

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CLASS SIZE AND CLASS CANCELLATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

It is recognized that the District's current Board Policy addressing class cancellation needs careful consideration and revision. Generally, the current permanent policy provides the guideline (based on minimum class size) to cancel classes with fewer than 20 students. It also requires the District to be efficient and it provides some guidance for flexibility. In addition, each of the campuses has created student-centered class cancellation guidance documents to support the flexibility of the current policy.

The District has a unique opportunity to work together on a collaborative solution. The Interim Chancellor has invited the formation of a work group that includes constituent voices to consider a new approach, potentially rooted in an emerging best practices in class cancellations related to *maximum class size*. The charge of the work group is to come to agreement on a solution that can be recommended to the Chancellor *together* as a best practice.

Staff shares this report for the purpose of edifying the District and our constituencies about the possible impacts of District and Board of Trustees' decisions regarding class cancellation, and uniquely invites input from constituent groups in advance of the upcoming study session. At the study session on November 8, 2023, staff will present information that impacts decision-making on class cancellation and invite constituent groups to be a part of the discussion with the Board of Trustees.

II. BACKGROUND

The SMCCCD has a current [Board Policy 6.04](#) on Minimum Class Size Guidelines that reads as follows:

1. "The District's Colleges will organize classes in as *efficient* a manner as possible consistent with good instructional practices and the needs of students.
2. Classes with fewer than twenty (20) students will normally be cancelled or merged with another section.
3. Certain classes with enrollments of twenty (20) or fewer, for example required sequential courses, single sessions required for a major, and classes in facilities which will not accommodate twenty (20) students, will be carefully reviewed in consultation with discipline faculty and, if offered, will be balanced against large classes."

[Emphasis added.]

This Board Policy has been in place since at least September of 2014. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, the District and the AFT entered into an MOU for the Fall 2021 semester that officially lowered the minimum class size for class cancellations to 10 students. This MOU language was then continued in a Spring 2022 MOU:

"Article 5.S.2: Classes that achieve an enrollment of at least 10 students will not be cancelled..."

Following the expiration of the Spring 2022 MOU, the then Chancellor issued an executive order extending the minimum class size of 10 students for through the Fall 2022 semester in order to allow for study and discussion of the issue with the Board as part of continued management of the COVID-19 global pandemic. At its regular meeting on September 8, 2022, the Chancellor brought a discussion item to the Board regarding Board Policy 6.04. At that meeting, the Board requested information to inform a discussion about minimum class sizes guidelines codified in this Board Policy, and how a potential change to that policy would impact class cancellations. A detailed report was provided to the Board at its regular meeting on November 30, 2022 that included data on course cancellation trends, the estimated cost of those canceled courses, and student re-enrollment patterns. After discussion with the Board, it was agreed that the Chancellor would extend the executive order to maintain the minimum class size guidelines for class cancellations at ten (10) students through the Spring 2023 semester, and that the District Participatory Governance Council (DPGC) would bring a recommendation to the Chancellor on possible revisions to BP 6.04 in the Spring.

On February 28, 2023, Governor Newsom ended the COVID-19 State of Emergency for the state of California. Upon the sunseting of this order, all temporary suspensions or modifications of Board Policy also came to an end, including the temporary adjustment of minimum class size. As such, the Interim Chancellor no longer had the sole authority to modify BP 6.04, and the policy as it was adopted was in effect. Subsequently, at the regular meeting of the Board on May 24, 2023, a recommendation was brought by the Interim Chancellor to the Board on suggested revisions to BP 6.04, incorporating some but not all of the recommendations from DPGC. Importantly, this recommendation maintained the minimum class size guidelines at twenty (20) students. After hearing from constituents and discussion with the Board, staff was directed to provide additional time and information for analysis and discussion at a future study session of the Board, which was scheduled for November 8, 2023. In the meantime, based on the recommendation of the Interim Chancellor, the Board agreed to extend the temporary reduction in minimum class size guidelines in BP 6.04 to ten (10) students through the summer 2024 session in order to allow time for additional student and a final recommendation to be considered and approved by the Board of Trustees in the Spring 2024 semester.

III. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Over the past decade, the District has experienced a continuous enrollment decline. At the same time, the average class size and section fill rates have also continued to decline, despite reductions in section offerings. This has resulted in a parallel decline in the efficiency of course scheduling and section offerings across the District. As the District attempts to return to enrollment growth, there will be significant fiscal impacts if the District does not address issues of average class size, fill rates, and the number of sections offered. This issue is further discussed in sections IV and V below.

The District has been in a steady state of enrollment decline for at least the past decade (see Figure 1 below), a trend that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 global pandemic, leading to sharper declines in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years. The impact of the pandemic was felt across every educational

sector in the state and the nation, and was not unique to SMCCCD. Significant investments made for the 2023-24 academic year, including the implementation of the Free Community College strategic initiative, have begun to reverse this downward trend for the Fall 2023 semester.

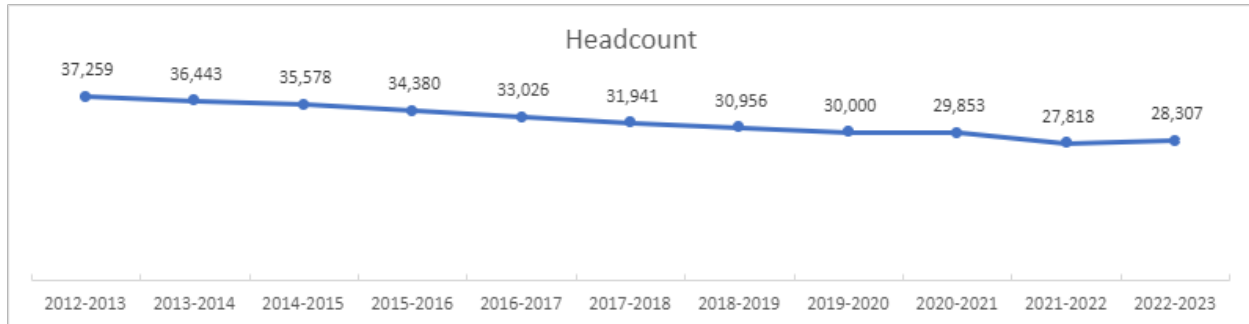


Figure 1

There are several trends that are related to the overall enrollment decline in the District and also to a discussion of minimum class size and class cancellations that are presented in a series of figures below. The first (Figure 2) shows a gradual decline in the average class size across the District that has accompanied the enrollment decline, from a high of 30 students per section to a low of 24 during the 2021-22 academic year.

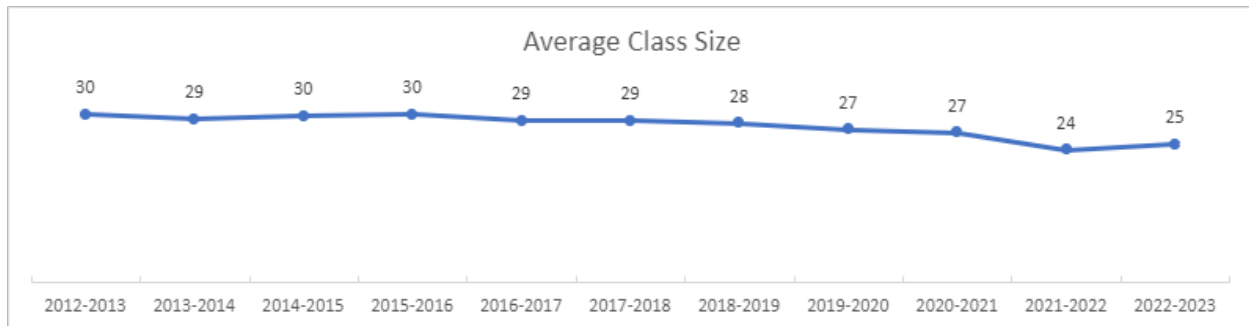


Figure 2

At the same time, as average class sizes have declined, so has the section fill rate, which is the calculation of the number of students in each section divided by the available seats in that section. A corollary impact of a reduction in the minimum class size number from twenty (20) to ten (10) students for cancellation decisions has been a decrease in the section fill rate from a high of 73% to just 61% in the 2022-23 academic year (see Figure 3 below).

