

Dear Legislators,

I want to talk about how cuts to education have affected me personally, as a teacher in Beaverton School District. Seventeen years ago, I entered this profession to connect with my students, and to make a difference in their lives and learning. The National Commission on Teaching & America's Future reports that 46% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years. Teaching can be a joyful act, but the costs of teacher turnover are high, and it's too early to anticipate how Oregon's budget cuts will affect our most experienced educators, who have survived the early years in this difficult profession.

Why do I think about leaving teaching, the career that I once loved? Why do other talented, dedicated professionals choose to leave?

When I first began teaching at Sunset High School, my average class size was 32 students. I had two classes below 30. As the years progressed, my class sizes began to increase. 5 years ago, my average classes were 36 students, but I had some as large as 39 or 40. Now, my largest class is 42 students and my average is 38. And, my teaching load is "light" compared to others in this school!

I teach through connecting with my students, and getting to know them personally. This is difficult--if not impossible--to do with 42 students in a core subject. Managing a classroom of 42 students means that I have less time with each student in a 90 minute period. The main reason I entered teaching--to help kids--is in jeopardy.

I also want to make a difference, but the most frustrating thing about these budget cuts is that they undermine my efficacy as an instructor. Large class sizes have affected my ability to start class on time, monitor student engagement, or to do the kinds of learning activities that benefit students, like simulations or large discussions. And I simply can't offer the same kind of personalized feedback or instruction that I used to provide for my students. I am planning day-by-day. I am never caught up with grading. I offer fewer writing opportunities because I don't have enough time to grade the work I have already collected. I have no common prep time to collaborate with my colleagues. Professional development opportunities have dwindled, and there is very little time to reflect on best practices or how to implement them. I feel anxious and tired most of the time, because I know that I'm not doing a good job, at least to the standard I hold for myself. I am merely trying to survive each day.

What needs to change? Reduce class sizes. Provide the money for textbooks that we so desperately need. Invest in a stable source of funding for Oregon public schools. For if we do not change the conditions in our schools, many talented, dedicated, and experienced educators will leave. And our students will suffer. But we have the opportunity to do something today! Invest in education by passing HB 3427.

Sincerely,
Alisa Harvey
Beaverton School District