

# SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based only on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL: CS/SB 1116

SPONSOR: Committee on Education and Senator Laurent

SUBJECT: School Size

DATE: April 20, 1999 REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Hill</u>	<u>O'Farrell</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>Favorable/CS</u>
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____

## I. Summary:

The bill provides legislative findings about the benefits of small schools. Effective July 1, 2000, the bill requires school district plans for educational facilities to be plans for small schools. This requirement does not apply to any educational facility plan which is under architectural contract on July 1, 2000. The purpose of requiring small school plans is to promote increased learning and more effective use of school facilities. The bill does not impose penalties for noncompliance and does not specifically require districts to construct small schools as planned.

The fiscal impact of this bill cannot be determined at this time. Districts will incur costs associated with the development plans for small schools. The availability and cost of property for multiple small schools will also affect costs. Districts may be eligible for more state funding through SIT awards if actual costs per student station for small schools are less than the cost limits applicable to SIT awards.

This bill is effective July 1, 2000.

This bill creates section 235.2157 of the Florida Statutes.

## II. Present Situation:

### Small Schools

There is no universal agreement on the upper and lower enrollment limits of effective and efficient schools. Research indicates that an effective size for an elementary school is 300 to 400 students and 400 to 800 students for a secondary school. Many researchers conclude that no school should have more than 400 to 500 students. One study which is tracking 24,000 students over time found that reading and math achievement was less in high schools above or below an ideal range of 600 to 900 students. That study suggests that there must be balance between having a setting that is small enough to foster an intimate sense of community and having a school that is large enough to have a rational academic program. Size alone is not a determinate of success.

Some small schools differ from larger ones in all areas of operations, while others differ mainly in the fact that they serve fewer students.

Research on small schools (i.e., small learning communities) has consistently found that these settings produce better attendance, lower dropout rates, fewer incidents of violence, and greater participation in extracurricular activities. Students and teachers in small schools enjoy a greater sense of belonging. Students have more positive attitudes toward academics. The evidence regarding the impact of small school settings on academic achievement is less clear. Small schools provide an achievement advantage for economically disadvantaged and minority students, but affluent students may fare better in larger schools.

Research on simulating small size (e.g., school-within-a-school) as a way to restructure schools is very limited. Separate leadership and independent authority, not necessarily separate buildings, seem to be key determinates in the success of small school environments.

The common justifications for building larger schools are economies of scale in the use of personnel and resources and the ability to provide more comprehensive instructional programs. Some researchers found that expenditures (per pupil or overall) exhibit a U-shaped association with size, with the largest and smallest schools showing diseconomies of scale. A 1992 study of large urban schools (i.e., 1,500 - 4,000 students) determined that the large schools did not achieve cost efficiencies significant enough to justify their existence or to offset negative educational effects. Large schools require more administration and support positions to manage their operations and more teachers for specialized departments and courses. Higher rates of violence and vandalism also add to large school costs

### **District School Board's Authority and Responsibility for School Construction**

Each district school board is authorized and responsible for planning for the establishment, organization, and operation of schools in the district. Each school board determines the location of individual schools and the attendance zones that will be served by each school (s. 230.23, F.S.).

Each school board must adopt and annually update a 5-year capital outlay work plan (s. 235.185, F.S.). The 5-year capital outlay work plan must be a balanced plan of the district's anticipated state and local capital outlay revenues and expenditures.

When planning for and constructing educational facilities, each school district must comply with the State Uniform Building Code for Public Educational Facilities and related rules of the State Board of Education which include, by adoption, the State Requirements for Educational Facilities (SREF). The uniform building code and SREF guide the construction of safe and efficient educational facilities and consider the educational programs to be delivered. Each school board determines the size and configuration of schools constructed with the district's state and local capital outlay funds.

School districts may not use funds received from the Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund (PECO) to build any educational facility that exceeds the maximum costs per student station established by s. 235.435, F.S. The statutory cost limits were based on 5-year statewide average costs of constructing elementary, middle, and high schools. The maximum

costs per student station do not reflect the cost of purchasing land for school sites. The School Infrastructure Thrift (SIT) Program rewards districts for building schools below the statutory cost limits. A SIT award provides 50 percent of the cost savings realized by frugal school construction. Neither the statutory cost limits on student station costs nor the SIT awards were based upon the construction of small schools.

School districts' authority to plan for and build schools is exercised within the context of local governments' authority to plan for and regulate land use. Each city and county must adopt and enforce a local comprehensive plan that establishes future land uses and the densities and intensities of each use (s. 163.3177(6)(a), F.S.). Each local comprehensive plan must identify land use districts where schools are allowed and local governments may direct school districts to build schools only on sites that are consistent with local land use designations (s. 235.193, F.S.) School boards and local governing bodies must work cooperatively to ensure that plans for school construction and opening dates are coordinated in time and place with plans for residential development and related services. This coordinated planning process must consider the effects of the proposed location of a public school, including the feasibility of keeping central city facilities viable by discouraging urban sprawl and encouraging central city redevelopment and efficient use of infrastructure.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

The bill provides legislative findings about the benefits of small schools. Effective July 1, 2000, the bill requires all plans for new educational facilities to be constructed within each school district and reflected in a district's 5-year facilities workplan to be plans for small schools. The bill does not specifically require the construction of small schools. The purpose of the new requirements is to promote increased learning and more effective use of school facilities.

As defined by this bill, a "small school" is:

- an elementary school with a student population of not more than 500 students.
- a middle school with a student population of not more than 900 students.
- a high school with a student population of not more than 1,200 students.
- a school serving kindergarten through grade 8 with a student population of not more than 700 students.
- a school serving kindergarten through grade 12 with a student population of not more than 900 students.

A school on a single campus which operates as a school-within-a-school is considered a small school if each subunit physically located on the single campus meets those "small school" provisions.

Small schools must comply with all laws, rules, and court orders related to racial balance.

The bill does not impose penalties for noncompliance and does not specifically require districts to construct small schools as planned.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2000.

**IV. Constitutional Issues:**

## A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

## B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

## C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

**V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:**

## A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

## B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

## C. Government Sector Impact:

The fiscal impact of this bill cannot be determined at this time. Districts will incur costs associated with the development plans for small schools. The availability and cost of property for multiple small schools will also affect costs. Districts may be eligible for more state funding through SIT awards if actual costs per student station for small schools are less than the cost limits applicable to SIT awards.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Amendments:**

None.

