Date: February 25, 2013
To: House Education Committee,
Chair Gelser and Members
From: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations Consultant
RE: ***HB 2644 [Class Size Data Collection]***

Thank you so much for your consideration of this bill to ensure that ***true*** class size data is made available to you, to the public, and to researchers who study the connection between investments and student outcomes. We believe that replacing the mathematical fiction currently published with real information on class size is a modest but important change that will more accurately reflect the learning conditions of Oregon's public school students.

Currently, districts typically depict "class size" as a ratio of total enrolled students to total adults, or in some cases, to total licensed professionals. This back-of-the-napkin math distorts the truth about class size, because counselors, administrators, TOSAs, librarians, and other educational employees included in the equation do not always have a classroom of students assigned to them. Thus, the ratio mislabeled as "average class size" reports a much lower number than is actually experienced by students.

Why should you see this as a concern?

Oregon's dramatically overcrowded classrooms are known to us because parents and teachers report the anecdotes. They are concerned about the students in grade schools who are overwhelmed and act out. They are concerned that providing individual attention is becoming impossible. They are concerned that grading and commenting on English papers is a thing of the past. They are worried about the students too intimidated by the huge class sizes to ask a question when they don't understand a concept. They are worried about student safety.

Our principals and students and parents know what their immediate environment is yielding in these fiscally desperate times. But who doesn't have an accurate picture? Policymakers. The media. Researchers. The business community, whose expectations often result in the passage of ever-higher standards and completion expectations. The public at large, which doesn't always grasp the connection between resource scarcity and student performance.

We are asking to be among the first of the states that collect and report what every administrator already knows about his or her school building: how many students are assigned to each teacher of record. The data are already known, already reported in many cases, and are already coded and defined by federal law. We are deeply sensitive to the need to keep administrator efforts to a minimum, given all that is already on their plate, and that is why we worked closely with ODE to ensure that the collection doesn't add a new burden. The dash one amendments to the bill further refines and streamlines the concept, and should reduce significantly any costs for compilation of the annual class size report.

With respect to the research value of true class size data collection, we are attaching one of the many documents we've found that reflect the need for this approach. You will see that this data is fundamental to good research on the linkage between investments in education and the results that may be expected from a particular funding level.

To further illustrate the difference between current class size data practices and the realities of Oregon's schoolchildren, two educators have joined me at the dais to describe their class size realities. Deborah Barnes of North Clackamas and Steve Hammond of Beaverton are here to share why this bill is so important to the 43,000 members of the Oregon Education Association.

Thank you so much for considering this concept, and for passing HB 2644 as amended by the dash ones to the floor, do-pass.

NCPEA POLICY BRIEF

CLASS-SIZE POLICY: THE STAR EXPERIMENT AND RELATED CLASS-SIZE STUDIES
Volume 1, Number 2, October 2012

Author: Charles M. Achilles

Differing Definitions that Affect Conclusions: Class Size vs. Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Since the early 1900s class-size studies in the United States and elsewhere have shown positive benefits for students and teachers. Yet class size in the early grades is still debated and is not a predominant national policy. The debate is fueled in part by confusion over how students and teachers are counted.

Between 1980 and 2012 researchers have conducted many class size, Class-Size Reduction (CSR), and Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) efforts (often misnamed as "class-size studies") in the U.S. and abroad. Two remarkable consistencies are apparent: a) PTR analyses show little effect, and b) class-size analyses show considerable positive effects on short- and long-term student outcomes. On average, the difference between these two calculations in American elementary schools is about 10 students.

Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) is "the number of students in a school or district compared to the number of teaching professionals." Often all educators are part of the computation, including counselors and administrators. PTR is a formula and process for equitable allocation of resources important to administrators, policy persons, and others.

Class Size is "the number of students for whom a teacher is primarily responsible during a school year." Class size is an organizing tool for providing instructional and education services to clients.

Average Class Size is the sum of all students regularly in each teacher's class divided by the actual number of regular teachers in those specific classes. If four second grade classrooms have 14, 16, 18, 18 (n=65) students, the average, (not actual) second grade class size is 16.25 (or 16).

Class-Size Reduction (CSR) involves the processes to achieve class sizes smaller than the ones presently in place, such as changing the class size from 25 to 16. Surveys and databases usually generate PTR's. Valid and reliable ways to get class-size data are 1) to count students in a class and/or 2) to establish class sizes and monitor them as in the Tennessee STAR Experiment.

And From

Class Size Reduction: What It Is, and Isn't

People have been discussing the benefits of class size reduction programs for many years.

Such programs are credited with improving the achievement of students in the early grades and in particular those considered to be at risk.

Unfortunately, people often mean different things when they use the term *class size reduction*. Some define it as a reduction in the average number of students per teacher school wide. Others say it means a reduction in the number of students in a particular classroom.

Class size reduction programs are popular with the public. In the last 10 years, 40 states have implemented such programs. Class size reduction seems to enhance the social experiences of both teachers and students. Teachers who are effective with small classes know how to individualize teaching. They have clear expectations, they are less distracted by discipline problems, and they balance teacher-directed and child-centered teaching.

Terminology is used loosely in some research, too. Some researchers conflate three related but distinct terms: *class size reduction*, *pupil-teacher ratio*, and *class size*.

UW-Madison education professor Beth Graue and colleague Erica Rauscher recognize that such blurring of meanings poorly serves the needs of education policymakers and stakeholders. To sort out the terminologies, they interviewed scholars who have worked on the topic and began unpacking the assumptions used in research, policy, and practice.

Let's consider a hypothetical school with 30 certified staff members and 300 K–2 students—a 10:1 ratio. One might think a pupil-teacher ratio the appropriate tool for understanding class size and its impact on instruction. But wait—the pupil-teacher ratio approach is actually intended for *economic* analyses, not for analyzing instructional effectiveness. The pupil-teacher ratio addresses staff expenditures, including those for both classroom and specialist teachers. In our hypothetical school, the 10:1 ratio represents the average of lower special education ratios and higher general education ratios—not the actual number of students per teacher in every child's classroom. Thus, a school's pupil-teacher ratio says little about what actually happens in a classroom and how human resources are allocated.

It isn't surprising that problems arise when (a) implementations of class size reduction programs rely on data from pupil-teacher ratio studies, (b) data that describe class size and pupil-teacher ratio are used to support (or undermine) class size reduction programs, and (c) tools to evaluate class size reduction programs use the assumptions underlying pupil-teacher ratios.