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LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS
56th Legislature, 2nd Session, 2024

Bill Number	<u>HM20</u>	Sponsor	<u>Romero, GA/Gurrola/Lara/Jaramillo/Parajón</u>
Tracking Number	<u>.227414.1</u>	Committee Referrals	<u>HEC</u>
Short Title	<u>Study Class Size Reduction</u>		
Analyst	<u>Armatage</u>	Original Date	<u>2/6/2024</u>
		Last Updated	<u></u>

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Memorial 20 (HM20) requests the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) to study kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) class size reductions, including the potential effects on student outcomes, staffing, and funding. Findings from the study would be published and presented to the governor and the Legislature by December 31, 2024.

FISCAL IMPACT

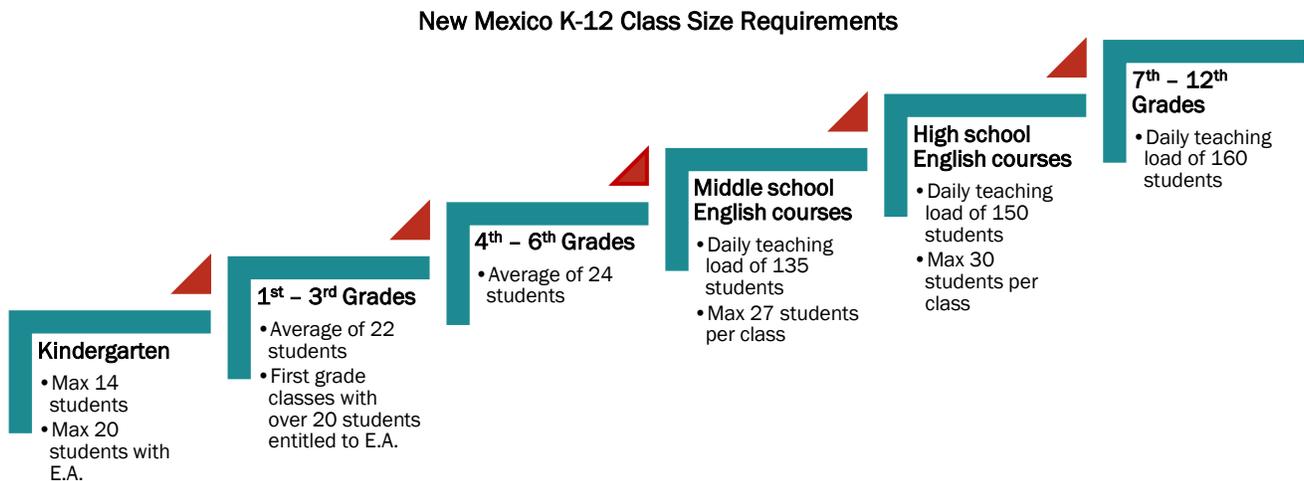
Legislative memorials do not carry appropriations.

SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Class Size Maximums. New Mexico set class size requirements for K-12 students in the early 1990s and few changes have been made since that time. While kindergarten classes have an absolute maximum number of students (14 students or 20 students with an educational assistant), class size requirements for subsequent grades are primarily based on the average size of all classes within a particular range of grades. For example, the average class load for fourth through sixth grade teachers may not exceed 24 students when averaged among grades four, five, and six. Under this requirement, the size of classes within a school could vary substantially. As stipulated by state law in [Section 22-10A-20 NMSA 1978](#), school districts may apply for class size waivers on an annual basis, which cannot not be granted for more than two consecutive years. Waivers may only be granted when districts demonstrate:

1. No portable classrooms are available;
2. No other available sources of funding exist to meet the need for additional classrooms;
3. The district has plans to build capacity within one year; and
4. Parents of children affected by the waiver are notified in writing of the district's decision.

For districts that receive a waiver for an elementary school, the average class load for teachers cannot not exceed 20 students in the first grade and shall not exceed 25 students when averaged among grades two, three, four, five, and six.



Source: LESC Files

School districts and charter schools are required to report the size and composition of classes to the Public Education Department (PED) by the 40th day of the school year. Those that fail to meet class load requirements within two years may not have their budget approved. Although reporting is required, data detailing class sizes across the state is not published by PED.

According to a 2016 [survey](#) by the National Center for Education Statistics, New Mexico’s class size maximums for elementary students are below the national average elementary school class size (26.5 students). New Mexico’s maximum class size for required middle school English courses is close to the national average class size for middle school teachers (26.8 students). However, class size requirements for other courses in 7th through 12th grades are above national average class sizes for these grades (26 to 26.8 students).

Student Outcomes. Overall, existing [research](#) suggests reducing class sizes is likely to produce improved student outcomes. However, the effect size of the improvements is highly debated. The largest and most influential class size study is the Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) study, conducted in Tennessee in the 1980s. The study randomly assigned students and teachers to either large classes (an average of 22 students) or small classes (an average of 15 students). The researchers [found](#) this size reduction increased student achievement by about three months of schooling over the subsequent four years. In addition, the students assigned to smaller classes were [found](#) to be 2 percentage points more likely to enroll in college. Other studies have found smaller effects or mixed effects. Positive effects on student outcomes appear to be most dramatic for students in early grades, at-risk students, and students in classes with a less well-prepared and effective teacher. Policymakers may wish to consider the high cost of implementing class size reductions and alternative interventions that have a higher return on investment. The [Washington State Institute for Public Policy](#) (WSIPP) estimates the return on investment for reducing a class size by one student ranges from \$2.14 in middle school to \$8.76 in kindergarten. In comparison, WSIPP estimates the return on investment for small group tutoring by non-certified adults to be much higher at \$17.30. However, given the backdrop of the consolidated *Martinez-Yazzie* lawsuit, New Mexico’s large proportion of at-risk students, and an [increasing proportion](#) of teacher candidates completing alternative licensure programs with little classroom experience prior to teaching, smaller class sizes are worth consideration in New Mexico.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention. Little research exists on the effects of class size reductions on teacher retention. However, a few small [studies](#) suggest a correlation between smaller class

sizes and improved teacher retention. Teachers themselves clearly express dissatisfaction with larger class sizes. In the 2023 Merrimack College Teacher [Survey](#), the top three steps teachers said districts could take to support their well-being were increasing compensation, reducing class sizes, and providing more support for student discipline-related issues. Some [research](#) suggests smaller class sizes may improve student engagement and behavior, allowing teachers to focus more on providing instruction. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers in New Mexico and across the nation [reported](#) a marked impact on students' social, emotional and behavioral development, resulting in increased disruptions of instructional time and demands on teachers.

Teacher Shortages. According to the 2023 New Mexico Educator Vacancy [Report](#) by New Mexico State University's Southwest Outreach Academic Research Evaluation and Policy Center, New Mexico had 751 teacher vacancies at the beginning of SY24, a 9 percent increase from the prior year. The state also fell short of nearly 500 educational assistants. One complicating factor of reducing class sizes is an increased need for teachers to staff the resulting additional classrooms. When a district already faces teacher shortages, this may result in more classes being taught by long-term substitutes.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

LESC staff would be required to work with representatives from the Public Education Department, the Higher Education Department, the Legislative Finance Committee, the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, school district and charter school leadership, teachers' unions, and educator preparation programs to produce the report.

RELATED BILLS

Relates to HB215, School Class Loads, which would reduce maximum class sizes for kindergarten through 12th grade students in New Mexico.

Relates to HB227, Phase in Class Load Limits, which would phase in reduced maximum class sizes for kindergarten through 12th grade students in New Mexico over a period of five school years.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- LESC Files
- New Mexico Higher Education Department (HED)
- New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD)

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