

Good afternoon Chair Wagner and committee members. For the record my name is Justin Potts and I'm a nationally certified school psychologist. I've been in education for 25 years and I started my career working with kids here in Salem at Marion County Juvenile Department in the mid-90s.

I've been a past president and director-at-large of the Oregon School Psychologists Association, and a member of a number of state level committees and commission work over the years, beginning with the Juvenile Justice Task force back in 1995. I recently took on legislative co-chair work for the Eugene Education Association.

The students of the 90s, who saw the cuts caused by measures 5 and 50 back then, are now the parents of the elementary students the JCSS spent last year learning about. The current 3rd to 5th graders also experienced some of the largest class sizes, teacher layoffs, and reductions in programming for those who were most at-risk. I worked in Portland Public back in 2003 when Senator Fredrick was Information Director during a previous round of funding cuts. To avoid shutting the school year down 24 days early, we worked 10 days without pay. That was the first time I'd experienced the situation that meant doing the right thing for students meant working without any compensation.

This week in a middle school, I observed a student in a 6th grade class of 36 students with an excellent teacher. He told me that at best, he has less than a minute of individual contact per student. And my student was quietly unproductive until he could be helped. But remember, the teacher has no official say in his class sizes.

In one of my schools, despite the district reportedly returning to pre-recession funding levels, one special education teacher has as many as 53 students this year on her caseload, when 3 teachers averaged 1:20 only 8 years ago. She has to figure out how to provide over 260 hours of individualized instruction on student's IEPs...per week. The math doesn't work even if that teacher works through every lunch, evening and weekend. She also has no say on her caseload.

The recommended school psych to student ratio is 1:700 for a model that focuses on supporting student behavior and mental health. In my district it's 1:1600. Our school nurses have a 1:1800 ratio when the recommended is 1:750, and we have excessive class sizes in our medically fragile and life skills programs. Yet during bargaining, a district representative claimed there was no reason life skills teachers should even get preparation time at the start of the year, as if setting up feeding protocols or training support staff or connecting with medical providers should take no more time than setting up any other classroom. Because negotiation on caseloads isn't permissible, there is no incentive to maintain manageable and safe program size.

You see, the argument used against this measure is the same logic as for this measure. District leadership wants to ensure that it has control over spending priorities, and teachers simply want to have a say that an uncompensated burden of class size and caseload demands doesn't fall solely on them and their students. It's not just about class sizes, but the needs of the students in those classes. Districts, not unions, determine priorities, but compensation for demands created by those priorities should be negotiable, creating an incentive for reasonable class sizes and caseloads. There are plenty of examples

out there for which this exists and works for both the district and teachers, who truly should want the same thing.

If I may read from the findings of that 1995 Juvenile Justice Task Force:

As we look at these issues, two things are given:

We face limited government resources and tough choices; and

Investment more than pays for itself over time; you will be judged on how well you meet today's needs.

I often say I have to advocate for kids despite the system, not because of it. A simple statute change to permit negotiating on caseloads and class sizes is a step towards investing in real change for my students.

Thank you,



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