

I am a second grade teacher in Beaverton School District. Each year, our school faces the challenge of balancing class sizes to keep a physically comfortable number of people in a room, but also to try and create learning environments wherein teachers can know each student and have the time and resources to tailor education to each of their needs. It's a monumental task on a daily basis when teaching more than 21 or 22 students. Please understand what this means: I have students reading at a kindergarten reading level who do not yet know letter names and sounds. They don't know that reading means looking from the top left, going right, and how there are spaces between words. Or that words are made up of letters, which represent sounds. I also have students who are reading at a fourth grade level. Students who devour new vocabulary, who have developed a strong identity as readers with favorite series, genres, and authors. They have moved past learning to read, and are voraciously reading to learn, and for enjoyment. It is guaranteed that I will have students across this reading spectrum every year. This is not an unusual circumstance. My job is to use our reading block each day to address the needs of every single student in my class. Imagine the enormity and complexity of that responsibility with 36 students. We don't have enough cubbies for them because classrooms weren't designed for that many. But I am supposed to serve each of them every day, track their progress, communicate with their families, and design the next educational step. That's only reading. Teachers are left with the choice to either fail their students or spend all of their personal time working, and still not have enough instructional time to individualize instruction for all their students. So, it's fail/fail. And it's exhausting. And demoralizing. Never feeling like you are succeeding at your job contributes to early burnout. No matter how hard we work and how many extra hours we put in, we are set up to fail when class sizes are not controlled. Would you hire a pilot and tell them they must fly 3 planes at once? Of course not—it would be setting them up to fail. Teachers are set up to fail, and then schools and teachers are judged as ineffective. As we work ourselves into the ground, we are criticized for not being able to do enough. The reason is that we are given an impossible task! There was one year when I had between 18-21 students throughout the year. What a feeling! I knew my students well. We built an amazing classroom community. I felt capable of planning for and implementing differentiated instruction for all of my students. I was in regular contact with their families about academic progress, but I also had time to tell them things like how their student comforted another student who was sad today, and showed great empathy, and I think a new friendship could be forming so perhaps you want to arrange a play date. It was an incredible year. I still worked lots of extra hours, but not so many as I do now, and I finished each day feeling successful and fulfilled. I started each day feeling energized and ready to welcome my students for another day of learning. My students loved coming to school, and so did I. Their parents remarked on this as well. It wasn't because I was a more talented teacher that year, or because I was working harder then. It was because I was given an appropriate number of students, and I could serve them well. I could really do my job! We could also recruit more great teachers if they knew the job was not an uphill climb on an icy slope. Who wants to go into education when they see the way we struggle and fail, and draw criticism from the communities we work so hard to serve? It is thankless and hopeless work much of the time. I implore you. Support this bill to make real, meaningful change in education.