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TO: Members of House Business and Labor Committee  
FROM: Jan Nordlund, Committee Analyst  
DATE: February 13, 2018  
RE: HB 4113 – Class size and collective bargaining

HB 4113 Class size as a mandatory subject of collective bargaining

Business and Labor Committee members had questions that were not asked because of time constraints when the public hearing on HB 4113 was held. I forwarded the committee's questions to OSBA, COSA, and OEA with an invitation to submit responses to the following statements/questions.

Specifically to Mark Thielman, Alsea SD Superintendent:

What kind of work load do the 7-12 grade teachers have? Do they have 6-7 periods and a prep?

Superintendent Thielman responded:

Our Middle School/High School program covers grades 6-12. MS/HS students have a full academic schedule with 5 required courses and 2 elective periods for 6-10 and varies for grades 11-12. The teachers teach 6 periods and have one period as prep. Because we are a small school, teachers prepare to teach six different subjects and class sizes vary from the smallest of four students (Macro Biology) to the largest of 34 students (in MS PE).\*\*\*At current funding levels, we have been fortunate to offer more elective classes than in previous school years. Unfortunately, rising healthcare and PERS costs are making these investments out of reach for the next biennium.

OEA's Jared Mason-Gere submitted this:

Average Last 5 years: 150 students

We currently have 15 members in the licensed unit.

Alsea had a graduating class of 13 students in 2016-17---that is average to above average for their historical standards. In 2010, they had a graduating class of 5 students. For advertising purposes (they are open enrollment), Alsea has a 1:10 teacher to student ratio.

They are on a 4 day school week at all levels. At the Middle School and High School, they teach 6 out of 7 period day with each teacher getting a prep period. There is also a short break and advisory section that some teachers have.

When the average Oregon teacher starts thinking about “large class sizes,” he or she is usually talking about 30 plus kindergartners or 38 fifth graders in a class for example. There is no situation in which Alsea would ever approach these type of numbers based on their enrollment. If Alsea was able to bargain class size, that proposal would likely get centered on the number of students in combination classes. When you have between 5 and 15 students on average historically per grade level, this means that teachers have combination classes. For example, we might have a teacher with K-1 blend of 15 students total. In low enrollment years, however, the District may attempt to create a K-2 blend. This K-2 blend might only have 23 students---low for average class sizes across the state, but significant if one is teaching three grade levels at the same time. Our proposals in Alsea bargaining for class size would likely seek to limit the size of blended classes. For example, “A combination of three grade levels or more shall never exceed 18 students” or something like that.

As far as salary, when you talk to OEA member educators in Alsea, they invariably point to the size of the District and the fact that it is a 4 day school week for the reason they work there for less money than they could make elsewhere.

Specifically to Liz Hartman, Lake Oswego SB Member, please address this comment: You indicated that class size would be mandated by the state. This is not true. It just means locals can bring it to the table; it doesn't mean they have to agree.

OSBA's Richard Donovan responded on behalf of Ms. Hartman:

Mandating bargaining over class size is not about just bringing something to the table. It means that school districts will be forced to bargain with teachers' union representatives over class size, and if districts do not agree to proposed terms, then teachers can strike. That is what HB 4113 would force into law. Currently, as a permissive subject, districts and teachers can have a conversation about class size. Most districts are happy to have this conversation. But the legislature mandating the conversation is the legislature forcing school districts to spend money on employees, not students. In my view, schools in this state are a public trust, one that the legislature has underfunded for decades. By his own admission in the hearing, the chief sponsor of HB 4113, Rep. Brian Clem, said that this bill was not a solution. “Money is the issue,” he said in his opening remarks. The legislature should focus on real solutions, and not focus on squeezing local school districts by forcing bargaining over forces that we cannot control. School boards balance all of the needs of the district and while teachers and class size are a key component, there are years when the focus has to go elsewhere to advance students. As much as school board oversight is about employees, the oversight is also about student success, safety, and all the factors that go into delivering an education that prepares them for their future.

Statements/questions for all to respond to:

Besides the data developed by Dr. John Hattie – who is at the University of Melbourne (as in Australia, a fundamentally different educational system than in the US) – what studies demonstrate, beyond reasonable doubt, that class size does not improve student learning environments?

Data I can find shows that when class size is 20 or less there are significant increases in standardized performances, problem-solving, as well as quality of learning environment for students, staff, and teachers... What studies do you/they have, disputing this?

Most studies across the US suggest that there is “marginal” difference when class size reduction is from 25 (or more) to 22. However, even in these cases where marginal improvement (rather than significant increases) in standardized test performance/s: there was undeniable improvements in student behavior, staff and teacher morale, and associated factors – not specifically measurable through standardized testing tools.

While parties can be opposed to the measure in question (related to mandatory class size as a bargaining topic), what advocate with any sense of legitimacy – can honestly argue class size has been “proven” to have no significant impact upon student learning environments? Words matter, the research must be put into context to be understood, it is high time that we demand such on matters as critical as this.

OSBA responded:

The following answer pertains all the above 4 questions, which all deal with the same topic.

OSBA submitted testimony includes a list of potential sources of information on Class Size Reduction policy, including a meta-analysis titled “Class Size and Student Outcomes: Research and Policy Implications” by Matthew M. Chingos. That document describes analysis of class size research, and states: “The number of high-quality studies is disappointingly small, and does not offer guidance as to the optimal class size overall, much less for specific contexts such as grades, subjects, or student populations. But it does offer lessons relevant to current policy debates. Most studies find at least some evidence of positive effects of smaller classes, but the size of these benefits is inconsistent across studies and often small.” For further information on Class Size Reduction policy, including discussion regarding cost-benefit analysis, please consult the article, or any of the other articles submitted for the record.

OSBA strongly rebuts the characterization that “class size does not improve student learning environments.” This is not what was stated in the hearing and is not an accurate representation of OSBA’s position. The limited research available indicates that Class Size Reduction policies are expensive. Furthermore, that research indicates it is often better for student achievement to target investment in other areas. School districts and school board members should not be required to bargain over things that are entirely out

of the control of the district and that research indicates is of inconsistent benefit. All students must be served, and the focus of district decisions should be on student achievement.