

What other things should we be considering regarding class size?

Parents value smaller class sizes for educational and relational purposes. This school is based on relationships and the K/2 teams finds it very difficult to build those relationships when there are so many children in one space. With so many children, there is more likelihood that some will "slip through the cracks" because the attention is always diverted by the ones who are struggling academically or have behavioral issues. Smaller crew sizes will not only boost school morale, but it will also enhance the learning that takes place inside and outside of the classroom.

As a First grade teacher, co-teaching is an essential aspect of our classroom. Some aspects of co-teaching that we value are: 1-the ability to continue teaching when another student is having a crisis 2-Small group instruction, intervention and enrichment can occur at all times during the day, even when the other teacher is doing a lesson 3-Benefits to building student relationships and helping when they are having a difficult time 4-Increased professional satisfaction (co-teaching is one of the main reasons I remain at Exploris) 5-Co-teaching allows us to share expertise, as well as chime in with pertinent information during lessons 6-Students can have more personal interaction with teachers, among many other huge benefits to both teachers and students

As far as crew size, I think that the large number of students in a classroom has many consequences on student learning. Examples include 1-It is more difficult to identify those that need additional help because there are so many students 2-Well behaved, average children tend to slip through the cracks and not receive as much attention as they deserve 3-Studies show that smaller classes performed substantially better by the end of

second grade in test scores, grades, and fewer disciplinary referrals AND

the gains lasted. The students that had been assigned to smaller classes were more likely to graduate in four years, more likely to go to college, and more likely to get a degree in a STEM field. The positive effect was twice as large for poor and minority students, and thus narrowed the achievement gap. (Tennessee STAR experiment)

4-class size reduction most benefits minority and disadvantaged students, and would be expected to narrow the racial achievement gap by about one-third. It is also estimated that the economic gains of smaller classes in the early grades outweighed the costs two to one. Since we are working towards a more diverse environment, small class size should be a priority.

5-Smaller class size allows us to better fit our mission at Exploris. Our mission specifies Project based, experiential learning experiences. This is difficult to pull off with 38 students in a classroom. From organization to supplies to maintaining respectful behavior, it is exceptionally hard to provide those experiences. In particular, it is difficult during field experiences. Even with parent volunteers, safety is a huge concern when you have such a large group of 6 and 7 year olds.

6-Finally, I believe you will lose many high quality teachers if class sizes are not reduced. I truly believe that the large number of students in a room is directly related to our increased amount of discipline issues. Without help in this area, I am afraid many teachers will decide to relocate to areas where class sizes are more manageable.

In addition, if we determine that we need to maintain larger class sizes, I would request that each crew have a Teaching partner, instead of one per grade level.

As a member of the first grade team, co-teaching has such a positive affect on our classroom and our students. Some of the benefits of co-teaching that we see in our room are: when one teacher is teaching a lesson, the other teacher is able to pull a small group of students from the group to give them more targeted teaching. According to research, "Co-teaching allows for more intense and individualized instruction in the general education setting increasing access to the general education curriculum while decreasing stigma for students with special needs." As co-teachers, we have the ability to continue teaching when a student is having a crisis, which happens almost weekly in our room. Since moving to co-teaching last year, it is the number 1 reason why I love working at Exploris. Co-teaching allows for our team to build better, and more deeper relationships with our students, which comes in handy when they might be having a difficult time.

Something else to consider is the amount of time teachers spend grading, conferencing, etc. For example, a 30-minute portfolio conference for 19 students will take 9 1/2 hours. We do portfolio conferences 2-3 times a year. That is a lot of time! One teacher workday does not allow for conferences for 19 students. It also creates a burden on team members because we have to rotate in and out of conferences or else we would be here all day and night and over the weekend having conferences.

People used to be drawn to Exploris because of our low student: teacher ratio and high-quality instruction. This is no longer the case. We still go by the name Exploris but are no longer the same and continue to get further and further away from who we used to be.

Unsure

Why is 16 not an option for the other grade levels?

We should consider our mission and our values when considering crew size. Will we be what we are in our minds and what we "sell" to the public if we continue with these crew sizes?

For example, we claim in the Reflection value that "Exploris values the creation of time to slow down, to reflect, and to build connections." This takes time. All research shows that with student-teacher ratio, more students means less time per student with the teacher. It means less time on task because there are more interruptions, more papers to pass out, more time needed for transitions. We teachers often reflect on why we can't do some of the activities that we used to do for learning and it's because we don't have the time to slow-down with more students. In addition, more students with needs means even less equity in time with students because we are either managing self-regulation issues or providing academic support.

