

Ministry Consultation - Class Size

The Ottawa Carleton District School Board appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the government's proposed changes to class size.

Class Size Consultation Questions - Grades 1-8

1. What are the opportunities of the planned changes in relation to the four key goals?

- As small class sizes provide a solid educational foundation to children, the OCDSB supports the decision to maintain class sizes for grades 1 to 3, but would have preferred a Board wide class size average to the current class size caps.
- The OCDSB has not been able to identify any new opportunities that would result from the proposed changes.

2. Will the status quo in grades 1-3 and modest changes to grades 4-8 allow for continued flexibility in organizing school board class sizes?

- Class size caps can be a barrier to creating school organizations that are in the best interests of students. Board wide class size averages provide greater ability/flexibility for administrators to exercise their professional judgment to create school organizations that are responsive to student needs. Some examples include considering the number of students with special needs in each class, minimizing the number of combined grade classes, and/or creating classes with the best interests of the students and staff in mind without the constraint of a hard cap class size.
- Class size regulations must be accompanied by sufficient and full funding to allow for implementation without compromising student achievement. Current funding levels are already insufficient to meet the class size requirements, while also balancing the needs of students.
- In the OCDSB, where enrolment in some schools and some programs may be low, resulting in very small class sizes, a Board wide class size average will mean very large classes, in some cases higher than 35, in other schools or programs.
- A funded average class size of 23.84, or something less than 24.5, provides needed flexibility to address situations of unacceptably large classes.
- Adjusting the funding for grades 4 to 8 to align with the class size average will likely result in situations of unacceptably large classes in some schools, requiring funding to be redirected from other needs in order to mitigate large class sizes.
- The moratorium on Pupil Accommodation Reviews has impaired the flexibility of school boards to address issues of small cohort sizes, thereby increasing the incidence of over-large and over-small class sizes and the incidence of combined grade classes.

3. Are there any other comments on the planned changes, keeping in mind the goals outlined above, you would like to provide?

- The planned changes neglect to address the issue of class composition. The Ministry's approach seems to assume that all classes are roughly the same in terms of workload regardless of class composition (students with special education needs, English language learners, etc.). Boards should be allowed and encouraged to adopt flexible class size strategies taking class composition into account.
- The reduction in the funded average class size for grades 4 to 8 means a reduction of approximately ten (10) teaching positions in the OCDSB and although this will not result in loss of jobs, it represents a reduction in the number of junior/intermediate classes across the district.

Class Size Consultation Questions - Grades 9-12

1. What are the opportunities of the planned changes in relation to the four key goals?

- There are no new opportunities identified by these changes, but there are opportunity costs.
- Increasing the board wide average class size from the current 22 to the proposed 28 will have significant detrimental impacts on secondary programming. Unadjusted for changes in enrolment, the proposed change is expected to mean a potential loss of about 300 secondary teaching positions in the OCDSB at full implementation. This equates to a loss of 1800 sections or classes that will no longer be available to secondary students.
- For safety, lack of equipment or other reasons, it is not possible to load some classes (e.g., hands-on trades and technology courses) beyond current numbers. This means that school administrators will be forced to make difficult decisions about whether these courses can continue to be offered and, if so, at what impact on learning in other courses, where class sizes will need to be significantly higher to meet a board wide average of 28 students per class.
- Some senior secondary courses (e.g., physics, chemistry) which are important prerequisites for post-secondary programs currently run with class sizes less than 20 in some schools. School administrators will have to make difficult choices as to whether and how often these courses can be offered, particularly in smaller secondary schools where it is already challenging to offer a full complement of compulsory courses every year.
- Current collective agreement language, including language that requires staffing levels aligned with class size average closer to 22, will mean the OCDSB and other boards in similar situation will be unable to implement the change until/unless the current language is changed through bargaining.

2. The new vision for e-learning is intended to provide more programming options for students. What comments and advice do you have?

- E-learning can provide some options only if school districts are completely engaged in

the development and delivery of the model.

- More information is required on the E-learning model to fully understand its impact.
- The experience of the OCDSB has demonstrated that E-learning may not be a viable or desirable option for all learners.
- Students with limited access to the technology and the internet will face significant barriers to their learning within the E-learning model. The challenges will be particularly acute for some rural students and for students in low-socioeconomic circumstances.
- E-learning instruction should remain within the purview and jurisdiction of local school boards; the OCDSB would support the creation of regional consortia to increase efficiencies in delivery.
- Funding models should recognize that local boards will have additional costs supporting students as they engage in the E-learning model (e.g., providing adequate technological resources).

3. Class size caps exist in many local agreements. Do these caps pose a barrier to implementing the new class size requirements?

- Our current negotiated class size caps contained in the collective agreement are a barrier to implementation of the proposed class size requirements. Without a change to the class size caps, it will not be possible to implement the proposed class size requirements and still provide programming to allow students to meet the requirements for an OSSD across all pathways.
- In addition to class size cap language, some collective agreements, including those of the OCDSB, contain staff generating formulas that are aligned with the current mandated class size average of 22.

4. Are there other comments on the planned changes, keeping in mind the four key goals, you would like to provide?

- The consultation guide suggests the government is relying on comparative information from Quebec that supports increased class sizes as students move through K-12. The information also indicates that the class size figure for secondary in Quebec excludes students “with different characteristics and need (i.e. economically disadvantaged areas or special education needs)”, and that there are “significantly lower class size requirements” for these students. In Ontario, schools have moved to a much more inclusive model for providing special education to students with identified exceptionalities and needs. This means that many secondary classes currently include students with special needs. What will the impact of larger classes be on students with special needs? On teachers and other education workers and their ability to serve students with special needs? The government must ensure that the needs of all students in Ontario are considered in its proposed class size average of 28 for all secondary students.
- Ensure specialty classes (e.g. technology classes that are necessarily small for reasons of safety and supervision) are excluded from the average class size calculation.