



Alberta Education Processes to Manage the Student Class Size Initiative



Executive Summary

February 2018

Who

Alberta Education

What

Performance audit

When

We conducted our field work from March to September 2017 and examined records and activities from September 2004 to July 2017.

Learn More

education.alberta.ca/class-size/about-class-size

Why we did this audit

In the early 2000s, the Department of Education examined analysis that reducing student class sizes can have a positive impact on improving learning outcomes. The department decided in 2004 it would implement the Class Size Initiative to reduce average student class size in each school jurisdiction.

The department provides funding to school jurisdictions through the Class Size Initiative to hire and retain teachers to reduce class sizes. School jurisdictions do not need to meet the guidelines in every classroom; instead, each jurisdiction is expected to meet the guidelines on average across its schools.

The Class Size Initiative is ongoing with a budget of over \$293 million for fiscal 2018.

Our audit objective was to examine the design and operating effectiveness of the Department of Education's processes to define the desired results of the Class Size Initiative, to develop an action plan to achieve those results, and to measure, monitor and report on the initiative.

What we concluded

We concluded that the Department of Education did not, in all significant respects, have effective processes as of July 2017 to define the desired results of the Class Size Initiative, to develop an action plan to achieve those results, and to measure, monitor and report on the initiative.

Based on our audit findings, it appears the department has, over time, converted Class Size Initiative funding to additional base instructional funding.

Why this is important to Albertans

The department has accepted that having small class sizes is most beneficial to students in their early years. The department has spent billions of dollars to reduce class sizes, but it does not know why school jurisdictions have been unable to achieve the target for the K-3 grade group over the past 13 years.

The department should be reporting to Albertan families why it has not achieved its desired result and what it plans to do differently in the future.

Alberta Education Processes to Manage the Student Class Size Initiative (continued)



What we examined

We examined the department's processes to define desired results, to develop an action plan, and to measure, monitor and report on the Class Size Initiative. To assess the design and operating effectiveness of these processes we:

- interviewed key staff and reviewed documents to understand goals, objectives and results
- examined the department's processes to collect and report on data
- examined the department's processes to provide oversight of the school jurisdictions and ensure accountability for results to Albertans

What we found

- Despite the \$2.7 billion in funding spent on the initiative since 2004, the number of school jurisdictions that met the department's class size targets in 2017 is lower than in 2004.
- The department's use of average class sizes as its target has an inherent limitation as it obscures the actual number of classes that have not met the ACOL suggested levels.
- The department:
 - does not have an action plan to achieve the desired results of the initiative since the end of the 2006–2007 school year
 - stopped requiring school jurisdictions, from the 2008–2009 school year onwards, to report on how they were using initiative funding
 - has not analyzed why school jurisdictions have not achieved the department's desired result for the K-3 grade group for the last 10 years

What needs to be done

If the Department of Education continues the Class Size Initiative, the department should develop an action plan and improve processes to regularly monitor and report on the initiative.

Consequences of not taking action

The department will continue to invest money without knowing if it is effectively achieving the desired results of the initiative.

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oag.ab.ca

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