I hear some say, "Well, behavior and academics would be better if you built better relationships with your students." Absolutely! That's why Relationships is a core value. We have transitioned from having time to really get to know our students to superficial "team" activities and meetings. It is more of a challenge to know students 1:1 when there are more students because, as established, more students, less time per student, therefore leading to more superficial activities. Some ways we used to get to know our students used to happen between the spaces of time when we were walking to field experiences or service-learning, but that doesn't happen as much anymore. Unfortunately several of the things we used to do, popping over to the museum, backpack buddies, etc. we can no longer do because we are over the limit of 16. We find this even as we search for new opportunities- "Your group is just too big." Also, walking downtown and keeping all the kids safe with 19 vs. 16 is different because they are more spread out. It was easier to walk with 16 and have a conversation that involved much of the group. As described in our values, we have "a keen understanding of the unique development of the age group which they teach." Building relationships, especially with adolescents, takes time. They see through the superficial. Responsiveness and Restorative practices take time for conversation, trust-building, and reflection which we did a lot more of when we had 16 than we can now. When co-teaching, if we had 32 in a classroom and 2 or 4 folks had some issues to work out, one teacher could easily step out to work with the students, academically, socially, emotionally. This has become a greater challenge with the increased class sizes. Therefore, we have had to hire others (full-time counselors, additional admin, interventionists) to pick up the slack. At this point with the growing diverse needs of our population, we probably need these folks now, however, it is important that all staff's time is being valued and used effectively. Finally, we used to get to know our students and build relationships through writing crew journals. They wrote to us and we wrote back, not a few comments, but paragraph or paragraphs. We learned about their families, their hopes and dreams, their passions, and their perspectives in a deep way beyond a questionnaire or cute activity, They also learned about us as humans, not teachers from our responses. It was a lot of work, but we could get started reading crew journals on Fridays during planning (1 teacher could easily manage 32 students for an hour, so we would tag out). So why has this become such a challenge now?

Numbers cannot be thought of in "adding just 1 or 2" to a crew, they must be considered for the overall total and time. If we consider that we have added 3-4 students per crew since 2013. That means we have added 12-16 per grade level. Then considering the exponential increase in Exceptional Children, expansion to include more socio-economically diverse population which sometimes require the time and personnel of more than "one" child, it is like we have added another crew to each grade level (at the middle school) without an additional teacher.

Thoughtful feedback to foster values like Craftsmanship, Reflection, Relationships, Social Empowerment, Innovation, Responsibility, Connections to Nature, and Curiosity all take time. Think about it in terms of the crew journal (where all of the above were often addressed). If it took about 10-15 minutes to read and respond to each of 16 journals, then that's about 2.5-3 hours of time needed. Add in "just 3 more students" and that is now 4 hours of time. Therefore, less time needs to be taken for other things, or fewer quality responses, or find a "quick and easy" replacement. We do a lot of writing at Exploris so let's extrapolate this from just a crew to a content area and we'll use Writing again. For 64 students (16 per crew), it takes about 21 hours to read and respond to an essay. We now have 76 students, so that is about 25 and a half hours to complete the task. This is only one example of the increased time needed to maintain our standards for thoughtful feedback. No wonder crew journals have gone extinct at Exploris middle among other things.

As class sizes increase, then we look toward the solutions of other big systems, automated feedback from computerized programs, less-time for hands-on, less space to even move through the room safely, increased discipline issues, more rigid structures, and then we are only Exploris on paper and not in the classroom. Many other charters have been "inspired" to follow our original model and now we continue to move farther from it. Are we collaborating with other charters with small numbers to see how they make it work? We need to look to our values to guide us in our future and these decisions. There are many more charter choices available now than there were before and we are becoming more like the traditional than the unique innovators we once were. I think we would all agree that it is more important to be guided by our values than the bottom dollar. We have a lot of brilliant people and resources that should be able to find responsible solutions that strike a compromise between the two while remembering the reason we are all here is to do what is best for kids while truly valuing the time and efforts of our staff.

Many things are tied to quality instructional practices and there is not a one size fits all. As I taught elementary for 15 years, 20 was always my sweet spot, but my instructional practices, intervention support and the fact that my classroom was self contained, my room was the size of our current rooms at the middle school, and that I had all curriculum laid out by the county made a huge difference in the ability to teach students. I had my 20 students ALL day to build relationships, not just in our "crew" time. I was able to get to know students individually as people and as students. With the current model of our school, this is not a reality. My crew is too large to get to know in a 30 min. period once a day. 2 crews in a room is too much to manage and get appropriate results from instructional practices, regardless of how many teachers are in the room. Ratios are for daycares not academic settings. Just because there is a low teacher to student ratio (as compared to other schools), does not mean that it is a reasonable ratio for best instruction at Exploris.

