

Understanding Class Size and the Impact on Students and Educators

With the spiking of workloads and stress levels over the last several years, educator burnout and turnover are escalating and shortages are impacting every school system in Maryland.

Increasing Individual Attention for Students

While unmanageable class sizes, caseloads, and staffing ratios were present before the pandemic, they have reached crisis levels in the wake of the pandemic. Class size is at the root of the challenging working conditions that drive educators from the profession and hamper students from receiving the individual and small group instruction and services they need.

The emphasis that the Blueprint for Maryland's Future places on hiring thousands of additional educators can have a transformative impact on student achievement, our professions, and our schools. Giving educators the ability to discuss class sizes at the table and collaboratively develop targeted strategies to mitigate the impact of large class sizes on students and educators will further this enduring commitment to our students.

Why Is This Change Needed?

Currently, class size is an illegal topic of bargaining. That means educators can't even bring up class sizes at the bargaining table, even though it has long been a top concern for educators and parents and impacts the amount of individualized attention students receive. **Maryland is one of only nine states where class size is an illegal subject of bargaining, along with Alaska, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Nebraska, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.** It is bargainable in the District of Columbia and 12 states (Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, and Pennsylvania). In the remainder of states, the law is silent or collective bargaining does not exist.

Strengthening Student Relationships

Smaller class sizes and more staff support mean the opportunity for students and educators to deepen and strengthen relationships—a critical

step in supporting academic and social-emotional growth, particularly in the wake of the stresses, traumas, and inequities stemming from the pandemic and long-term racial and economic injustice. These stronger relationships underpin the life-changing relationships that can develop between educators and students that can set students on a path for success and achievement. While excessive class sizes clearly hamper developing these relationships, they also impact the additional work educators need to do to support students, such as grading papers, writing letters of recommendation, providing after-school help, and making calls and emails to families.

Reducing Educator Burnout and Turnover

Even before the pandemic, educator retention and recruitment were at crisis levels. **With the spiking of workloads and stress levels over the last several years, educator burnout and turnover are escalating and shortages are impacting every school system in Maryland.** Maryland has always been a teacher-import state, meaning that we do not graduate enough teachers from our higher education institutions to fill the number of positions that open up annually. However, enrollment in teacher education programs in Maryland—and in surrounding states—has dropped precipitously over the last several years, and that trend has accelerated during the pandemic. We need to take steps to reduce the burnout and turnover that are negatively impacting the profession—and driving great educators out of our schools—before the shortage crisis worsens.

MSEA supports HB 85/SB 206 to give educators a voice in their class sizes to help make sure students have the individualized attention they need, keep class sizes small, and reduce educator shortages.

The Impact of Class Size in Their Words

Maryland Teachers Tell Their Stories



Teacher workloads are always impossible to complete during our regular workday, but this year has added even more onto teacher's overflowing plates. Planning, preparations, and grading for the six subjects I teach as an elementary educator already takes my paltry 45-minute planning (less transition and bathroom break time), but I also plan before school four days a week for an additional 45 minutes and one day after school with my colleagues. I also regularly stay after school another one to two hours several days out of the week on my own.

Most days I'm at school from 7:40 a.m. until after 6 p.m. and spend additional time on the weekends, yet this still isn't enough time to complete my regular workload. Added to that, I am now being asked to regularly make quarantine work packets for students that will be out for almost two weeks. Each time I have done this it has taken me two to three hours to gather all the materials and write out directions for the families. This takes away from the precious time I need for my regular workload.

Student mental health is also impacting my time. So many of my 5th graders are struggling this year, much more than in previous years. My instruction time is regularly disrupted when I need to help my students talk through their emotional issues. On several occasions I have given up my lunch, or sacrificed lesson time, to help a student manage a crisis. There are certainly counselors in the building, but they too are overwhelmed and so sometimes they are unavailable.

Most days I feel like I am drowning, unable to keep up with everything I need to do, and constantly feeling like I either drop the ball with my students or sacrifice all of my personal life and time. Neither is a good, healthy, or reasonable expectation. Our workload should be such that I can complete it within a reasonable time frame and still have my evenings and weekends available for personal home-life balance."

TEACHER | **HARFORD COUNTY**



Large class sizes have always impacted my ability to serve students. Everyone knows that the number one factor that contributes the most to student success is small class sizes. We need to be able to develop good relationships with our students, spend one on one time with them, and have time to provide meaningful feedback, as well as communicate with parents. Large class sizes make all of that harder to do and result in less time to do all that because we are dealing with so many students.

TEACHER | **BALTIMORE COUNTY**



Over my three classes, I have 93 high school students this semester. If I were to spend only five minutes per student grading an assignment, it would still take more than seven hours to grade each assignment. We have 80 minute mods—if I want to check in with each student individually, I only have 2.5 minutes with each student.

TEACHER | **CARROLL COUNTY**



The excessive class size is making it harder to provide individual help that is desperately needed by low performing students. Covering for absent staff leaves little to no time to prepare quality lessons. Exhaustion is a regular feeling. I would quit if I could, this is not what I agreed to when I got into teaching. The students are tired, overwhelmed, and anxious. Their grades are depressed by the atmosphere and stress.

TEACHER | **PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY**

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