

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

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

BILL: SB 208

SPONSOR: Senator Wasserman Schultz

SUBJECT: School Facilities

DATE: November 29, 2001 REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	O'Farrell	O'Farrell	ED	Favorable
2.			AED	
3.			AP	
4.				
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

The bill provides a series of modifications to the small school requirement scheduled to go into effect in the school districts on July 1, 2003. The definition of school-within-a-school is expanded, middle school and high school student maximums are increased, and the Commissioner of Education is authorized to grant exemptions from the small schools requirement under certain conditions.

The effective date of the legislation is July 1, 2002.

This bill amends sections 230.23 and 235.2157 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

The 2000 Legislature enacted legislation (ch. 2000-235, L.O.F) addressing many issues affecting school safety. One of the strategies to improve student safety was directed toward school facilities and new school construction. Section 235. 2157, F.S., the Small School Requirement was created to provide a safer atmosphere in schools by reducing their size. The law expresses legislative findings that Florida's public schools are among the largest in the nation, and that,

Smaller schools provide benefits of reduced discipline problems and crime, reduced truancy and gang participation, reduced dropout rates, improved teacher and student attitudes, improved student self-perception, student academic achievement equal to or superior to that of students at larger schools, and increased parental involvement.

The law provides that beginning July 1, 2003, all construction plans for school district educational facilities must be plans for small schools. Small schools are defined as follows:

- An elementary school with a student population of no more than 500 students

- A middle school with a student population of no more than 700 students
- A high school with a student population of no more than 900 students
- A school serving kindergarten through grade 8 with a student population of no more than 700 students
- A school serving kindergarten through grade 12 with a student population of no more than 900 students

The law does not affect new schools already under architectural contract on July 1, 2003.

New schools may exceed the student population limits only if the school operates as a school-within-a-school and each smaller unit operating on a single campus complies with the student population limits in the law.

A school-within-a-school is defined in s. 230.23(20), F.S., as an operational program that employs the strategies of flexible scheduling, team planning, and the organization of groups of students with groups of teachers into smaller units on a single campus so each unit operates as a smaller school.

Although it is more than a year before school districts will be limited to small schools, they are in the process of preparing and updating 5-year facilities work plans. Many of the districts, especially those serving urban and high growth areas, have expressed concern about the availability and cost of multiple school sites.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The legislation under consideration provides school districts with more flexibility in meeting the small school requirement.

The bill expands the definition of a school-within-a-school to include a physical plant design for a campus consisting of several small classroom buildings and a common, central core area. The Department of Education will define the facilities that may be in the core area, which will serve all the smaller buildings.

A second modification increases the student population maximums:

- Middle school, from 700 to 900 students.
- High school, from 900 to 1,200 students.

The bill also authorizes the Commissioner of Education to exempt school districts from the small school requirement, if the planned school facility:

- Is affected by an interlocal agreement between the school district and a local government that has specific school construction requirements that conflict with the small school requirement
- Has a lowest bid cost that can be documented by the school district as exceeding the per-pupil station cost requirements for the School Infrastructure Thrift Program (SIT) as defined in s. 235.216, F.S., or
- Has a proposed site that has been documented as being unavailable or excessively priced, and continued pursuit of a site in the area would not be in the students' best interests.

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:

School districts may save capital outlay funds because of the larger secondary school sizes and the opportunity to benefit from an economy of scale if local costs escalate.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.