

To the Oregon House Committee on Business and Labor

As a former classroom teacher and school counselor (and currently I work as a sub for both), I would like to express my strong support for SB 580.

Class size and case loads should definitely be on the table as mandatory subjects for collective bargaining.

Research has clearly shown that class size has a huge impact on learning. Along with the research though, this is simply intuitive. One teacher can only give so much time to each student, and larger class sizes clearly allow for less time per student. A current trend in teaching, differentiated instruction, calls for allowing teachers to do more individualized instruction, tailoring instruction to student needs. I know from experience that creating materials and lessons for differentiated instruction is extremely rewarding, yet extremely time consuming, as it entails meeting each student and groups of students where they are at. Smaller class sizes allow for more opportunity to meet each individual child's needs, and give each (regardless of skill level) the amount of instructional time needed. And the time I took to prepare materials for some individualized and small group learning paid off when I saw the growth in reading, language arts, and math my students made.

Class size greatly impacts discipline. The time that teachers take for classroom discipline and to handle crisis and disruption takes away from learning. Not only is time taken from instruction to deal with the behavior, but times is then needed to redirect a class back to the learning task. A few years ago teachers came out to voice their concerns over this "crisis in the classroom" yet it has not been addressed. Smaller class sizes lead to less disruptive behavior: simply by having their learning needs met in a more timely manner keeps students on task. Teachers can deal with small distractions faster with smaller class sizes and students tend to display less disruptive behavior when they feel they have less of an audience. Students get lost way too easily in larger classrooms, and many students do not tend to be strong advocates for their learning needs, thereby becoming a lost student in a large classroom.

Classrooms are communities. A smaller classroom makes for a closer community, where students become supportive of one another. Students thrive in those supportive environments, where positive peer supportive leads to better learning outcomes, better relationship skill building, and better school attendance.

Professional associations (school counselors and social workers) recommend a 250 to 1 ratio. Very few schools even approach this; 400 to 450 to one is more of the norm. Counselors and social workers cannot adequately meet the needs of students on their caseloads with these numbers: the academic support, social/emotional support, and the career/college preparation needed for high school students. If we want higher graduation rates; graduates prepared to earn living wages[and students who will thrive because they get the attention they need by teachers, counselors, and social workers; we must be ready to put class and caseload size on the bargaining table.

You don't improve things by making the same mistakes over and over. The mistakes we have been making include loading too many students into classrooms and onto counselor caseloads. Make our schools better places to learn and grow for Oregon students by passing SB 580. What we spend for the staff needed will be repaid with higher graduation rates, where students will be much more likely to reach their full potential as contributing members of our communities. Every student is worth it.

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