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Most of USA's remaining local team is preparing to look for new work. NASA

USA reaches end of mission

Downsized firm's future in doubt

By James Dean
FLORIDA TODAY

Outside orbiter hangars and a tile processing shop, Mike McCulley gave a guest the lay of the land at Kennedy Space Center.

That side of the street is Lockheed, this side Rockwell, he explained. Each protects its turf and information, slowing shuttle work and increasing its cost.

"Once we're all under one badge, I guarantee you things are going to be a lot slicker and a lot smoother," McCulley, then Lockheed's KSC site director, remembers telling Rockwell's Kent Black. "And they were. These barriers just fell. One badge, one team, one company."

The joint venture that brought the rivals together was United Space Alliance, which in 1996 became the lead operator of NASA's shuttle fleet and immediately one of Brevard County's largest employers.

Seventeen years later, most of USA's remaining local team is preparing to turn in its badges and look for new work.

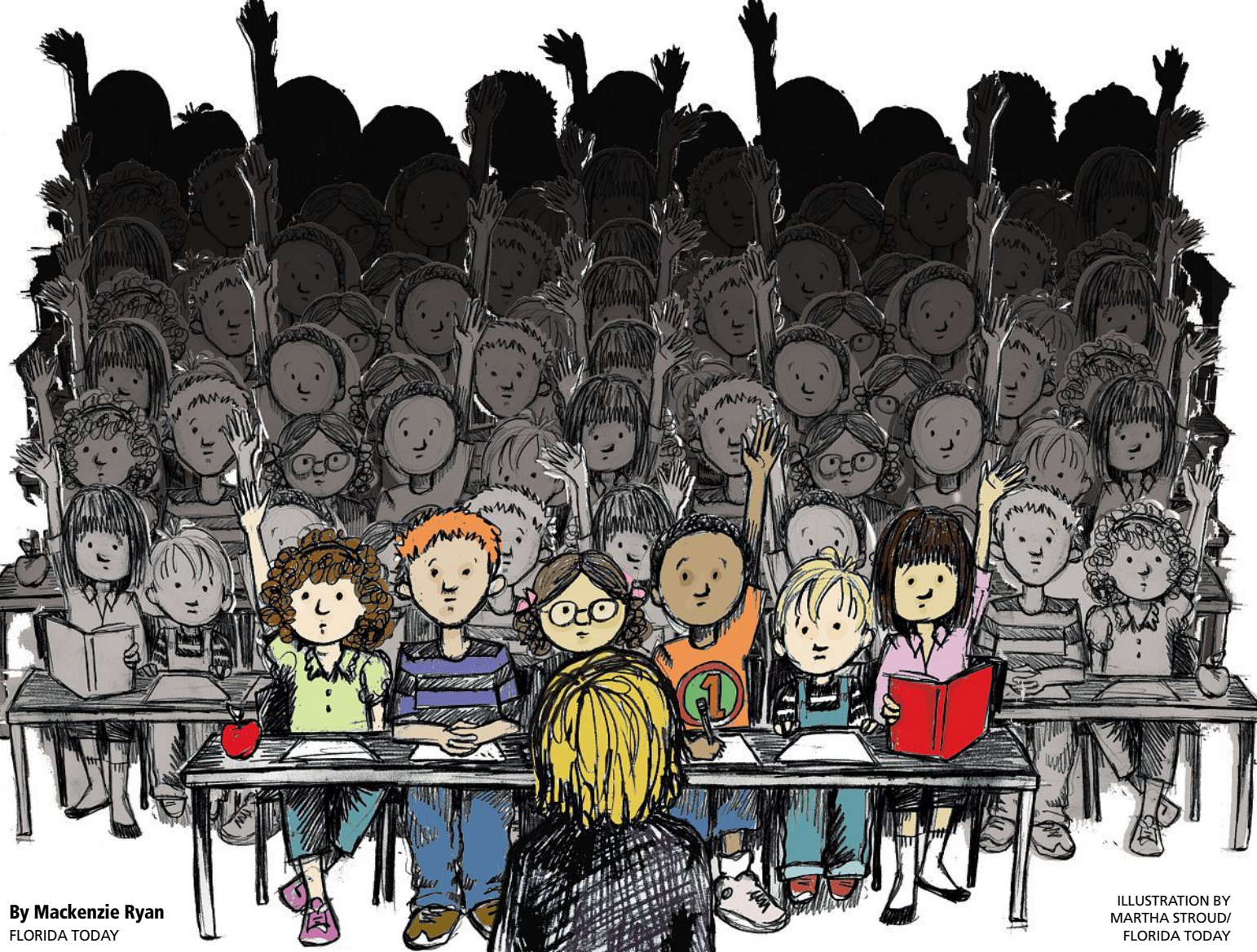
See USA, Page 9A

BY THE NUMBERS

- 636 local employees expected to be laid off
 - 142 local employees remaining after upcoming layoffs
 - 6,600 peak USA employment at Kennedy Space Center
 - \$25.7 billion in revenue from NASA between 1996-2012
- Source: USA, NASA

Brevard budget crisis puts small class sizes on the chopping block. Ignoring the constitutional amendment would save \$4.8 million. But is it worth it?

NUMBERS GAME



By Mackenzie Ryan
FLORIDA TODAY

ILLUSTRATION BY
MARTHA STROUD/
FLORIDA TODAY

A decade ago, Florida voters amended the state's constitution to limit the size of public school classes.

Now, Brevard Public Schools is considering breaking that law.

Doing so would slash \$4.8 million from the district's budget by eliminating nearly 70 teaching jobs, roughly the dollar amount that would protect elementary art and music programs.

School leaders say they can make

the change without creating large classes. At some schools, it might mean adding no more than one or two students per class.

But for those opposed, the issue is about more than saving money.

It's about breaking the law.

"It's illegal," said Ronald Rice, a 47-year-old from Palm Bay whose two children are now grown. "It's flouting the law."