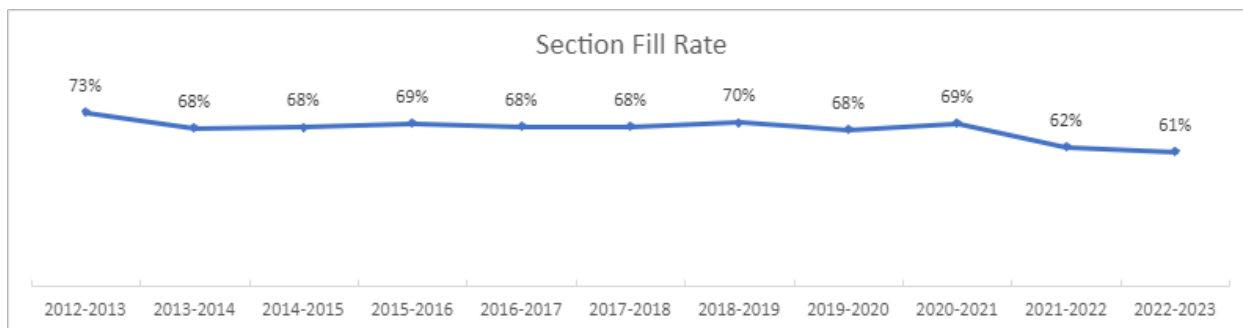


Figure 3

Related and expectedly, there has been a steady decline in the number of sections offered (see Figure 4 below) across the three colleges of the District that has tracked the decline in enrollment. Importantly, although sections have been reduced significantly over the same time period, section fill rates and average class sizes have also declined, suggesting that the efficient scheduling of courses has also been in decline. This issue is examined in more depth in the following section.



Figure 4

IV. PRODUCTIVITY, EFFICIENCY, AND FTES

Fiscal efficiency in instruction has declined significantly in the past ten years as a result of smaller class sizes during a period of sustained enrollment decline. As stewards of the public trust (whether a District is apportionment-based or community funded) the District is obligated to exercise fiscal responsibility and to maximize the use of its facilities. This means maximizing the use of classroom space and understanding the impact of class size on instructional costs.

The District states in Board Policy 6.04, “1. The District's Colleges will organize classes in as *efficient* a manner as possible consistent with good instructional practices and the needs of students.” As efficiency decreases, the District spends more money to educate fewer students. Over the past ten years, the efficiency of course scheduling has continued to decline to a point that would be unsustainable for any District that is not community funded. The information below reviews how Districts typically calculate efficiency using a Productivity (Load) metric, and what is considered a sustainable load for Districts that rely on state apportionment. Data is then presented for the SMCCCD showing how inefficient the District has become in its course offerings.

As a Community Funded (formerly known as Basic Aid) District, the SMCCCD does not receive state apportionment based on the Full Time Equivalent Students (FTES) it serves. However, specific categorical allocations continue to be based wholly or in part on FTES, although these make up a small proportion of the District’s overall budget. Nonetheless, it is useful to understand the calculation of FTES and how that relates to an analysis of productivity or load, in order to be able to have a discussion of efficiency as it relates to the financial impact of lower efficiency and productivity.

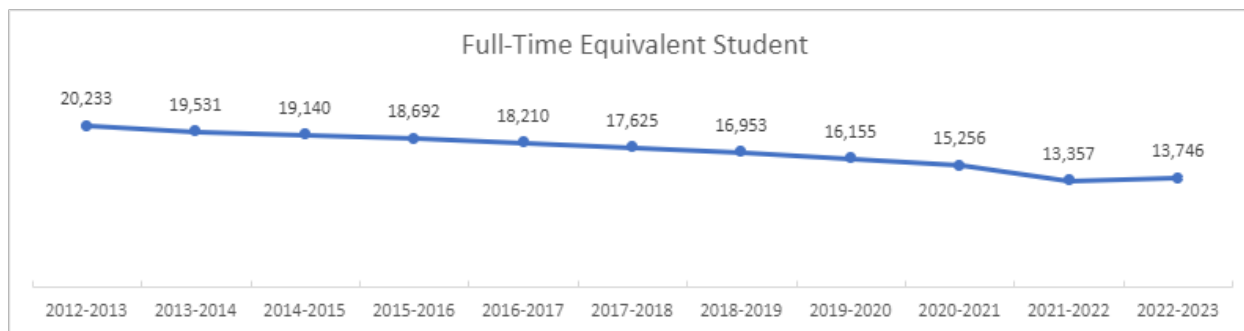


Figure 5

IV.A A QUICK PRIMER ON CALCULATING FTES AND PRODUCTIVITY (LOAD)

