

Plan for Phased Class Size Reduction at Atlanta Neighborhood Charter School

Background

In response to significant funding reductions, since 2010 class size maximums at both ANCS campuses have increased to their current levels:

- Kindergarten: 18 students
- 1st-5th Grades: 24 students
- 6th-8th Grades: 27 students

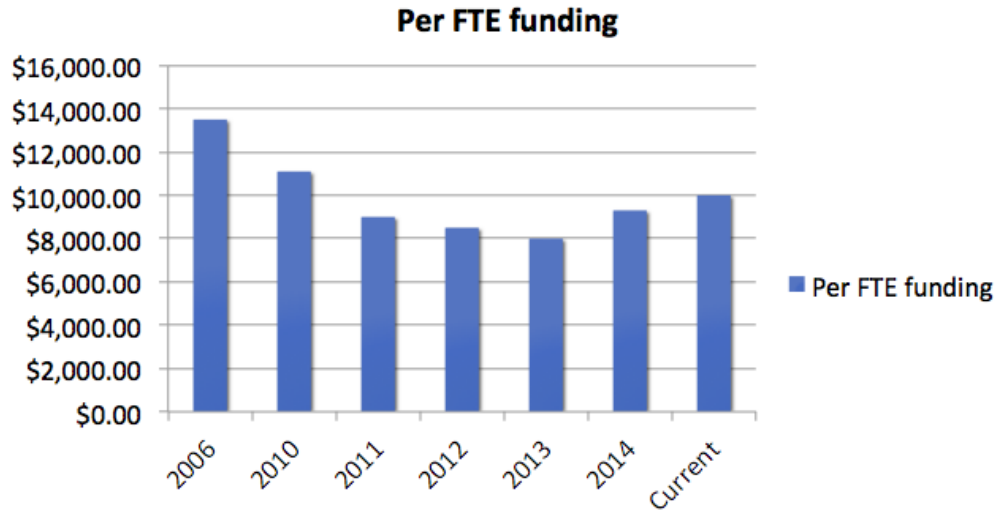
These class size maximums are similar to--or lower than--other area public schools. And when staffing of classrooms is considered, the average student-to-teacher ratio at ANCS is about five students lower than most other area public schools.

Given this comparison to other schools and the fact that research is mixed on the impact of class sizes on student learning and what the “optimum” class size may be, some may wonder why focus on class size at ANCS. Reducing class size remains a critical issue for our school because of the hands-on nature of learning in our classrooms and our desire to personalize the educational experience as much as feasible; based on feedback from our teachers and students, smaller class sizes will help both to occur more effectively. For that reason, our school’s strategic plan calls for a plan for phased class size reduction and this document represents the draft of that plan.

Funding

At current funding levels, the approximate local/state funding per student (FTE) is \$10,000. The chart below shows that while this funding is rebounding from recent lows, it is by no means at previous levels. This fact is important to consider making plans for future class size reductions for two reasons:

1. Reducing class sizes means sacrificing revenue that could be used for other needs at our school.
2. Plans for class size reduction must still be squared with what per student funding levels end up being each year--if we experience another big drop in local/state funding, we will have to assess what class size maximums can be achieved.



Class Size Maximums for 2015-16 and Beyond

With the preceding context, our school's leadership team recommends we begin moving towards the following maximum class size targets as funding allows in the next several years:

- Kindergarten: 16 students
- 1st-5th Grades: 22 students
- 6th-8th Grades: 25 students

Making it a priority to achieve these class size levels will mean carefully considering--and possibly putting off--adding additional personnel and resource expenses to our school's budget outside of those necessary to insure student safety and compliance with special program requirements (see *draft of FY16 budget assumptions in March 2015 finance committee reports*).

For the 2015-16 school year, we recommend setting a class size maximum of 17 students in all kindergarten classes for the 2015-16 school year and, through any student attrition, aiming for a maximum of 23 students in all 1st and 2nd grade classrooms. Class size maximums for 2015-16 would remain at their current level in grades 3rd-8th. The reduction in K-2nd would result in up to approximately \$100,000 less revenue for the 2015-16 school year.

Moving forward from the 2015-16 school year, our school's leadership team--with feedback from the faculty/staff--will evaluate and recommend continued lowering of class size maximums towards the targets listed above. While the recommended approach in 2015-16 begins with reductions in the lower grade levels because it is easier to control for class size as students enter the school in kindergarten and the critical needs of our youngest learners, that should not suggest that upper grades will not see lower class sizes until these classes of students move up through the school. We will assess needs each year and may recommend

reducing class size maximums in the upper grades while smaller classes in the lower grades begin to advance.