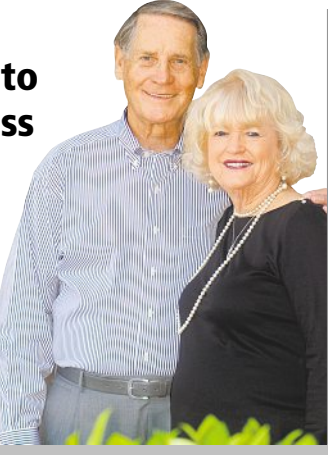
See NUMBERS, Page 3A

HOW WOULD STUDENTS FARE IF CLASS-SIZE RULE IS IGNORED? SEE VIDEO AT FLORIDATODAY.COM.

STYLE

The secret to their success

After 50 years of marriage, Phil and Jeanne Farmer are still best friends.



SPORTS

National pastime

It's opening day at Space Coast Stadium. For one family, being there is pretty important.



BUSINESS

Spotlight on candles

Cocoa entrepreneur Jessica Croft is hoping her products are a hit with Oscar hopefuls.


PUBLIC INTEREST

Trash deal

Matt Reed: Big-money recycling fuels Waste Management deal.

TODAY'S DEAL

\$94 value for \$47 Admission for 2, Buffet for 2, 2 Drinks each, \$19 Slot Credits each at Victory Casino Cruises Cape Canaveral, FL DealChicken.com



INDEX

Autos

Help!

Lottery

Horoscopes

Section G

11B

2A

11B

Public Interest

18-19A

News of the North

20A

Obituaries

6-7B

Outdoors

10C

SportsTalk

4C

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First- and second-graders learn in teacher Cynthia Miller’s multi-age classroom. Miller said she prefers teaching in this style of classroom. TIM SHORTT/ FLORIDA TODAY

Numbers

Continued from Page 1A

A shy child, Rice recalls being overlooked by Orange County teachers in the large classes of the 1970s and '80s. When capping class sizes came to voters in 2002, she was all for it. Having no more than 18 to 25 students per class, depending on grade level, made sense.

At the time, some Space Coast classes had upwards of 32 or 36 students, former teachers say. Some kindergarten classes had 25 children, seven more than the maximum now.

“That was bordering on criminal,” retired teacher Bo Bartleson said.

Brevard Superintendent Brian Binggeli says he does believe slight increases would save money without sacrificing student education.

He has proposed returning to class sizes found four years ago, when the state required districts to keep down school-wide averages. It was a step toward the current, stricter requirements that cap the number of students in individual classrooms.

“I truly believe that class size, based on the school-wide average, is not an impediment to our success,” said Binggeli, adding that it’s important to not go higher than the school-wide average.