EC population, having EC teachers and/or teaching partners run their own crews or run service learning groups to bring numbers down for those high impact activities.

The space we have to break out and get into 1:19 small groups, the space we have per student in our current building.

CREW size directly affects classroom dimensions/size. Sometimes in Middle school - the body sizes far exceed the space constraints we have in the classroom. As well some of the break-out spaces for CREW and the ART ROOM - are all too small for 7th & 8th graders with 19-20 per CREW.

When we have many behavior issues in CREW and 19-20 to manage - sometimes the CREW experience is difficult to manage.				
We are under a legislature that funds us less than we were funded in 2005. Our health care costs and student needs have gone up. Our reality is that we are likely in a model that is 1:20 for crew at the middle school level. We must seriously reflect on if we want strong support personnel for EC, intervention, coaching, guidance OR smaller crews. Further we need to visit other schools trying to work like us and understand how they are managing 1:20 or even 1:22.				
It does feel crucial to me that we lower class sizes in the K-2 grades for sure, and possibly in 3-5 (I would defer to them on that). A few more kids in middle grades does not feel like a big deal because we co teach all day long and have special ed support staff who are amazing!				
We are a school that value off-campus activities in and around downtown Raleigh. However, if class sizes get too big, an unintended consequence is that we will have to stay inside more; businesses and organizations are less likely to take large groups and they are harder to manage.				
Please consider that at least in kindergarten, the students require an immense amount of facilitation and support to complete daily routines and assignments/tasks. The only time we work in our crews is for 15 minutes of morning meeting. We are all one class, all 38 children are all our students for the remainder of the day. The amount of children in the K classroom, makes it difficult to establish relationships and connections with each child in a time frame that is conducive to establishing a class family during the most important weeks of the year. Having a large class also brings double the children with behavior concerns. For example, this year it took us several weeks/months to identify the children who were needing a speech evaluation or other supports due to the focus on other children who had behaviors that were unsafe. I think it's been really beneficial to the children to have co-teachers as we have been able to plan some really wonderful lessons and experiences together for the children. I wonder what bigger and better things we could accomplish with lower numbers in our classroom.				
Younger grade levels would really benefit from smaller crew sizes to help aid more one on one teaching.				
Smaller class sizes in K-2 (max 14) is what is so needed as well as continuing the co-teaching model. The benefits of having two lead teachers in the room include avoiding teacher burn out and creating meaningful relationships with all students. Diverse populations actively seek out programs where they feel they are in a supportive environment where their child's needs are being met. This goal is much easier to accomplish when you have less children in the classroom and therefore are able to really direct your time and attention to each student. Really investing that time and effort and creating those meaningful connections with students and families goes a very long way.				
There is also the issue of more high need behaviors in the classroom. When you are faced with a child who from day 1 demonstrates a high level of support is needed to be able to function it immediately takes away your ability to create connections with 30 plus other children. Which also means that you are unable identify other needs in your classroom speech, OT, and academic needs in a timely manner. If we had the ability to have smaller class sizes in K-2 (max 14) then not only can you accommodate the high need behaviors more effectively but you are then also able to create connections with all students and assess their needs in a timely manner.				
Lastly smaller class sizes in K-2 (max 14) would also help support teacher retention as well as attract new teachers.				

