

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill No: HB 158

49th Legislature, 1st Session, 2009

Short Title: Decrease Class Size for Grades 4, 5 & 6

Sponsor(s): Representative Al Park and Others

Analyst: Kathleen Forrer

Date: February 10, 2009

Bill Summary:

HB 158 amends the *School Personnel Act* to reduce the maximum average class load for an elementary school teacher at an individual school from 24 to 22 students per classroom when averaged among grades 4, 5, and 6.

Fiscal Impact:

HB 158 makes no appropriation.

Fiscal Issues:

Based on a school-by-school analysis of 40th day enrollment data provided by the Public Education Department (PED) and the average salary for an elementary teacher, also provided by PED, the Legislative Education Study Committee staff estimate the total cost of implementing the class size reduction mandated in HB 158 to be approximately \$12.9 million:

2008-2009 Average Elementary School Teacher's Salary	\$45,159
Plus Fringe Benefits at 30.9% (New Employees)	\$13,954
Total Salary & Benefits	<u>\$59,113</u>
Additional Teachers Needed (FTE)	218.21
Estimated Cost (FTE x Total Salary & Benefits)	<u>\$12,899,048</u>

Although PED's analysis of HB 158 indicates that the current average teacher's salary is \$41,637 per year, 40th day data from the Student Teacher Accountability Reporting System (STARS) shows that the average salary for an elementary teacher for school year 2008-2009 is \$45,159.

PED also notes that school districts and charter schools may also incur additional costs related to increased custodial and maintenance needs, as well as the need for additional classrooms.

Issues:

According to a review of the research on class-size reduction undertaken by the Education Commission of the States, the evidence regarding whether small classes improve student achievement is mixed and cites the following research results:

- Students in early grades learn more and continue to have an edge over the rest of their peers when they return to normal classrooms. The impact is greatest and longer-lasting if they remain in small classes, however.

- The payoff in terms of student achievement gains does not translate into a cost-effective investment. Tutoring and direct instruction appear to be more cost-effective.
- Kindergarten through third grade students benefit most, as do minority students in urban schools.
- Class-size reduction cannot be isolated as the sole factor for increased student achievement.
- Reading and math scores improve for some students in comparison to peers in regular-size classes.
- Smaller classes force districts to hire significantly more teachers and create more classroom space.
- Effectiveness depends on whether teachers adapt their teaching methods to take advantage of small classes and have more focused time with students.
- Small classes result in fewer classroom distractions and more time for teachers to devote to each student.

In a report entitled *Class Size: Counting Students Can Count*, the American Educational Research Association makes the following observation:

The most dramatic impact seems to be achieved by reaching students early. Ideally, students should experience small classes of 13 to 17 students when entering school, in either kindergarten or first grade. While there is strong evidence of academic improvement during the first two years spent in a small class, there is more ambiguity about the value of additional years. It is not certain that there are added gains during second- and third-grade small classes. Yet, recent studies indicate that, after the students have returned to regular-sized classes (in fourth through eighth grade), students who were in small classes for three or four years retain a greater advantage.

Finally, the Education Commission of the States concludes that reducing class size is most effective when the following conditions are met:

- classes are reduced to between 15 and 19 students;
- particular schools are targeted, especially those with low-achieving and low-income students;
- teachers are provided ongoing, high-quality professional development to make the most of the smaller class size conditions; and
- teachers are well-qualified and a challenging curriculum is used for every student.

Related Bills:

None known as of February 10, 2009.