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Average class size remains relatively steady

Edmonton... Classrooms in Alberta have grown by an average of less than half a student since last year and are very close, in all but the primary grades, to the class-size guidelines set out by the Alberta Commission on Learning.

According to the most comprehensive class-size survey ever done in Alberta, classes grew from an average size of 21.5 to 21.9 at the kindergarten to Grade 3 level; from 24.2 to 24.7 at the Grade 4-6 level; and stayed constant at 25.5 at the Grade 7-9 level. High school classes, which have not been part of the survey in previous years, averaged 25.1 students in core subject areas.

Class sizes in the four metro school jurisdictions were typically higher than those in rural and other urban jurisdictions. But even among those four, the average class size remained relatively stable in one and actually decreased in two. The fourth saw increases of 1.5 to 2 students.

“I am encouraged by these numbers and I think generally parents should be, too,” Minister of Learning Dr. Lyle Oberg said. “They show that, although some larger classes exist, class sizes, on average, have not changed significantly in the past two years and remain manageable. In fact, we are much closer to meeting the Learning Commission guidelines than people might think.”

When special education classes are factored into the class-size average – as was contemplated by the Learning Commission in the setting of its guidelines – class sizes at the junior high and high school levels are already within Learning Commission guidelines, while class sizes at the Grade 4-6 level are within one student of meeting them. However, the average class size at the K-3 level is significantly above the recommended guideline of 17. (See backgrounder for details.)

The class-size survey was completed this fall, before Alberta Learning injected an additional \$60 million in annual funding into the K-12 school system. The additional funds were provided retroactive to September 2003 and should be used by boards to address priority areas, such as class size. This school year, boards have been given the flexibility to use their funding to best meet the needs of their students. With “transparency” being one of the key principles of this new funding framework, boards will be required to show parents and the public how these additional funds were used.

“Given that nearly all boards have balanced their budgets this school year, they will have the flexibility to allocate government’s additional investment in priority areas,” Oberg said. “Those boards that are concerned about class sizes will be able to hire more teachers. I would encourage them to look particularly at the primary grades, where the class-size averages are significantly higher than the Commission guidelines and where small classes are of the greatest benefit.”

The class-size survey – which was carried out by school boards and responded to by 99.8% of schools – measures the size of distinct classrooms. It does not include teacher assistants, teacher librarians, specialist teachers, or administrators and other educators who have classroom responsibilities.

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This announcement is available on the Internet at: <http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/news>

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Class Size Results

Class Size Survey Results

- A total of 99.8 per cent of schools surveyed responded.
- The survey was designed to capture only the core academic subjects in Grades 7-9 and 10-12 (Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science - including Chemistry, Biology and Physics).
- 99 per cent of K-3 classes had 30 or fewer students and 79 per cent had 25 or fewer.
- 94 per cent of 4-6 classes had 30 or fewer students and 52 per cent had 25 or fewer.
- 83 per cent of 7-9 classes had 30 or fewer students and 43 per cent had 25 or fewer.
- 72 per cent of 10-12 classes had 30 or fewer students and 45 per cent had 25 or fewer.

Average Class Size 2003/04

	Without special education classes		Including special education classes		Commission Guidelines*
	2002/03	2003/04	2002/03	2003/04	
K-3	21.5	21.9	21.4	21.7	17
4-6	24.2	24.7	23.4	23.9	23
7-9	25.5	25.5	25.2	24.9	25
10-12	-	25.1	-	24.9	27

* Alberta's Commission on Learning guidelines were developed based on the inclusion of special education classes.

Average Class Size - Without Special Education Classes

	K-3			4-6			7-9			10-12		
	01/02	02/03	03/04	01/02	02/03	03/04	01/02	02/03	03/04	01/02	02/03	03/04
Metro	22.4	22.3	23.0	25.7	25.1	25.8	-	27.5	27.5	-	-	28.9
Rural	21.2	20.9	20.9	23.7	23.6	23.5	-	23.8	23.7	-	-	21.9
Urban	21.4	21.5	21.0	24.5	24.3	25.5	-	26.4	26.7	-	-	27.8
Charter	-	19.8	22.1	-	20.5	22.8	-	19.9	21.5	-	-	23.7
Francophone	17.5	17.4	18.7	17.9	17.3	19.2	-	18.7	16.4	-	-	13.6
Provincial	21.8	21.5	21.9	24.7	24.2	24.7	-	25.5	25.5	-	-	25.1

Average Class Size - Including Special Education Classes

	K-3			4-6			7-9			10-12		
	01/02	02/03	03/04	01/02	02/03	03/04	01/02	02/03	03/04	01/02	02/03	03/04
Metro	22.3	22.1	22.8	24.3	23.9	24.3	-	27.1	26.7	-	-	28.4
Rural	21.1	20.8	20.8	23.4	23.2	23.3	-	23.5	23.2	-	-	21.9
Urban	21.3	21.3	21.6	23.8	23.3	25.1	-	26.0	26.2	-	-	27.7
Charter	-	19.8	22.1	-	20.5	22.8	-	19.9	21.5	-	-	23.7
Francophone	17.5	17.3	18.7	17.6	17.3	19.2	-	18.7	16.3	-	-	13.6
Provincial	21.6	21.4	21.7	23.8	23.4	23.9	-	25.2	24.9	-	-	24.9

Class Size Survey

Special Education Classes

As recommended by the Commission on Learning, the results of the class size survey include special education classes, which are typically smaller. Previously, special education classes have not been included in the survey. The Commission report states: "School jurisdictions should be expected to meet the guidelines for average class sizes across their school jurisdiction. That means the guidelines would not necessarily be met in each and every classroom but should be met on average across the school jurisdiction ... Class composition should be considered by schools in setting class size. Generally, classes with special needs students, students whose first language is not English, and vulnerable and at-risk students should be smaller than the suggested guideline. Classes should also be smaller in cases where there are safety considerations such as vocational classes."

Reporting of class size

In accordance with the Learning Commission recommendations on class size, school boards will be required to publicly report their average class sizes annually, using methodology that is consistent across jurisdictions, and will be accountable for explaining whether or not the guidelines have been met. Using the same methodology, Alberta Learning will continue to report province-wide results.

Teacher Assistants

- A total of 6,808 FTE teacher assistants (K-12) were reported at the school level, an average of 4.8 per school. The average in fall 2002 for K-9 schools was 5.1 per school.
 - 5,633 of those teacher assistants, an average of 4.0 per school, were specifically assigned to students with special needs
 - 1,175 of those teacher assistants, an average of 0.8 per school, provided support to other students
- The metro urban school boards (Calgary and Edmonton) reported an average of 2.9 teacher assistants per school
- The other urban school boards (Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Fort McMurray) reported an average of 8.2 teacher assistants per school
- The rural school boards reported an average of 6.4 teacher assistants per school
- The francophone school boards reported an average of 2.4 teacher assistants per school
- The Charter schools reported an average of 2.0 teacher assistants per school

Special Needs Statistics

- Of the 42,151 classes reported in the survey:
 - 67 percent of the classes were reported to have students with special needs. The average size of these classes was 25.1. On average, 2.8 of the students in a class had mild/moderate special needs and 0.7 had severe special needs.
 - 33 percent of the classes had no students with special needs. The average size of these classes was 24.0

English as a Second Language (ESL) Statistics

- Of the 42,151 classes reported in the survey:
 - 31 percent of the classes had ESL students. The average size of these classes was 26.4. On average, 3.5 students per class were learning English as a second language.
 - 69 percent of the classes had no ESL students. The average size of these classes was 24.0.

Average Class Size by Grade