However, if in the end we are unable to accommodate this class size then I feel that it is important to maintain co-teaching and provide 2 teaching partners in K-2.					
Utilizing staff not currently utilized to have a crew such as EC teachers and partners. If portfolio conferences and other academic issues hinder this idea then put those responsibilities on academic teachers and the day to day crew activities share with other staff.					
current limited space					
Space! Cramming the kids into this building is the biggest problem. It's possible 19 kid crews would work better with more space. Same issue for adding kids who need to be in EC small group, we don't have enough space to put more in the room at one time.					
# of IEPs/504s per crew and needs they require					
Acoustics. If you are going to put 2 crews in a classroom, there has to be opportunity to create more defined spaces. Kindergarten has done a good job of creating a setup that allows for 2 seperate spaces when needed. Because the dividers (curtains) go top to bottom and they are fabric, it makes for better acoustics as the fabric absorbs some of the sound. Plus, the visual barrier is larger. There are some rolling dividers around the school, but do not block out a lot of the sound.					
K/1 worked really well with one teacher and one teaching partner per 20-student crew the first year of the elementary school.					
Crews should have even numbers to support partner work.					
TA's. Every K teacher that I know in Wake County has a TA. These teachers share a TA, and it is a disservice to the needs of kindergarteners and their teachers. We also need space for EC student services.					
See above. More, smaller classrooms.					
Increased crew sizes also increases other spending and increases teacher stress which can lead to turnover, which costs money. We may have more income with more students, but in the long run we are not saving money.					
I think 15 in K and 16-17 in other grade levels. I don't think upper grade levels should have bigger crews. In our current spaces, these grades have smaller spaces and bigger people and furniture. It is hard to move around in those spaces. While using the area outside a classroom as CREW space was feasible when class sizes were 14, it's not when they are 19. The big kids don't fit.					
Often it's not the teacher ratio that's a problem, it's the combined number of students in the small spaces we have.					
Smaller crew sizes allow us to do more of the things that make our school so unique. This will help us to maintain our reputation as a great school so that we can attract great diverse families!					
The current impact it is having on staff culture/climate and our students. Many students and staff report the working conditions and lack of space to be difficult to cope with. How far do we have to move to find a place that is economical to balance out cost and still enrich the educational environment? We are already finding it difficult to navigate places that can accomodate our crew sizes, thus the experience we used to have is no longer an option. Also parking is a major stressor					
The invisible costs related to larger crew sizes (more support staff, upgrades to facilities, teacher turnover etc.)					

What ideas do you have for reducing spending to offset reduced revenue?

Contacting other charter schools to see other models/ methods of offsetting revenue.

I would check with other Charter schools and see how they work it. Also, keep in mind that at one time Exploris was the "premium" for class sizes. Many parents wanted to come to Exploris because our class sizes were smaller then those in WCPSS. Now, WCPSS class sizes are actually smaller then ours. (See N and O January 2019: Wake has to deal with how the average K-3 class size in North Carolina will drop from 20 students this year to 19 children in the fall and 18 students in 2020. It's scheduled to drop in 2021 to a maximum of 16 to 18 students in a class, depending on the grade level.) Parents value smaller class sizes and without a change, I predict our enrollment will drop significantly. In addition, many of our diverse populations are looking for smaller class sizes. I believe that we will deter them from applying if our class sizes are larger then those they could get at their base.

In terms of reducing spending, I would reach out to other local charter schools to see how they implement and utilize their budget.

Not have a year end surplus.

Not sure.

As we have a surplus taking 1 or 2 students out of each grade shouldn't really affect the budget much.

We could do fundraising.

I'm not certain how to reduce spending.

Owning our own land and building.

Share teaching partners among elementary grades

Make EC and Global Arts full time - would that allow for fewer employees, thus saving \$? Could all Global Arts double as a TA, thus decreasing spending?

****It is hard to do this without looking at our budget. It would be helpful if the budget was shared with us, so we could look more closely at the numbers.****

1. Encourage staff to reduce number of teacher absences to reduce substitute budget. If staff are asked to attend PD, maybe the PD organization could reimburse for a sub. If class sizes are smaller, subs may not be needed as often.

2. Grants

3. Review staff organization and complete a needs assessment. Are all administrative/office staff positions necessary and used appropriately? I'm certainly not saying they are unnecessary but it is just a thought.

4. Increase before care/after care cost.

None

Affordable building, using people and resources effectively. Assessing spending on each campus, how the \$ is used and looking to cut based on the effectiveness of \$\$ spent. Cost analysis... Exploris did not have serious financial issues until the elementary opened. The

opening was supposed to make us more financially stable, so what has happened to cause the opposite? Can those things be eliminated or corrected?

I think a complete and thorough look at where money is spent? I'm not sure that I know enough about our revenue and expenses to answer that question. I do know that what sets us apart from other choice schools and innovative schools is being compromised by class size, instructional support and teacher needs-based professional development and that our reputation and status in the community will be affected in the long term. We need to figure out a way to provide a quality instructional program, retain highly qualified teacher in a tough economy and keep our values at our core.

If we are in one building K-8, reducing to 1 associate director for K-8 would be feasible

Return our administration to a smaller size. Go back to just having one AD, and eliminate instructional coach position.

Reorganize and reconsider staffing and administrative positions added as we added more students.

Can we canvas families especially those in younger grades if they would be willing to give more to the school to offset this smaller class size? RCHS makes up 325,000\$ per year from their annual fund parent drive. If we could attract more willing parents and possibly alumni parents to give 10% more?!

