



**Date:** February 18, 2019  
**To:** Senate Education Committee, Chair Wagner and Members  
**From:** Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations  
**RE:** *Class Size and Student Success*

On behalf of OEA's 44,000 members, it is my honor to set the context for our work related to class size, and our reasons for it. It all comes down to student success.

In the wake of Oregon's public-school struggles about which you have all heard so much – disrupted learning, low four-year-cohort graduation rates, the nation's highest class sizes, other measures of the student experience, as well as the looming educator shortage and high turnover rates – our teachers are asking: when will we finally see the link among these outcomes and give our students the schools they deserve?

Class size – meaning the number of students assigned to learn from a single teacher – is perhaps the single greatest factor in reaching all students in our classrooms today. Though some argue that research on the topic has yielded conflicting findings, the most methodologically sound studies have demonstrated the following truths about meaningful class size reductions on student learning:

- Students, especially in the early grades and in low-income areas, benefit from classes limited to 15 students and one teacher.
- Students of color particularly benefit from the social emotional, academic, and supportive environment of small classes.
- Students who are struggling academically receive much more intensive and personalized support, including 1:1 instruction, in optimally small classes.
- Teachers have a better understanding of each student, in terms of cognitive and non-cognitive factors, when classes are small. Students are less likely to “slip through the cracks.”
- The longer students experience small class sizes, the longer in their academic careers the benefits are felt.
- The relationships built among students and with teachers create better school climate, better student behavior, better attendance, a greater sense of community, and healthier self-concepts.
- This leads to greater student safety, fewer suspensions, greater parent involvement, and reduced teacher attrition.

Older students, too, benefit from smaller classrooms.

- Teachers have time for more in-depth responses to papers and assignments.
- There is more time for class discussions.
- Small classes are less intimidating, allowing students to speak up when they have a question.

- Small classes afford better engagement of students, who are therefore likely to leave school without graduating.

Some research has shown that less obvious benefits also accrue to students who have small class sizes:

- Public health experts argue that reducing class sizes may be more cost-effective than almost any other medical intervention, with large savings in health care and almost two years of additional life for those students who were in smaller classes in the early grades. (<https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/FAQ-7-myths-04.26.13.pdf>)
- The Tennessee STAR experiment, the most scrupulous and famous study designed to determine the effects of smaller class sizes on student performance, which was conducted in the 1980s, revealed that students placed in smaller classes in the early grades had higher earnings in adulthood, and greater likelihoods of attending college and having a 410K retirement plan as an adult (IBID).

The Tennessee STAR study showed that its 32 percent reduction in class size increased student achievement by an amount equivalent to about three additional months of schooling four years later. ([https://www.brookings.edu/research/class-size-what-research-says-and-what-it-means-for-state-policy/.](https://www.brookings.edu/research/class-size-what-research-says-and-what-it-means-for-state-policy/))

It is little wonder then that so many parents, students, and teachers are calling for lower class sizes. A national survey of 50,000 Americans found that reducing class sizes was perceived to be the best way to reform schools. And teachers – who are, after all, closest to the actual practice of teaching – strongly believe in reducing the student-to-teacher ratio. A 2007 survey found that 81 percent of American teachers would prefer smaller class sizes to higher salaries.

(<https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Mathis%20RBOPM-9%20Class%20Size.pdf>.) And as Oregon copes with a shortage of teachers now and into the future, class size reduction could be part of the strategy to abate this problem. Where class sizes have been lowered, teacher retention has been higher, which in turn increased the experience level and overall effectiveness of the educator work force. (<https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/FAQ-7-myths-04.26.13.pdf>)

More on the details of the research are included in the attached overview from the National Education Policy Center.

Now I would like to introduce three educators who will speak directly to this issue: Celeste Pellicci, David Wilkinson, and Tina Lamanna.