



California Teachers Association
Instruction & Professional Development



Fall, 2009

Guide for Dealing with Larger Class Sizes

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As CTA members go back to school, many are going to be dealing with a *new normal* as a result of California's budget crisis. Even though funding under Proposition 98 was protected, the education budget has been slashed by nearly \$18 million over the last two years. As a result many of our members will be experiencing larger class sizes. For some of our K-3 teachers, the 20-1 ratio is all they have known during their careers. For many other teachers, their classrooms are going to be pushed to the contractual limits. CTA is providing this guide to assist members as they make this transition.

Increasing Student Independence and Responsibility

As the number of students in a classroom increases, the availability of the teacher to an individual student at any moment in time decreases. Helping students learn to become more independent and responsible for their own learning and behavior has always been a goal of teachers, but it becomes even more necessary with larger class sizes. As learning in the classroom becomes increasingly student-directed rather than teacher-directed, students develop the flexibility and independence they need to succeed in classrooms with up to 50% more students. Students at all grade levels are able to learn and use age-appropriate self-management skills.

However, students will not become self-directed without learning self-management skills and having multiple opportunities to practice and reflect on their skill building in this area. In general, students will need to learn and use four separate yet related skills. These self-management skills are equally useful when applied to academic performance tasks or social behavior in the classroom.

- Self-monitoring (identifying, assessing and recording target behaviors)
- Self-instruction (mental rehearsal, self-talk, task analysis, applying problem-solving processes)
- Goal-setting (establishes the purpose or target to increase student motivation)
- Self-reinforcement (reinforcers can be tangible, social, or activity related)

Student self-management must be established before students can take full advantage of independent or small group instructional centers and activities.

Classroom Organization

Organizing your classroom is a key to a smooth beginning of the school year. Anticipating and planning on what to expect will minimize changes, chaos, and disruptions in your classroom and increase time for instruction.

- Visualize what your classroom is going to look like with 32 or 35 or even 40 desks.
- Design an optimal room set up; mock up several designs.
 - Things to consider are the “hardscapes” such as desks, teacher’s work area, learning resource centers, classroom media or library, tables and chairs. With more students, you will have less space to work with.
 - For K-3 classrooms that have been reconfigured or designed for 20-1, this may be a challenge.
- Consider where to put your books, computers, materials and supplies if you are going to be without an aide or another adult in the classroom. With more students, you will need to consider management of time, movement of students and efficiency.

The system for organizing your classroom might need to be modified or completely overhauled. Keep in mind that having more students means that both you and the student will have less time for instruction unless you are able to manage your time and your space more efficiently.

Additional things to think about:

- Keep high traffic areas free of congestion.
- Be sure you can see all students and have ready access to all areas of the room.
- Keep frequently used materials and student supplies readily accessible.
- Be certain students can see instructional presentations and displays.
- Be sure there is good ventilation.
- Keep the room temperature comfortable.
- Be sure that lighting is sufficient.

Classroom Environment

Rules: Rules are just like other instructional activities. They have to be taught, reviewed and reinforced if they are to be remembered. Teaching of rules and routines is the first activity that needs to be accomplished.

Guidelines for establishing rules are:

- Involve the class in making the rules
- Keep the rules short and easy to understand.
- Phrase rules in a positive way.
- Remind the class of the rules at times other than when someone has misbehaved.
- Post the rules and review them periodically.
- If a rule isn't working, change it.

Routines: Routines refer to specific behaviors and activities that are taught in order to provide smooth, uninterrupted class operation. Routines, carefully taught, can save large amounts of time during the year. When students know exactly what is expected of them in a variety of situations, the time saved can be spent teaching rather than organizing or disciplining.

Develop, teach, and enforce a specific routine for these basic situations:

- Passing papers
- Leaving to go to the restroom
- Getting supplies and books
- Working in small groups
- Dismissing the class
- Turning in assignments
- Putting away materials
- Safety routines
- Taking attendance

The effortlessness of routines can allow time for visual scanning, a way to gauge the collective attitudes of the group. These observations can help you target instruction and responses throughout the day.

Student Assessment

Having more students in the class also means that a review at your assessment practices may be in order. Every aspect of instruction and assessment with a greater number of students requires that you be more efficient without sacrificing effectiveness.

Use daily monitoring assessment techniques that require a lower investment of time in preparation and analysis but provide data that allow you to adjust instruction as needed. Some examples are:

- Individual response white boards
- One-sentence summaries
- Signal cards
- Quick-writes

Some of these assessment techniques are based on teacher observation of student performance in real time. You can maximize the usefulness of these monitoring opportunities by recording notes or using a checklist that you can refer to later and share with students and parents.