

# SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL: CS/SBs 1254 & 1954

SPONSOR: Education Committee and Senators Wasserman Schultz and Rossin

SUBJECT: School Facilities

DATE: April 16, 2001                      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	O'Farrell	O'Farrell	ED	Favorable/CS
2.	_____	_____	AED	_____
3.	_____	_____	AP	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

**I. Summary:**

The bill modifies s. 235.2157, F.S., the Small Schools Requirement, by raising student population limits by 200-300 students for all schools except elementary schools. In addition the Commissioner of Education is authorized to approve exemptions to the requirements if: local comprehensive plans call for a specific type of school construction, the lowest construction bid on a school would exceed the statutory limits on costs per pupil station, and school siting in a particular area is unavailable or cost prohibitive. Also, a new example is added to the statutory definition of a school-within-a-school to include situations where students are housed in a grouping of separate, smaller facilities meeting the small schools requirements, which are served by a common core facility.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2001.

This bill amends sections 230.23 and 235.2157 of the Florida Statutes.

**II. Present Situation:**

The 2000 Legislature enacted legislation (ch. 2000-235, L.O.F) addressing many issues affecting school safety. One of the strategies to improve student safety was directed toward school facilities and new school construction. Section 235. 2157, F.S., the Small School Requirement was created to provide a safer atmosphere in schools by reducing their size. The law expresses legislative findings that Florida's public schools are among the largest in the nation, and that,

*Smaller schools provide benefits of reduced discipline problems and crime, reduced truancy, and gang participation, reduced dropout rates, improved teacher and student attitudes, improved student self-perception, student academic achievement equal to or superior to that of students at larger schools, and increased parental involvement.*

The law provides that beginning July 1, 2003, all construction plans for school district educational facilities must be plans for small schools. Small schools are defined as follows:

- An elementary school with a student population of no more than 500 students
- A middle school with a student population of no more than 700 students
- A high school with a student population of no more than 900 students
- A school serving kindergarten through grade 8 with a student population of no more than 700 students
- A school serving kindergarten through grade 12 with a student population of no more than 900 students

The law does not affect new schools already under architectural contract on July 1, 2003.

Provision is made for new schools on a single campus that exceed the student population limits, if the school operates as a school-within-a-school. Such an accommodation shall be considered a small school as long as each smaller unit operating on the single campus complies with the student population limits in the law.

A school-within-a-school is defined in s. 230.23(20), F.S., as an operational program that employs the strategies of flexible scheduling, team planning, and the organization of groups of students with groups of teachers into smaller units on a single campus so each unit operates as a smaller school.

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

The bill adds a new example to the s. 230.23(20), F.S., definition of schools-within-a-school. A physical plant design that groups students in buildings meeting the small schools requirement that are served by a common core facility.

Section 235.2157, F.S., the small school requirement, is amended to increase the student population limits for schools other than elementary schools as follows:

- Middle school student population of no more than 900 students
- High school student population of no more than 1,200 students
- A kindergarten through grade 8 school student population of no more than 900 students
- A kindergarten through grade 12 school student population of no more than 1,200 students.

The legislation also authorizes the Commissioner of Education to approve several new exemptions to the small schools requirement. The possible exemptions may be awarded if the following situations exist:

- An agreement between the school district and a local government body consistent with a local comprehensive plan that requires a specific type of school construction
- A lowest bid or request for proposal received for a school meeting small-schools specifications that exceeds the per-pupil station cost defined in s. 235.216, F.S.

- Documentation that school siting is unavailable or priced well above appraisal and that to pursue a small school in that particular location would not be in the best interest of the students.

The statutory changes in the bill give school districts additional flexibility as they plan to meet the small schools requirement for new school construction that goes into effect July 1, 2003.

#### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

##### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

##### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

##### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

#### **V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:**

##### **A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

##### **B. Private Sector Impact:**

None.

##### **C. Government Sector Impact:**

The larger student populations permissible for small schools other than elementary schools may result in some construction cost savings for districts.

#### **VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

#### **VII. Related Issues:**

None.

#### **VIII. Amendments:**

None.