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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PAPER

Implementation of the Class Size Amendment in Charter Schools

Purpose

The Constitutional Amendment for class size reduction adopted by Florida voters in November 2002 and implemented by the Legislature in Senate Bill 30A in May 2003 measures compliance based upon district averages during the first three years of implementation (School Years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006). Charter schools are not included in district averages because they are independently governed. As a result, the progress of a particular charter school can only be measured at the individual school level. Until school-level compliance is required for all public schools in School Year 2006-2007, charter schools, in conjunction with their sponsors, will be required to develop accountability plans for the use of class size reduction funds and to measure progress toward meeting school-level compliance. Please refer to the Class Size Reduction website at <http://www.firn.edu/doe/arm/class-size.htm> for all previous memoranda related to the class size reduction requirements. The purposes of this Technical Assistance Paper are the following:

1. To provide additional guidance to charter schools regarding the implementation of the class size amendment.
2. To explain how the class size amendment will affect charter schools.
3. To explain how charter schools should use the class size reduction funds.

Background

Section 1 of Article IX of the Florida Constitution was amended in November 2002 to provide that, by the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, the maximum number of students in core-curricula courses assigned to a teacher in each of the following three grade ranges shall be:

- 18 students in Prekindergarten through Grade 3
- 22 students in Grades 4 through 8
- 25 students in Grades 9 through 12

Core curricula courses for class size reduction are those belonging to the following areas: Mathematics, Language Arts/Reading, Science, Social Studies, Foreign Language, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Exceptional Student Education (ESE), and courses taught in traditional self-contained elementary school classrooms. Specific legal descriptions of these courses may be found in s. 1003.01(14), Florida Statutes.

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Class Size Reduction Time Schedule

Under Senate Bill 30A, compliance with the class size reduction requirements will be measured at the *district* level during the School Years 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006. In School Years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, compliance with the class size reduction requirements will be measured at the *school* level.

In 2008-2009, compliance will be measured at the *classroom* level. All Florida public schools, including charter schools, are to be in full compliance with the amendment's provisions beginning in School Year 2010-2011.

As stated previously, since charter schools are independently governed and free standing public schools, they are administratively outside the school districts and are not included in district class size averages. Attempting to apply "district averages" to charter schools would be impossible. Therefore, a method must be put in place which simultaneously ensures that charter schools will be in full compliance by the start of School Year 2010-2011, that recognizes the independent administrative character of charter schools, and that allows charter schools maximum flexibility in fulfilling the constitutional mandate.

Charter School Implementation of Class Size Reduction

Until school-level compliance is required for all public schools, each charter school will develop an individualized Class Size Reduction Plan (Accountability Plan) for the use of class size reduction funds and to measure progress toward meeting school-level compliance. Charter schools will be expected to develop their plans in conjunction with their sponsors and work closely with their school district finance officers and MIS directors.

The method for charter schools to come into full compliance by the constitutional deadline of the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year will be as follows:

- No later than October 15, 2004, each currently operating charter school must submit to its sponsor an individualized Class Size Reduction Plan (Accountability Plan) for reaching the constitutional maximum class sizes by School Year 2010-2011.

While there is no template or approved outline for developing the plan, it is to be sufficiently detailed so as to allow an analysis of the success of the charter school in meeting its goals. The accountability plan should describe how the class size reduction (CSR) funds are being used and provide measures of progress toward meeting school-level compliance. The plan should include answers to questions including, but not limited to, the following:

- Is the school currently over the cap?
 - What will be done in 2004-05 and 2005-06 to reach the 2006-2007 school-level cap?
 - How did the school use the CSR funds in School Year 2003-2004?
 - How did the CSR funds meet the goals set?
 - What adjustments need to be made in School Year 2004-2005?
 - How will CSR funds be used in the coming years?
 - How did the charter school coordinate with the sponsor in developing the plan?
- No later than November 8, 2004, the sponsor shall review the charter school's plan and determine if additional information or revisions are necessary based upon the October 2004 student survey. If revisions are necessary, the sponsor will contact and coordinate with the charter school to ensure that the plan addresses all identified concerns.

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- By November 22, 2004, the sponsor will submit plans electronically to the Department of Education for review by the Commissioner of Education. The school district must summarize the status of the charter school plan in complying with plan development timelines and requirements. Plans are to be submitted to: Karen.Hines@fldoe.org.
- The Commissioner will review the plans and determine if additional evidence is necessary to ensure compliance with the CSR provisions. Schools and their sponsors will be notified of the results of the state level review. Schools with deficient plans will revise their plans according to timelines and recommendations established by the Commissioner.

Uses of Class Size Reduction Funds

The Class Size Reduction allocation is an operating categorical that is based on the weighted FTE. This funding is provided to all charter schools, beginning in the 2003-2004 school year. Senate Bill 30A provides for considerable flexibility in the uses of the funds provided for the implementation of the class size reduction requirements.

Charter schools that are not in compliance with the constitutional maximums may use the funds to defray expenses necessary “to reduce class size in any lawful manner.” Any lawful manner may include, for those charter schools that own, are building to own, or are purchasing facilities, expenditures for such mortgage payments, remodeling or construction as are necessary to expand its facilities to allow it to meet the class size requirements. For those charter schools that achieve, and then maintain, the maximum allowable class sizes prior to the 2010 deadline, the funds may be used for any lawful operational expenses, with priority given to utilization of the funds to increase teacher salaries.

Contacts for Additional Information

Charter schools are to work with their districts to verify that the calculations of the baseline data collected in 2003 and 2004 are accurate. Contact the MIS Department at the school district for additional information on calculation of class size averages. For specific questions regarding data that cannot be answered locally, contact Martha Haynes, Education Information and Accountability Services, at (850) 245-9912 or martha.haynes@fldoe.org.

For additional information on funding, contact Linda Champion, Office of Funding and Financial Reporting, at (850) 245-0406 or linda.champion@fldoe.org.

For questions and information on charter school class size reduction strategies and techniques, contact Nancy Scowcroft, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, at (850) 245-0502 or nancy.scowcroft@fldoe.org.

All Florida Department of Education paperless communications relating to class size are located at www.firn.edu/doe/arm/class-size.htm.

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