

# **BSEP Community Conversations**

## **Preliminary Summary of Class Size Discussions**

Included in this summary: Comments logged at King Middle School 2/17, Board Room 2/25, BHS 3/2, Rosa Parks 3/10, Malcolm X 3/14, PTA Council 3/21

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**The majority of comments (152 of 213) were for balancing class sizes K-5, based on three main themes:**

**1) The current system has some serious drawbacks:**

- a. The current structure with a big jump in class size between 20:1 at 3rd to 26:1 at 4th grade class forces schools with three third grades to choose between having combination classes (3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup>), or larger classes, some as high as 30 or 31;
- b. This is an equity issue for teachers, as 20:1 in K-3 versus 30:1 in 4-5 is a big difference, and disparity in teachers' workloads (report cards, parent conferences);
- c. The current "district-wide average" has created a wide variation in class sizes, with upper elementary grades ranging from 24 to 32;
- d. Currently, 4th grade teachers have an incentive to switch to 3rd grade to reduce the number of students.

**2) Class size balancing and school-wide averages have potential advantages:**

- a. Less variation in class size between schools and among grades due to the balanced approach with school-site averages;
- b. Elimination of combination classes and elimination of large 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes;
- c. Attention for older elementary kids who are experiencing increased social and academic demands who need intervention before middle school;
- d. Slightly larger classes in K-3 may have some advantages (larger social group with more diversity);
- e. Flex rooms could be made available for art, science, computer lab, music, interventions, and freed up for Transitional Kindergarten classes at some schools;
- f. Smaller upper grades may mean smaller music classes.

**3) The change in class sizes is not significant when compared to the benefits:**

- a. The research on benefits of small classes is based on 15-17 kids and may not apply to the difference between 20 and 22, or 21 and 24 students.
- b. The balanced class size approach is more financially sustainable; investing so much money in small K-3 classes may not be the most effective use of funds.
- c. Other purposes (counseling, libraries, music, art student support, etc.) provided by BSEP funds are vital. Balancing K-5 class size permits funds to be used elsewhere.

## Cautions

### **1) Significant concerns (61 comments of 213) about raising K-3 class sizes included:**

- a. Heterogeneous classes are hard, even when small;
- b. Increasing academic pressures in K-1 make it difficult to serve all kids;
- c. High needs / special needs kids could need more support;
- d. Upper grades kids may be more mature and able to handle larger class sizes;
- e. Effect on the strong student-teacher bonds in lower grades;
- f. A strong foundation in K-3 could make upper grades go more smoothly;
- g. Small K-3 classes are an attractive feature of BUSD for teachers and families;
- h. Transition from 5th to 6th grade would be harder with smaller 5th grade classes;
- i. The "workshop method" can make combo classes manageable.

### **2) There were concerns about what the "guarantees" would be:**

- a. How soon and where would flex spaces return for various schools? Wouldn't some classes be needed for additional 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade classes?
- b. Would there be any kind of "cap" on sizes, and would the new balanced approach guarantee there would be no more large classes?

## Questions and Suggestions:

- 1) Even if some class sizes are raised, would like to keep smaller TK's and Kindergartens.
- 2) It's important to have effective teacher training in differentiation no matter the class size; teacher skill and teacher support matter even more than class sizes.
- 3) Could the adult-child ratio be increased by providing I.A.s in early grades, especially first semester of Kindergarten?
- 4) Possible to provide more support (Rtl, Lit Coaches), especially in K and 1st grades?
- 5) Look at balancing teacher prep time K-5? Upper grades have one prep per day, lower grades have one prep per week. Can this be averaged when classes are balanced?
- 6) Would the balanced class size plan result in more students or fewer students at each school?
- 7) Could BHS average class sizes be increased – especially for the "lecture style" classes to give more funds for FTE to the lower schools?