Increasing class sizes is among the nearly \$30 million in budget cuts the Brevard School Board will discuss Tuesday

night. Elected officials also will hold a workshop in early March to consider which items should be protected if state funding is higher than expected.

Ripple effect

There are consequences to breaking the law on class size. The district would face a fine of a few hundred thousand dollars for flouting the constitution.

And Brevard would lose its “high performing” district designation, which gives certain perks — like starting school a few weeks early.

Forfeiting the perk in 2014-15 would push first semester finals to after winter break. It also would cause high schools to be out-of-sync with Brevard Community College’s calendar, potentially impacted the popular dual enrollment program.

At Manatee Elementary, Brevard’s largest elementary, returning to a school-wide average would eliminate two of the school’s 51 classroom teachers.

According to Principal Carl Brown’s calculations, if the school population remains the same, no class would have more than two additional students. Many would remain at current levels. “We’re not talking about a large increase, and we’re not talking about large classes.”

The change also would prevent some multi-grade classes from forming, although some parents and teachers prefer that model.

It would circumvent the need to form new classes mid-year when a new student enrolls,

which causes disruptions. And other measures, such as asking high school students to voluntarily take a virtual class, would not be needed as regularly.

Middle and high school teachers, however, will likely spend less time with each student.

If two extra students were added to each of their six classes, that amounts to 12 more tests to grade, essays to read or labs to prep — on top of the extra 22 to 25 students instructors they’re already expecting. Next year, for the first time, teachers will be required to teach six out of seven classes instead of five.

“The teachers are not going to be able to focus on students as much as they can now,” said Sharon Bowen, the mother of two eighth-graders and a librarian at Rockledge High. “I know changes should be made, but I don’t think we should sacrifice our kids.”

Binggeli acknowledges the issue and said he’s considering using additional state funding to add secondary teachers back to schools. Final budget figures may not be known until May.

Still, many remain skeptical. Mark Tormoen, retired principal of Viera High, believes the “double whammy” of increased class sizes and instructors teaching more classes will result in lower student achievement.

“Someone wise once told me: Money is always going to be an issue,” he said. “You can’t let that stop you from what you need to do for kids every day.”

COMING MONDAY ON FLORIDATODAY.COM

Another proposal being considered by the district: Institute a pay-to-play program for high school sports. Read more at floridatoday.com on Monday.

‘Sets the tone’

Others worry about the example it sets for students — and for employees.

“It sets the tone for unethical behavior throughout the district,” said Keith Yarbrough of Rockledge, a pharmacist who has become active in the budget cuts debate.

Yarbrough chaired a state ethics task force in the late 1990s, and saw firsthand the consequences of educators taking shortcuts.

“It happens all the time, not only in education but in general. It happens in corporations. It happens in families,” he said. “Decisions at the top set the stage for the whole organization.”

An online survey by Save BPS found that after school closures, individuals were most concerned about increasing class sizes. “They are concerned that the educational quality in Brevard is going to be compromised,” said Michelle Speisman of Save BPS. Cuts are “focused on the school level.”

The unscientific survey gauged concerns of about 100 parents and community members familiar with Save BPS, which has worked to find alternative solutions to school closures and budget cuts.

“These are student-heavy and school-heavy cuts,” said Vida Escue, a Titusville parent, 44, who has been active in the budget debate. “Maybe the district can afford to pay the fines, but just

because we can afford to pay them: Should we?”

This year, 25 of Florida’s 67 school districts disregarded the class size law, making them eligible for fines.

A loophole took the teeth out of the financial consequences. Penalties totaled more than \$22 million, but were reduced to \$5.7 million.

Fines are reduced by 75 percent if school districts submit a plan detailing how they will improve class sizes. The law does not require the districts to follow their plan, only to submit it.

That’s shortchanged districts who are in compliance with the law, as penalties are redistributed as rewards. This year, Brevard’s reward was \$152,000.

Proposed legislation could further lessen the consequences. A bill in the state house would set the penalty level at the school-wide average, instead of at individual class sizes. Another bill would allow districts to set the school calendar so final exams fall before winter break.

Both are gaining traction, but it remains unclear if there is enough momentum for them to become law.

“I don’t like the notion that we have to make this choice,” Binggeli said. “For the greater good of programs for children, and for staff members, it’s a decision we need to make.”

