

[Classroom Technology](#)

[C-Palms – A Closer Look](#)

[C-Palms – Hands-On Overview](#)

[New Teacher Support Program](#)

[Interviewing Tips](#)

[New Teacher Survival Kit](#)

[Pay For Performance Base Salary Schedule for New Hires](#)

[Online Alternative Modules](#)

[Teacher Evaluation Model](#)

[Teaching Students with Disabilities – Questions and Answers](#)

[The 9 High-Yield Instructional Strategies](#)

About St. Johns County School District

[Associate Teacher Model](#)

[Fast Facts About Our District](#)

[Half-Cent Sales Surtax Referendum](#)

[Half-Cent Sales Surtax CAC – Annual Report](#)

[School Calendar](#)

[School Directory](#)

[Interactive Map of School Locations](#)

[School Locations Printable PDF](#)

[St. Johns County Academies](#)

St. Johns County

Schools

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St. Augustine, FL 32084

(904) 547-7500