For the majority of California community colleges, FTES determines over 90% of the funding that they receive. As such, the production of FTES commands the attention of everyone from administrators to faculty. The most basic calculation of FTES, and the relation to students and weekly contact hours (units) is as follows:

$$1 \text{ FTES} = 1 \text{ student} \times 15 \text{ hours/week} \times 2 \text{ semesters of } 17.5 \text{ weeks} = 525 \text{ contact hours}$$

$$\text{Class meets } 3 \text{ hours/week} \times 30 \text{ students enrolled on Census Day} \times \text{TLM} = 17.5 \text{ then FTES} = (3 \times 30 \times 17.5) / 525 = 3.00$$

It is from this calculation that the concept of Productivity (or Load) is derived. Productivity or Load refer to measures of efficiency in the scheduling and delivery of sections, and the enrollment per section, as it relates to the production of FTES. For colleges on traditional calendars (i.e., 18 week semesters) the overall efficiency target historically is:

$$\text{Weekly Student Contact Hours (WSCH)} \div \text{Full Time Equivalent Faculty (FTEF)} = 525$$

So, as an example using a 3-unit class that meets 3 hours per week (i.e., has 3 weekly contact hours) would result in the follow Productivity (Load):

$$\text{WSCH} = 35 \text{ students} \times 3 \text{ hours} = 105$$

$$\text{FTEF} = .20 \text{ (3 units/15 units)}$$

$$\text{And so: } 105 / .20 = \mathbf{525 \text{ Productivity}}$$

Enrollment	Weekly Contact Hours (Units)	FTEF	Productivity (Load)
35	3	.20	525
30	3	.20	450
20	3	.20	300
10	3	.20	150

Table 1

An in-depth discussion of the calculation and considerations of Productivity (Load) can be found in the manual [Understanding and Calculating FTES and Efficiency \(2019\)](#) published by the CCCCO and IEPI. As shown in Figure 8 below, there has been a steady decline in the efficiency of section offerings over the past decade, as measured by Productivity (Load).

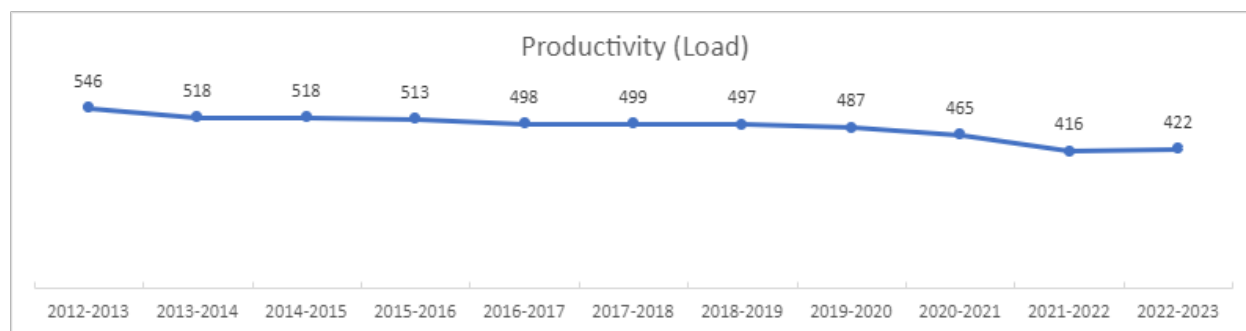


Figure 6

All of the above declines in efficiency have been accelerated since the adoption of the ten (10) student enrollment minimum for class cancellations, first in negotiated MOUs and then by executive action, there has been a dramatic shift in the number of sections each academic year that have had relatively low enrollments. Two charts below (Figures 5 and 6) show the shift from 2018-19 to the 2022-23 academic year. Notably, even with a minimum class size of twenty (20) students, the District had almost 30% of sections in 2018-19 with 20 or fewer students enrolled. This is for a number of reasons also outlined in the Board Policy. As of the 2022-23 academic year, this proportion had grown to almost 40% of sections having 20 or fewer students enrolled, including 11% with fewer than 10 students.

PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF COURSES BY CLASS SIZE, 2018-19

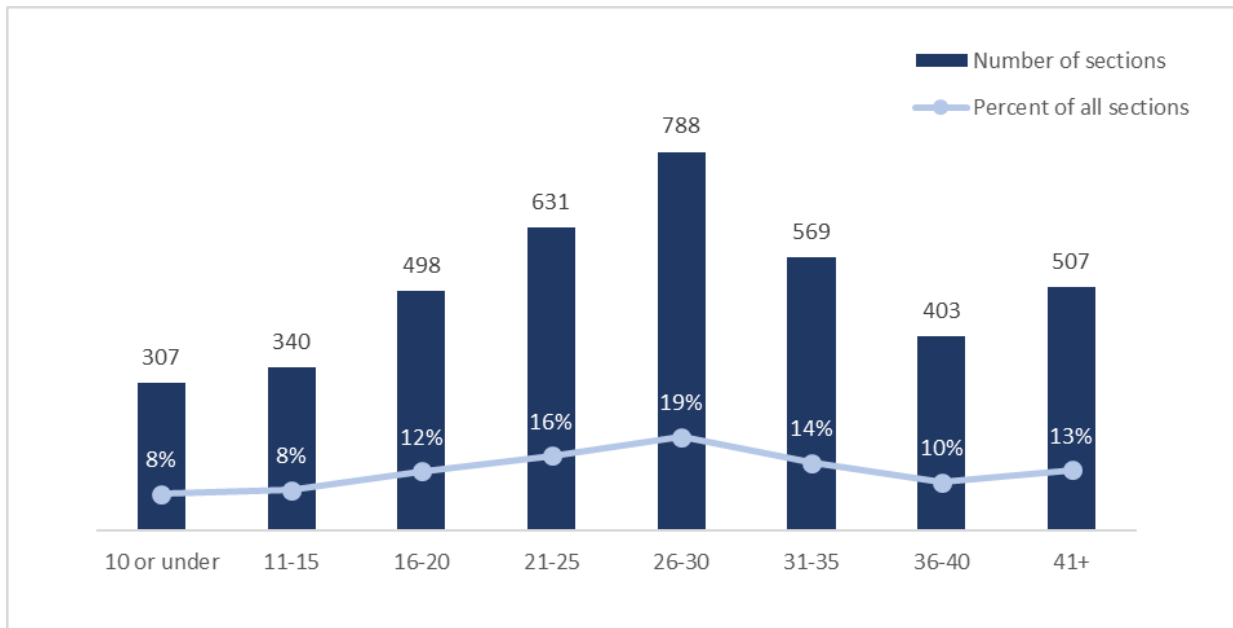


Figure 7 - Number and percent of sections by distribution of class size, 2018-19. Note: All sections include face-to-face, fully online, and hybrid modality.

PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF COURSES BY CLASS SIZE, 2022-23