Contact Ryan at 321-242-3664 or mryan@floridatoday.com. Follow her on Twitter @Mackenzie_Ryan or at Facebook.com/FloridaTodayEducation.

FLORIDA’S CLASS-SIZE LAW

Voters amended the Florida Constitution in 2002 to limit the number of students in core academic classes such as math and English. This year, about two-thirds of school districts — including Brevard — complied with the law and limited individual classes to the following sizes:

- » **18 students** in prekindergarten through third grade
- » **22 students** in fourth through eighth grade
- » **25 students** in high school classes

WHAT THAT MEANS

Brevard has a lower student-to-teacher ratio than other Florida districts, in large part due to its compliance with the class size law.

» **14.8 students** per classroom teacher is the Brevard ratio now. Other districts have an average 15.2 students per teacher.*

WHAT WOULD CHANGE

Brevard is considering increasing class sizes to school-wide averages, which would return class sizes to the levels of four years ago.

» **\$4.8 million** would be saved and 69 teaching positions would be cut. The district would face a fine, expected to be a few hundred thousand dollars, as a penalty for breaking the law. The proposal is ranked No. 31 out of about 50 different ways to save money, roughly halfway through \$30 million worth of budget cuts.

**Ratio includes exceptional education classes, which have fewer students than traditional classes.*

Source: Brevard Public Schools

BREVARD EMPLOYEES

BY THE NUMBERS

Brevard Public Schools employs the following full-time staff, according to a state report for this school year.

39
District administrators

238
School-based administrators

4,654
Classroom teachers, including pre-kindergarten and exceptional education

703
Additional instructional staff, such as guidance counselors and librarians

2,937
Non-instructional staff, such as aides, technicians and clerks

Source: Florida Department of Education

OTHER PROPOSED CUTS

Brevard Public Schools is considering about 50 different ways to save \$30 million. Here’s a sampling of 10 proposals being considered. Officials have ranked the list so that the lower the prioritized number, the more likely it will be cut. If additional state funding comes through and fewer cuts are needed, officials would take proposals off the bottom of the list. To view the full list, go to floridatoday.com.

Prioritized ranking	Amount saved	Proposed budget cut
No. 3	\$350,000	Centralize lawn maintenance. Savings would come from contracting with private companies or dedicating employees to the task. In addition, custodian hours will be shaved as they will not longer be responsible for lawns.
No. 10	\$550,000	Consolidate alternative learning and adult education centers, which likely will move to Clearlake Middle in Cocoa. Ending leases would save money, as would consolidating positions.
No. 15	\$200,000	Reduce Secondary Schools of National Prominence budget. The district receives additional state money based on how successful students are on college-prep exams such as AP or IB; reducing the district’s portion has the program pay for itself.
No. 24	\$429,000	Eliminate elementary and middle school Jump Start summer program, which helps struggling students prepare for the upcoming year before school starts. If cut, Brevard will only offer summer programs required by the state.
No. 35	\$250,000	Stop paying for every high school junior to take the ACT, a college-entrance exam. Guidance counselors use the test to help students win college scholarships. The test also helps gauge student performance nationally. If cut, students will need to pay for the test themselves, and school staff will help low-income students seek scholarships.
No. 38	\$1.2 million	Reduce the hours bus drivers work from 7 1/2 to either 7 or 6 hours by eliminating additional responsibilities after their routes are completed. Employees would continue to keep benefits.
No. 39	\$1.2 million	Eliminate media assistant positions: 43 at elementary schools and 27 at middle and high schools. The cuts would put more work on school librarians, likely impacting their instructional time. Volunteers could potentially help offset manpower lost.
No. 40	\$10.3 million	Require teachers to instruct six out of seven classes instead of five, effectively eliminating a second planning period or the supplement instructors receive to teach an additional class. The change has been negotiated as part of the teachers union’s contract. About 192 teaching jobs will be cut.
No. 44	\$257,000	Require one furlough day for 11- and 12-month employees. It would be the second furlough day for district administrators (their first furlough day is No. 37, a \$66,000 savings). It would be the first furlough day for employees such as custodians and secretaries.
No. 46	\$27,000	Cut back year-round middle school office clerks to 11-month employees — resulting in a reduction in pay. Clerks would either have June or July off, which reduces the impact to service levels.

Source: Brevard Public Schools