I think we seriously have to look at director, school directors, coach, intervention, guidance positions, global arts, finance, EC, partner, and admin positions. Where are we maximizing efficiency, and where are we duplicating efforts? The associate directors should have more responsibility for curriculum, site budget, money collected, scholarships, evaluation, and data. Director school-wide budget, fundraising, policy, and board. Director and board determine financial outcomes and performance outcomes. Associate directors make these things happen with the resources at hand. As a school we might commit \$9000 per pupil to elementary as an investment and \$8200 to middle. If this is the case let's be intentional, transparent, and clear about why we are making these choices to invest in our students in their earliest years. We should have more meetings at the site level with PD differentiated and focused. This will build problem solving, morale, and invest faculty as leaders and entrepreneurs. We need a clear organizational chart that then maximizes time and talent, and disperses leadership. Too often I see a meeting that costs us about \$1000 an hour in salaries. I am personally concerned that our leadership team has NO crew teachers yet every decision is based on crew. It is our CORE. We need to seriously and objectively audit our efficiency with time and people.

I also do not have an opinion on the ideal crew size for other grade levels. I can only speak for middle school...that ideal and what is realistic are two different things. This is a difficult question to answer with no "Other." I went high on all...because even if we have 19 or 20. We still have small numbers compared to any other school in the state under this budget.

Honestly I am totally OK with how things are currently. I have heard stories of how great Exploris used to be with the smaller sizes. So maybe some teachers who are used to larger sizes could take on a bit more if that's OK with them.

It is my impression that we have extra money at the end of each year. We do an annual fund and we have a capital campaign, so perhaps I do not fully understand how funding works. Teams often do not use all the allotted money and are asked to spend it at the end of the year. We have many grants. It is my perception that we have money to spare. Additionally, I think middle grades could take an extra student or two (I would not go over 20 in any crew) with plenty of support for the special ed students.

This is a really tough question. I wonder if Global Arts teachers, maybe admin could have crews to make them smaller. This means they'd need to work on Fridays which does not solve the spending issue.

I recommend reaching out to other charter schools about ways they maximize their revenue while keeping numbers down.

Instead of being given a stipend at the beginning of the year for the class, just be repaid when receipts are given.

Contact other charter schools and research what they do to reach this goal. Reaching out to public schools to learn how they accommodate smaller class sizes in lower grades may also prove to be beneficial. Lower class sizes in K-2 would attract more diverse populations to Exploris who feel that they are not having their needs met at other schools. Besides attracting more diverse populations smaller class sizes would also attract teachers and help to support teacher retention long term.

Remove bonus pay for non classroom employees

reduced class sizes should mean reduced staff

Move to a different building further away from the city that costs less in rent and is larger.

Would need to review budget to comment

Not sure. I haven't looked at the budget to see how the money is being spent. I may have to come back to this one later.

If higher grades have more and lower grades have less it should balance out.

Finding a cost-efficient K-8 building. Technology?

I would limit how much printing and therefore paper each teacher is allowed to use. Establish a schedule for students to clean the building. Purchase hand dryers so no more paper towel waste or spending. Purchase water bottle water fountains to support our water bottle use. Move into a healthy, clean building so that staff can be at work instead be at home sick.

I'd have to look at the budget to be able to answer that.

I personally do not see crew size as a problem... I see having two crews in a classroom as a problem. You can co teach utilizing two different spaces. That is most definitely the co teaching model we need to go to. Our population and the younger grades to not do well with the overstimulation of having 40 children in one space all day.

Reduce the size of the surplus

Find building sites that are smaller so we do not have to spend so much on facilities. Moving outside of the downtown area to find more affordable facilities. Parent volunteering used to be 'required' as part of the student handbook- is it still? Could parents volunteer as 'cleaning staff' to keep the buildings clean after school or on weekends. This would help them satisfy their volunteer hours and help us lower custodial costs. We could bring back blitzing and make students more responsible for keeping the buildings clean as well.

keep lower class sizes in mind when planning the new building, avoid lawsuits, look at administrative salaries

Look at overall expenses to see where they could be trimmed. If we had fewer students we might need fewer "support" staff.

That is a hard one. We are already underpaid compared to WCPSS (it was not always this way). How do we continue to attract good candidates if we are not competitive. Plus if we want to diversify our staff..we can't do that if most of the people we hire have to depend on another income to make ends meet.

Make the line-by-line budget transparent (not just big buckets) and hold input sessions so staff can review the data and make informed recommendations