

Good afternoon, Chair Dembrow and committee members, for the record, my name is Brad Cole and I am a social studies and student council teacher in the North Clackamas School District in Clackamas Oregon.

I want you to imagine for a moment that you are a doctor about to perform a complex surgery. You've diligently prepared for this surgery and you want the best for your patient and you know that this surgery, if done properly, should take 6 hours. However, you find out that the hospital administration has only given you 3 hours to perform this same surgery. You might be able to perform the surgery in that time, but what will the outcome be for your patients? Is it really fair to them? Now I want you to imagine that patient on that table is your child. Your precious granddaughter. Your inquisitive niece or your sports obsessed nephew. What would you do? And more importantly, don't you think the doctor should be able to negotiate this time requirement with the hospital administration?

This feels like a desperate and unfair situation for this doctor, of course. Yet as a teacher, I often feel this same sense of desperation about my class sizes. Because just like this doctor, I know what is going to serve my students best and I know that to do it right is going to take the full 6 hours. I know that I need to differentiate my instruction to meet the diverse needs of my students. I know that one size does not fit all in the classroom. I know that when I have smaller class sizes I get to have direct interactions with my students, to provide them immediate and actionable feedback, and that they are then supported in their growth as people and as students by more individualized instruction and pedagogical approaches. Simply put, I need to know my students and have the time and ability to give individualized feedback in order for them to learn. How can I meet the needs of my diverse classroom of learners - students learning English, students receiving special education services, students who are talented and gifted, students who are living in poverty or experiencing homelessness or trauma - when I'm effectively given 3 hours to perform this complex 6 hour surgery?

I have in many ways been set up to fail often as a teacher because my class sizes have inexorably and unconscionably increased year over year over year. Last year when I was in the building I had nearly 300 8th grade students with class sizes averaging between 35 and 40 students.

When I asked my students about their own experiences in my school, they didn't need an educational degree to understand the impact this was having on their education. They said things like...

"My voice isn't be heard"

"A lot of kids go unnoticed."

"It's difficult to concentrate"

"Teachers can not give you 1 on 1 help."

"Large classes were much more stressful than small classes."

"My teachers weren't able to give me the support I needed."

"Being talented and gifted, I didn't get much of the advanced work or attention."

"It got really noisy...that was a pretty big educational challenge"

"I got scared because there were so many people."

"It is hard to move around the room"

"Sometimes there aren't enough chairs or desks for everyone to work."

Let's listen to our students. I implore you to give teachers and our union representatives the ability to negotiate around class sizes. Just like that doctor needs the full 6 hours, we as teachers need smaller class sizes to meet the overwhelming needs of all of our amazing young scholars.