



Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, Members of the Committee:

For the record, I'm Sonja McKenzie. I serve as Chair of the Parkrose School Board and as Vice-Chair of the OSBA Board of Directors.

I want to start off by thanking you for your time today. I also want to acknowledge the very real concerns that I think have brought us here today: after decades of under-funding Oregon schools, we all share concerns over staff workload and specialized attention for students. However, I want to share with you why I don't think SB 580 helps us address either of those issues in a meaningful way.

First, I want to share that in Parkrose, we have a process built into our Collective Bargaining Agreement for addressing workload issues, which I do think is an important conversation. But in my opinion, requiring districts to bargain over class size is a poor stand-in for workload concerns, particularly given how limited districts are in their ability to make classes smaller.

I think I can speak for all school district leadership when I say that no one is pushing for classes to be larger than they need to be. Rather, current class sizes are a product of the many variables it takes to make our budgets balance. Prior to the pandemic, median sizes across our four elementary schools in Parkrose ranged from 24 to 27. If we were to add one additional class per elementary school, that would be an additional cost of up to \$500,000 just in salary and benefits for the teachers.

Our district's current margins are so thin, that level of staffing increase would require cuts elsewhere in the budget. Those reductions would likely come in the form of offering fewer electives to our middle and high school students or reducing the number of educational assistants and other support staff serving students.

Even if this staffing increase were feasible for our district, we also have the issue of simply not having space for more classes. In order to add classes in our existing elementary buildings, we would need to bump music teachers and other specialized classes out of their current classrooms, putting them in cafeterias.

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The only real way to reduce class size is to add more classes, and I've just shared with you why this isn't a viable option in Parkrose. Thus, if SB 580 were to pass, I suspect we would see proposals similar to that of PPS, where the district pays an overage to teachers' whose classes exceed a certain target. While this may help staff feel better compensated for the work they do, it does not result in any direct improvement in service to our students. In fact, I would argue it does the opposite.

Overage payments to teachers may be less than the cost of additional staff, but it still needs to come out of the budget somewhere. As I've said, we run on a pretty shoe-string budget in Parkrose. Just ask our business manager who serves as an occasional bus driver and has been known to climb on a roof in a pinch when facilities staff are otherwise busy. So, a cut in any area of the budget, will be noticeable.

My biggest concern is which students are most impacted by such a shift in funds. As I've stated, districts don't intentionally make classes bigger than they need to be. Likewise, our administrators consider how big a class *can* be when they are making staffing decisions.

Which is to say, classes with students with lots of high behavioral needs will be kept smaller than classes of students who don't need as many specialized supports. But it is the teacher of those larger classes that would receive overage payments, not the teacher with a smaller class of higher needs students. I see the focus on shifting funds for overpayments an inequitable use of resources. Correspondingly, the funds to cover those overage payments are dollars that are not able to be invested in additional supports for our highest need students.

I will close by acknowledging the frustration and fatigue many educators may feel over their current class sizes. Most districts would also like to have smaller classes. But until we have the funds and space to make those reductions, we need to thoughtfully target our resources to where they are most needed. I see SB 580 as a potential barrier to making such targeted investments and respectfully request you not support this bill.

Thank you.