

## CLASS SIZE REDUCTION, GRADES K-3

### INTRODUCTION

In July 1996, the Governor approved SB 1777, a class size reduction program designed to reduce class sizes in kindergarten and grades 1-3 to no more than 20 students per certificated teacher. The bill took effect immediately as an emergency statute. Statewide \$771 million was authorized to implement the ongoing program and \$200 million for facilities (one-time).

The program is voluntary and offers incentive grants to local school districts. Two options are available: (1) \$650 per student enrolled for full day instruction, or (2) \$325 per student for half day instruction, primarily in reading and math. Priorities are to implement the program beginning in first grade (if only one grade is implemented), then in first and second grades (if only two grade levels are implemented). If three grades are chosen, first and second grades plus either kindergarten or third grade may be chosen.

Other requirements:

- Allow a district to delay implementation until February 16, 1997, and still receive full funding for a full year. (Applications had to be submitted by February 16, 1997.)
- Withhold funds from a district's next apportionment if the district received funds but does not implement the program.
- Require each participating district to have a specified staff development program.
- Require the State Department of Education to evaluate each district program by March 28, 2002, in order to determine pupil achievement improvement and to identify successful components of such programs.

### SCOPE

The purpose of this investigation was to monitor the implementation by school districts in Ventura County and to identify any potential problems.

### INQUIRY

The Grand Jury reviewed the enabling legislation, read news reports on local school district plans to implement the program, and made appointments to interview local school leadership. Questions were developed to gather information. Interviews were held with the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools, his staff, and the superintendents of Conejo Valley Unified, Oxnard, and Simi Valley School Districts. These school districts represent a cross section of Ventura County districts by size and types of programs.

During these interviews and presentations by the school staffs, we found that all seventeen school districts had applied for grants. The information about each district's implementation of grade levels chosen, space limitations, number of teachers required, and number of students affected is summarized on the attached

chart, dated February 4, 1997, which was obtained from the Ventura County Superintendent of Schools.

School districts have employed the needed teachers and found space, some of which is temporary. Space is still a problem and requires a long term solution.

As of December 1996, 222 classrooms were needed, pending delivery of portable buildings on order. Portable buildings are still on back order since the manufacturers had no prior notice of the potential increase in need.

A search for space resulted in the use of school libraries, multipurpose rooms, computer labs, teacher lounges, special education resource rooms, and other rooms not normally used for classes which had to be converted to classrooms, at least temporarily.

The cost of portables will vary, depending upon each site, but the average is about \$48,000 per building. The state funding provided \$25,000 per building but the actual cost to install comes close to \$48,000 due to costs of preparing the ground, moving charges, and providing and/or upgrading utilities. Also, some school sites are already too small to accommodate portables. This is complicated by the Education Code requirement that ample outdoor recreational space must be maintained.

Another pressing issue is the impact on local district funds. Salaries and benefits for all new hires, automatic salary increases for other teachers, tenure requirements, additional supplies, and future evaluation costs are not factored into the present state funding.

Most school districts anticipate a 2-3% increase in enrollment next year with accompanying increases in space needs. An additional increase could result if many new students transfer from private schools to public schools due to the class size reduction program.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Since the program was implemented just prior to opening of school in the fall, there was very little time for local school districts to plan for classroom rearrangement, to hire additional teachers, and to order needed portable buildings to accommodate the larger number of rooms needed. As a result there was strong competition among districts to hire additional fully credentialed teachers from an available inadequate pool of teachers. In some instances, the pool of substitutes was depleted as well as the pool of students who were just completing their teaching preparation. As of December, 1996, school districts sought and hired 335 additional teachers.
2. Since state funding does not fully cover all expenses, local school districts have decided to allocate additional general funds to solve the shortfall in state funding. In the opinion of the school leadership, the 20% increase in operating cost is outweighed by the advantages to the children by having a smaller pupil/teacher ratio.
3. The general attitude of those interviewed was that everyone involved on a local level — parents, teachers and staff — was determined to succeed, viewing the advantages to children of individual instruction and response to individual strengths as paramount to any other inconveniences encountered.

COMMENDATION

The local school districts, in spite of space, personnel, and fiscal problems, have responded well to this phase of the program. The local district leadership is to be complemented for so quickly undertaking a massive change with such promising long term results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Local school districts generate public support for pending budget proposals that will provide full state funding for the current class size reduction program.
2. Local school districts oppose expanding class size reduction to the fourth grade until full funding for K - 3 is achieved.
3. Ventura County Superintendent of Schools generate public support for additional state school construction money or passage of local school bonds to build and/or modernize more schools to solve the space crunch.
4. Each local school district protect its general fund to avoid cannibalizing other academic programs.
5. Future Ventura County Grand Juries continue to monitor the progress of the class size reduction program in order to ensure the future financial stability and effectiveness of smaller classes in each school district that has implemented this program in Ventura County.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

Ventura County Superintendent of Schools

Local School Districts

Conejo Valley Unified

Oxnard

Simi Valley

## Ventura County Superintendent of Schools CLASS SIZE REDUCTION UPDATE

February 14, 1997

District	Grade Level	Teachers Hired	Classrms Needed	Portables Ord/Purch	Start Date	Students in Program	Comments
<b>Briggs Elementary</b>	1	1	1	0	2/97	46	May decide at Oct Board Mtg to implement 2nd & K
<b>Hueneme Elem</b>	1	15	15	16	1/97	1,004	
<b>Mesa Union Elementary</b>	1-2	1	0	0	8/96	51	Possibly K in Feb & 3 in 97-98
<b>Oak View Elementary</b>	1-2	6	8	8	9/96	370	Grade 2 at one site only
<b>Oxnard Elem</b>	1-1/2-2	46	45	45	8/96	1,836	1/2 combos and 2 at some sites
<b>Pleasant Valley Elementary</b>	1-2	26	7	7	9/96	1,560	2 at some sites, will do all 2 mid-year
	K	0	0	0	9/96	725	24 classes at 50% funding
<b>Rio Elementary</b>	1	10	6	2	9/96	336	
<b>Santa Clara Elementary</b>	K-2	0	0	0			Class size already under 20
<b>Santa Paula Elementary</b>	1	13	1	1	9/96	485	
<b>Somis Union Elementary</b>	1	1	0	0	8/96	51	
<b>Conejo Unified</b>	1-3	80	42	21	9/96	4,255	
<b>Fillmore Unified</b>	1	5	4	2	10/96	291	1 class implemented 10/94, 4 classes to be implmented 1/97
<b>Moorpark Unified</b>	1-3	31	31	31	2/97	1,837	
<b>Oak Park Unified</b>	K-2	14	6	6	10/96	816	
<b>Ojai Unified</b>	K-3	12	7	7	10/96	573	Grade 1 & 2 at all sites. Grades K and 3rd at some sites
<b>Simi Valley Unified</b>	1-2	42	25	0	10/96	3,055	Used 6 portables & 19 computer rooms, libraries & resource rooms. May implement K or 3 mid-year
<b>Ventura</b>	1	40	40	0	10/96	1,473	Have implemented some K & 2
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>343</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>147</b>		<b>18,764</b>	