



Smaller Classes for Elementary Students

Educators identify small classes as the most important factor in their ability to work individually with students and meet their diverse needs.

Smaller classes improve student behaviour and peer relationships and increase student engagement in the early grades. Investing in smaller classes contributes to alleviating the antisocial, aggressive behaviour that causes incidents of classroom violence.

Class size has been extensively studied. A 2014, US-based review of the research concludes: “The academic literature strongly supports the common-sense notion that class size is an important determinant of student outcomes.” A 2018 study of the California class size reduction program – the largest in US history dating back to the late 1990s – found smaller classes in public schools resulted in lower private school participation and higher enrolment in public schools, which in turn brought increased funding, improving the quality of public education.

Ontario’s previous investments in smaller classes in primary grades has had a positive impact on our classrooms. Ontario-based

research demonstrates that smaller primary classes have enabled teachers to provide more individual attention to students and use a greater variety of instructional strategies. Currently, primary grades are funded for an average class size of 20 and secondary grades for an average class size of 23. By comparison, funding for grades 4 to 8 supports a class size average of 24.5. As Ontario seeks to address existing learning gaps, reducing class sizes is a necessary first step.

Why Are Class Size Caps Needed?

Establishing limits on class size averages alone without hard caps means that individual classes can vary a great deal. Unlike in the primary grades, there are currently no caps on class size for grades 4 to 8, this has resulted in the largest class sizes in the system, often more than 30 students in a class.

Join us in protecting high-quality public education
at BuildingBetterSchools.ca



This imbalance creates learning environments that are not supportive of students' individual learning needs, making it difficult for educators to provide the high-quality learning opportunities students need. The benefits of the smaller classes we have seen in primary grades need to be extended to grades 4 to 8. The government should cap class size for grades 4 to 8 at 24 students.

Class size is also an issue in Ontario's Full-Day Kindergarten program. This program has proven to be very successful and has become a model for other jurisdictions and a fundamental part of our world-class education system. The Kindergarten program is funded to have an average class size of 26 and an average staff-child ratio of 1:13. There are still, however, many classes with over 30 students and an even greater number of Kindergarten/Grade 1 split-grade classes, which are not supported by a designated early childhood educator.

ETFO members consistently raise concerns about the challenges of setting up activity-based programs for that many young children and managing classroom behaviour when many of the students are experiencing formalized learning environments for the first time.

Overcrowded and often noisy classrooms or open "pods" limit teachers' and early childhood educators' ability to take full advantage of the play-based program and create stressful work and learning environments. The government should cap Kindergarten class size at 26 students.

What can the government do?

- Cap grades 4 to 8 class size at 24 students.
- Cap Kindergarten class size at 26 students.
- Provide adequate funding to ensure that every classroom has the necessary supports and resources for all students to be successful.

What you can do:

- Contact your MPP and ask them advocate for smaller classes and class size caps for Kindergarten and grades 4 to 8.
- Speak to your friends and family members about the importance of reducing class sizes, and the need for government investments in public education.



Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
136 Isabella Street | Toronto, ON Canada | M4Y 0B5
416-962-3836 | 1-888-838-3836