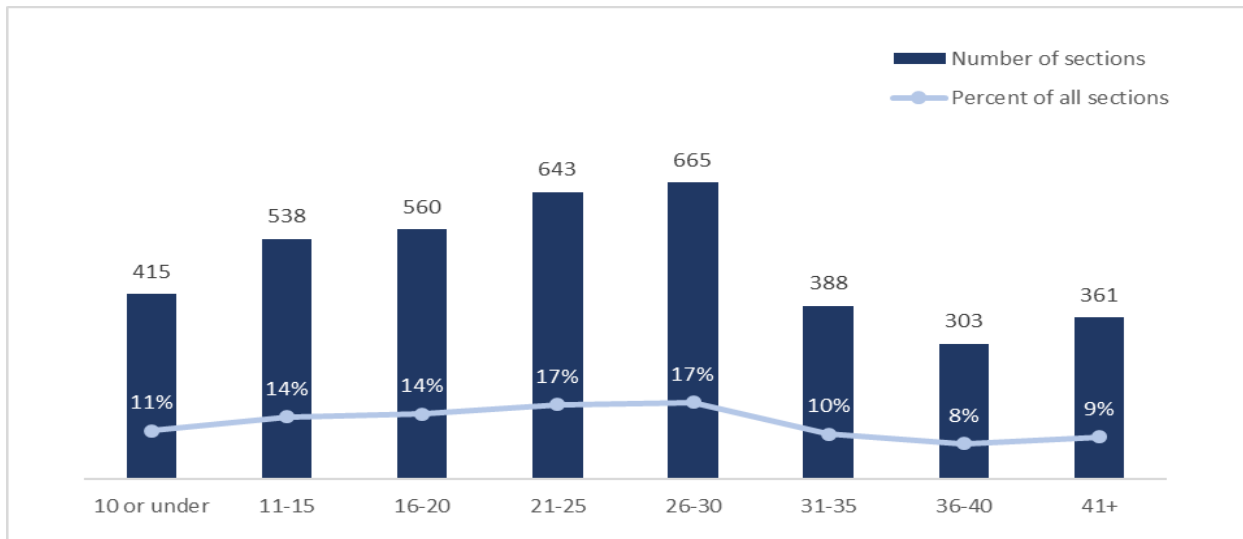


Figure 8 - Number and percent of sections by distribution of class size, 2022-23. Note: All sections include face-to-face, fully online, and hybrid modality.

V. THE COST OF INEFFICIENCY

The impact of maximizing the use of the District’s human and facilities resources to the best of its ability means a potential savings of tens of millions of dollars annually. As the District returns to an enrollment growth trend, with commitments to fund major initiatives such as Free Community College, scheduled maintenance, and capital improvements, the District must strategically consider realizing \$15M annually in Unrestricted General Funds.

Productivity metrics are an abstract but consistent calculation to describe efficiency across the CCC system. However, there are real cost implications for running an inefficient schedule. Table 2 below presents the actual instructional costs, FTES, and Productivity from the 2022-23 academic year, and then uses the above calculations to present a scenario that shows what instructional costs would have been if a higher Productivity had been achieved through greater efficiency to produce the same amount of FTES.

Instructional Costs	Productivity	FTES	WSCH	FTEF	Cost per FTEF
\$ 74,713,875*	422	13,746	412,380	977.2	\$ 76,456.80
\$ 60,055,724**	525	13,746	412,380	785.5	\$ 76,456.80

Table 2 – Comparison of Instructional Costs based on Productivity, FTES, and calculated FTEF. *NOTE: Actual costs from the SMCCCD CCCC 2022-23 311 Report. **NOTE: Calculated estimate based on 2022-23 actuals.

As shown above, holding constant the FTES produced and the Cost per FTEF, **if a District had a benchmark Productivity Goal of 525 instead of 422, the cost to produce 13,746 FTES would have been almost \$14.7M less** than was spent by the SMCCCD in 2022-23. As the District returns to growth in enrollment and FTES as it has begun in the Fall 2023 semester, low Productivity is unsustainable from a cost perspective.

VI. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are several additional issues that can be considered when examining minimum class size guidelines as they relate to class cancellations. From the cost of additional sections to the impact on students from cancelled classes, the District must balance these considerations as part of its class cancellation policy.

VI.A. COURSE CANCELLATION TRENDS

As shown above, just because a minimum class size is identified in Board Policy, it does not automatically result in cancellations, whether it is set to twenty (20) or ten (10) students. These additional considerations are presented below. The number of cancelled courses from Fall 2018 to Spring 2023 is shown in Table 2 below. Overall, the number of courses cancelled tend to be slightly higher in fall terms compared to spring terms. Course cancellations increased from Fall 2020 to Spring 2022, reflecting the scheduling challenges experienced during the COVID-19 global pandemic. For Fall 2021, Spring 2022, Fall 2022, and Spring 2023 terms, the total number of cancelled courses with class sizes from 11 to 19 was 20 as a result of the change to minimum class size guidelines.

