

CHAPTER 98-211

House Bill No. 367

An act relating to education; creating the “Florida Maximum Class Size Study Act”; requiring school districts to reduce the teacher-to-student ratio in certain schools; requiring the Department of Education to conduct a study of the efficacy of class size reductions; providing legislative goals; amending s. 233.0612, F.S.; encouraging school boards to install character-development programs in elementary schools; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. (1) This section may be cited as the “Florida Maximum Class Size Study Act.”

(2) During school year 1998-1999, each school district using funds provided in the 1998-1999 General Appropriations Act for the purpose of class size reduction shall, in at least one elementary school, reduce the teacher-to-student ratio to one full-time equivalent teacher to 20 students in kindergarten through grade three. In any district where there is a critically low-performing elementary school as identified by the Commissioner of Education, such school shall be selected for inclusion in the program under this subsection in preference to any other school in the district, and the ratio to be achieved in such schools shall be one full-time equivalent teacher to 15 students. In the case of a district with more than one elementary school identified by the commissioner as critically low-performing, the selection of a school shall be performed by the district school board by lot.

(3) At the conclusion of the 1998-1999 school year, the Department of Education shall conduct a complete study of the efficacy of the reductions in class size provided for in subsection (2). The study shall involve all participating schools and shall be focused on obtaining verifiable data regarding the benefits of class size reduction in terms of student achievement and performance. Results of the study shall be presented to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the minority leader of each house not later than January 1, 2000.

(4) Beginning with school year 1998-1999, it shall be the goal of the Legislature and each school district that each elementary school in the school district beginning with kindergarten through grade three class sizes not exceed 20 students, with a ratio of one full-time equivalent teacher per 20 students; except that only in the case of critically low-performing schools as identified by the Commissioner of Education, the goal in kindergarten through grade three shall be a ratio of one full-time equivalent teacher per 15 students. For purposes of any funding in the General Appropriations Act to meet these goals, the district shall give priority to identified critically low-performing schools in the district. Second priority for the use of any funds designated for meeting these goals shall be for kindergarten through grade one. Third priority for the use of any funds designated for meeting these goals shall be for grades two and three.

Section 2. Subsection (1) of section 233.0612, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

233.0612 Authorized instruction.—Each school district may provide students with programs and instruction at the appropriate grade levels in areas including, but not limited to, the following:

(1) Character development and law education. Each school board shall be encouraged to install in the elementary schools of the district a program in character development which is the same as or similar to the Character Counts or Character First! Education Series. The programs must be secular in nature and stress such character qualities as attentiveness, patience, and initiative.

Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 1998.

Became a law without the Governor's approval May 24, 1998.

Filed in Office Secretary of State May 22, 1998.