

Georgia Department of Education

2015-2016 State Board of Education Local Class Size Flexibility Considerations

In limited situations where the State Board of Education approves class size flexibility for the 2015-2016 school year, local school districts must consider the needs of the students and other program requirements that may impact class size. Among the considerations for all students are:

- (1) The delivery of instruction in an effective manner so that the needs of the learner can be met in the classroom;
- (2) The safety of the students in larger classrooms;
- (3) The possibility for increased discipline issues if classrooms are too large; and
- (4) Adequate equipment or materials for the entire class. Moreover, there are many subgroups or special populations with learning challenges that require additional considerations.

Additional considerations and guidance regarding how to utilize the flexibility authorized by the State Board are addressed below.

Class Size Considerations

Federal requirements: The State Board will not waive any federal requirements. School districts must adhere to all federal requirements that impact any school setting or group. This will include accountability requirements to meet state and federal performance targets for all students and subgroups, including students eligible under the IDEA and Title III (ESOL and Immigrant programs). In addition to the accountability requirements for meeting performance targets, school districts are expected to meet the performance requirements of Title III for ESOL students and the IDEA performance requirements for special education students. Any penalties for not meeting federal accountability and performance targets will still apply. As always, school districts are expected to improve the performance of all populations. Further, school districts must meet all federal requirements for the delivery of services. In short, that means that programs must be designed to meet the needs of the students for whom they are intended, that instruction must be delivered in an appropriate and timely manner, and no program discriminates on the basis of race/ethnicity, religion, disability or economic status. Additionally, school districts must continue to provide a free appropriate public education to all students eligible for special education services under IDEA.

Models of delivery: Although the State Board may grant flexibility for class size requirements, other program requirements were not waived. Districts provided a waiver for the 2015-2016 school year should review all program requirements very carefully as they adjust class sizes.

1. Special populations or programs such as English language learners (ELL), special education, gifted education, alternative education programs, remedial education program (REP), or early intervention program (EIP) have models of delivery for the services or programs. Even though the specific class sizes may be increased, the school system must adhere to all model delivery requirements. For example, the Augmented model for REP will still require additional teaching staff although the class size may be larger than the class size permitted under the current State Board rule. A model that calls for a reduced class size must be smaller than the district's regular class size although the class size may be larger than the class size permitted under the current State Board rule.
2. If certain models of delivery contain requirements for paraprofessionals as part of the class, the school district must adhere to those requirements. For example, a special education class for

students with profound intellectual disabilities must have a paraprofessional and a teacher. Although the number of students can increase beyond the class size permitted under the current State Board rule, the requirement to have paraprofessional in the classroom was not waived.

Eligibility limits: Some programs limit enrollment in the special program to a percentage of the school or district population. These enrollment limits were not waived. For example, EIP limits enrollment for services to 3% of the population in grades 2 - 5, this limit is still in place although more students may be served in a class.

Facility requirements: Facilities and some special programs require minimum space or other safety criteria. These space and safety requirements were not waived. For example, a special education classroom must contain 38 square feet per student. Classrooms for students with hearing impairments must have appropriate sound treatment or acoustical accommodations. Further, in career technical courses, national standards for industry certification and/or Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards will apply with their specific ratios of equipment/square footage to students.

Caseload requirements for special education: State Board Rule 160-4-7-.14 *Personnel, Facilities, and Caseloads*, limits the caseload for personnel providing services to students with disabilities. These caseload requirements were not waived, and school districts are expected to adhere to the caseload requirements of rule 160-4-7-.14.

Class Size Reporting during FTE: For local school districts that are approved for a class size waiver for the 2015-2016 school year, the GaDOE's Data Collections Division is suppressing class size overage errors during the 2015-2016 school year Class Size data collection. Any further updates will be communicated to your FTE Coordinators during the Data Collections.