Class Size Band	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020*	Spring 2021*	Fall 2021*	Spring 2022*	Fall 2022*	Spring 2023
<10	133	123	136	117	233	136	241	215	157	90
11-19	61	34	45	41	48	34	2	3	8	7
>=20	5	2	1	4	4	--	--	5	1	1
Total	199	159	182	162	285	170	243	223	166	98

Table 3 –Total number of sections cancelled for Fall 2018 to Spring 2023, by class size at the time of cancellation. Cross-listed sections have been accounted for and are not counted if there’s an active section. *NOTE: Terms impacted by COVID-19 global pandemic.

VI.B. FINANCIAL IMPACT OF OFFERING LOW-ENROLLED SECTIONS

A cost estimate associated with not cancelling low-enrolled courses open is presented in Table 3. The estimate uses the number of courses cancelled from Table 2 and calculates a cost by multiplying the total contact hours of those courses by the average faculty hourly rate for the term. Looking at sections that were cancelled with between 10 and 20 students enrolled, the potential cost of maintaining those sections would have been between \$192,000 to \$335,000 depending on the semester.

Class Size Band	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020*	Spring 2021*
10-15	\$279,851	\$177,075	\$271,968	\$203,727	\$215,282	\$176,006
16-19	\$53,605	\$15,766	\$6,307	\$6,269	\$31,750	\$4,419
Total	\$333,456	\$192,841	\$278,275	\$209,996	\$247,032	\$180,425

Table 4 – Total estimated cost of cancelled sections for Fall 2018 to Fall 2022. Cost is calculated by multiplying average faculty hourly rate for all active courses by total number of contact hours of all cancelled courses. *NOTE: Term impacted by COVID-19 global pandemic.

VI.C. IMPACT OF CLASS CANCELLATIONS ON ENROLLED STUDENTS

Between Fall 2018 and Spring 2022, the number of enrolled students impacted by cancelled courses ranged from a peak of 1,492 in Fall 2018 to the lowest of 462 in Spring 2023 (Table 3) in those cancelled sections.

Class Size Band	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020*	Spring 2021*	Fall 2021*	Spring 2022*	Fall 2022*	Spring 2023
<10	626	566	632	541	785	517	820	826	576	326
10-19	757	427	520	463	573	372	53	32	111	97

>=20	111	52	56	86	102	--	--	113	20	39
Total	1,492	1,045	1,208	1,090	1,460	889	873	971	707	462

Table 5 – Total number of students enrolled in a cancelled sections. *NOTE: Terms impacted by COVID-19 global pandemic.

Of those students in a cancelled section, 24% to 34% re-enrolled in a different section of the same course before the pandemic (Table 5). For the period during the pandemic, that percentage ranged from a high of 50% in Spring 2022 to lowest at 37% in Fall 2022.

Class Size Band	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020*	Spring 2021*	Fall 2021*	Spring 2022*	Fall 2022*	Spring 2023
<10	23%	29%	28%	26%	27%	41%	42%	46%	35%	40%
10-19	25%	42%	37%	34%	27%	50%	66%	69%	44%	32%
>=20	29%	25%	29%	7%	35%	--	--	79%	80%	44%
Total	24%	34%	32%	28%	28%	45%	44%	50%	37%	39%

Table 6 – Percent of students in a cancelled section and re-enrolled in the same course. *NOTE: Terms impacted by COVID-19 global pandemic. Only sections with exact subject and course number count.

Notably, of those students in a cancelled course, on average 87% remain enrolled in their home college through census of each term, before the pandemic (Table 5), and at an average of 86% during the pandemic terms. Similar percentages are observed for all class-size bands.

Class Size Band	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020*	Spring 2021*	Fall 2021*	Spring 2022*	Fall 2022*	Spring 2023
<10	86%	85%	87%	83%	81%	83%	85%	90%	89%	93%
10-19	86%	91%	91%	86%	80%	81%	81%	97%	92%	96%
>=20	84%	92%	95%	88%	88%	--	--	99%	100%	90%
Total	86%	88%	89%	85%	81%	83%	85%	91%	90%	93%

Table 7 – Percent of students in a cancelled section and remained enrolled as of census of each term. *NOTE: Terms impacted by COVID-19 global pandemic.

