Class Size Engagement Guide

In June 2018, Ontario elected a government committed to restoring accountability and trust in Ontario's public institutions and finances.

Ontario's Government for the People has just concluded the largest public consultation on education in the province's history. This comprehensive education consultation had participation from parents, students, educators, employers and organizations from across Ontario.

We have also recently concluded this year's consultation on education funding reform. The feedback we received will help us to deliver vital education programs and services efficiently.

At the Ministry of Education we are committed to working together with our education partners to achieve student success. We continue to look to our education partners to provide input on how we can achieve greater efficiencies and accountability throughout the sector and, through this guide, we are seeking your input on kindergarten to grade 12 class sizes in Ontario.

Our Government looks forward to working with all of you.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Lisa Thompson,
Minister of Education

About this Engagement

Class size changes potentially affect students and those working in the education sector. We are committed to discussing class size options, with education stakeholders through an engagement process that allows stakeholders to provide the benefit of their expertise, experience, and ideas. This guide is intended to support stakeholders in understanding the government's objectives and assist in the development of stakeholder submissions.

In order to ensure your feedback is considered, please forward your electronic submission by February 22, 2019 to: EDULABFINANCE@ontario.ca.

If you have questions about this engagement, please send them to: EDULABFINANCE@ontario.ca.

Background on Class Size in Ontario

The Class Size regulation made under the *Education Act* (O. Reg. 132/12) governs class sizes in elementary and secondary panels. The funded class size average, or student to educator ratio, is the key driver of funding for each panel and is designed to support boards in meeting regulated class sizes.

The Pupil Foundation Grant, along with the Teacher Qualifications and Experience allocations, are the foundational allocations within the Grants for Student Needs that support the staffing of classroom teachers and Early Childhood Educators (ECEs).The ministry provides the framework, funding, and flexibility needed to support school boards in meeting class size requirements for all grades across the province, but class organization remains a local school board responsibility.

As educator staffing costs represent approximately 80 per cent of the Grants for Student Needs allocation, the province's current fiscal circumstances require an examination of whether changes to class size would allow school boards to deliver better value for government investment.

Current Class Size Model

PANEL	Summary of Regulatory Requirements (O. Reg. 132/12)[1]
ELEMENTARY	
Kindergarten	• The maximum board-wide average class size is 26. • All school boards have a class size limit of 29 students. • Up to 10% of kindergarten classes of a board may exceed the class size limit and have up to 32 students under certain conditions[2].

[1] This provides a general overview of the Regulation only. The regulation contains further details, including definitions of key terms. Stakeholders should consult the text of the regulation.

[2] If purpose-built accommodation is not available (this exception will sunset after 2021–2022); If a program will be negatively affected (e.g., French immersion); or where compliance will increase kindergarten/Grade 1 combined classes.

PANEL	Summary of Regulatory Requirements (O. Reg. 132/12)[1]
	• The funded average class size is 25.57.
Grades 1-3	• At least 90 per cent of primary classes of a board must have 20 or fewer students. • All school boards have a class size limit of 23 students. • The funded average class size is 19.8.
Grades 4-8	• Maximum board-wide average class size is 24.5, except for certain boards identified in the class size regulation. • The regulation provides for a 5-year transition period, beginning in 2017, at the end of which the maximum board-wide average class size for all board would be 24.5 or lower. • The funded average class size is 23.84.
Mixed Grade	• All mixed-grade classes consisting of primary grade students (includes kindergarten) combined with students from junior-intermediate grades (grades 4 to 8) must have 23 or fewer students.
SECONDARY	
Grades 9-12	• The maximum board-wide average class size is 22. • The funded average class size is 22.0.

Hard Caps and Board-Wide Average Class Sizes

The ministry has heard, in previous education funding engagements that implementing hard caps on class sizes (as currently done in kindergarten and grades 1-3) is expensive and difficult for school boards to manage. It has been suggested that board-wide class size averages offer more flexibility for classroom organization and allows for more efficient use of board funds.

For Consideration:

1. Should the regulation continue to set hard caps on class sizes? Why or why not?
2. If hard caps are to be set out in regulation, what is an appropriate class size limit?
3. If hard caps were removed from regulation, what would be an appropriate mechanism to set effective class sizes?
4. Are board-wide averages appropriate to set effective class sizes? Why or why not?
5. Other than hard caps and board-wide averages, is there a different model for setting effective class size that the ministry should consider?

Kindergarten Classroom

The kindergarten maximum average class size requirement of 26 students on a board-wide basis results in an average child to educator ratio of 13:1. Most kindergarten classes are staffed with two qualified educators – a teacher and an ECE.

Ontario Reg 224/10, under the *Education Act,* contains an exception to this requirement. A board is not required to have an ECE in a kindergarten class if there are fewer than 16 kindergarten students in the class. This exception may be applied to one class per school per stream (i.e., one exception is allowed for English classes and one exception for French immersion classes per school). Boards must hire an ECE for all kindergarten classes if there is another class in the same school and the same track with more than 30 students.

For Consideration:

1. What are the implications of the present 'two educator' model for:
    a. Student outcomes?
    b. Educator workload and working conditions?
    c. Value-for-money?

2. Are there other models the ministry should consider?

Overall Class Size

There is little expert consensus on whether and how educational outcomes are affected by class size. The average class size for OECD countries and partner countries/economies in PISA 2015 ranged from less than 20 students in a classroom (e.g. Belgium and Finland) to 40 students or more (e.g. Vietnam, CABA (Argentina), B-S-J-G (China), and Turkey). The relatively larger classroom sizes in Asian countries and their high average student performance is often cited as an example that high performance is possible in larger classrooms (OECD, 2012 and 2016).

Ontario currently has one of the lowest student to teacher ratios among the provinces in Canada with restrictions on class sizes. Yet, when Ontario is compared to all other provinces regarding international testing, PISA 2015, Ontario is statistically performing as follows:

Mathematics: Lower than British Columbia and Quebec, the same as Alberta and Prince Edward Island and above Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan.

Reading: The same as Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Quebec, and above Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan.

Science: Lower than Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec, the same as Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and above Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan.

For Consideration:

1. To ensure quality education, for each panel, what class size would be considered too large or too small? Why?
    a. kindergarten
    b. grades 1-3
    c. grades 4-8
    d. grades 9-12

2. Do changes to class size, in the range of 1-6 students, affect educator workload and working conditions?
    a. If so, do these effects have an impact on students' learning outcomes?
    b. How could such effects be mitigated?

3. Is there any other feedback that you think should be considered that has not been addressed so far?

Conclusion

Ontario has a world-class publicly funded education system but others are quickly catching up. Through these types of engagements, the ministry challenges the status quo and seeks opportunities to do things better for the children in the Province of Ontario.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We look forward to your feedback.