Regardless of the criteria used, any class cancellation has the potential to negatively impact students, and the District attempts to mediate these impacts by making decisions on class cancellations in a timely manner, communicating to students, and making allowances for low-enrolled sections as outlined in Board Policy.

VII. ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

It is incumbent upon the District to consider alternate approaches and agree on a best practice that mitigates negative impacts of class cancellation on students, faculty, and fiscal sustainability. Class cancellation based on minimum class size may not be the best approach. Other approaches include FTEF allocations, faculty productivity targets (as in section IV above), and/or a class cancellations based on a percentage of maximum class size.

Setting section enrollment minimums to guide class cancellations has been the District practice codified in Board Policy since 2014, and is a standard practice at other community college districts in the CCC system. For example, the Peralta CCD, a four-college district in the East Bay, sets a minimum class size of 20 for vocational/technical classes and 25 for all others to guide cancellation, with similar exceptions made for classes that are needed to complete certificates or degrees, sequential courses, etc. Additionally, they allocate a set number of full-time equivalent faculty (FTEF) to each college each semester that limits the size of the schedule that is produced. However, Peralta CCD is a revenue-limit district that depends on state apportionment.

West Valley Mission CCD, a two-college community funded district, sets an informal minimum class size of 16 to guide cancellation decisions. The College of Marin, a single college district, sets a minimum class size of, “no less than fifteen (15) enrollees while College of Marin maintains its status as a Basic Aid District.” Similar to the SMCCCD, the Contra Costa Community College District (4CD) and Foothill-DeAnza District set a class minimum of 20, with standard exceptions made. Although there is some coherence in the exceptions that each district makes to any set class size minimum, there is less consistency in what that minimum is, and little to know justification for the specific number identified by each district.

VII.A. EMERGING PRACTICE: CLASS MAXIMUMS AND CLASS CANCELLATIONS

There are other approaches to class cancellations as they relate to class size that are utilized by other community college districts in the Bay Area and the CCC system. An approach that is used by the San Jose – Evergreen Community College District, a two-college community funded district, ties guidelines for class cancellations to delineated maximum class sizes as follows:

- “12.8.1.1 A class may be canceled within twenty (20) days before the class starts if the enrollment is less than 50% of the class maximum;
- 12.8.1.2 During the first two weeks of instruction, a class may be canceled if enrollment is less than 50% of the class maximum;
- 12.8.1.3 Classes shall not be canceled after the second week of instruction without the consent of the instructor.”

Again, there are standard exceptions allowed for the benefit of students if these thresholds are not met. This approach to class cancellations is less arbitrary, with cancellation decisions related to the agreed upon class maximum, and the timeline for decisions explicit with multiple decision points.

VIII. MOVING FORWARD – CHANCELLOR’S WORKGROUP

It is time to turn a new page and invite voices from across our constituent groups to work together to solve our most pressing issues. It is the Interim Chancellor’s hope that we take this first step together to recommend a way forward for class cancellations that is the best approach for the District and represents excellence in collaborative practice.

During the 2022-23 academic year, an ad-hoc joint committee of the District Academic Senate and AFT drafted a proposed administrative procedure for establishing class maximums. Building on this work, the Chancellor has established a work group to study the issues of class maximums and class cancellation, and develop recommendations for both revised Board Policy and possible administrative procedures. This work group includes the District Academic Senate President, District Curriculum Chair, one faculty member appointed by each college Academic Senate (for a total of five), two instructional Deans, one Vice President of Instruction, and the Vice Chancellor of Educational Services. This group will meet regularly over the next several months and develop recommendations that will be shared with other constituent groups, including DPGC, before final recommendations are made for revised policy and/or administrative procedure. It is expected that these recommendations will be brought forward in the Spring 2024 semester. It is hoped that this collaborative approach will re-focus the discussion away from a single class size minimum number and return the focus to a principled approach that is in the best interests of students and the District.

CONTACT

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