

Good afternoon, Chair Dembrow and committee members, for the record, my name is Amber Downing and I am a Special Education Teacher at La Pine High School in the Bend La Pine School District. This is my twentieth year in Special Education. I would like to urge you to support SB 580 to make class size and caseload a subject of collective bargaining. There is a lot of inequity in how districts determine caseloads and I think adding it to collective bargaining would be a step in the right direction. I am used to working extra hours, that is a given in this profession, but I am astounded at how much more is being asked of me as a professional. At some point, you know you are doing your best, but your best isn't good enough. You aren't helping kids as much as they need. I feel like I am failing my students all the time. That is really hard to live with, day in and day out. I got into this profession to work with kids and help kids find their path to adulthood, but most of my time is spent NOT helping kids. Most of my time is divided between doing paperwork and holding IEP meetings. My kids have grown needier over time...they need more emotional-behavioral support, they need more transition support to gain job and life skills, they need more parenting and positive role modeling, and they need me to be their cheerleader and champion. I try my best, but again, my best isn't good enough. I constantly have to remind myself that I am not the problem. The problem is the lack of supports and people in place to do the job that needs to be done. But that doesn't make it any easier to sleep at night when I know my students are struggling and I can't do more about it. So I hope SB 580 begins with class sizes and caseloads being added as a subject to the bargaining agreement and that the conversation continues with an in-depth look at student needs. A caseload of forty at one school can look completely different than a caseload of forty at another school. When we consider how "needy" a student is, we must look at things like socio-economic status, homelessness, if they are being raised by someone other than their parent, if they have been in residential treatment before, if they move or change schools often, if they are pursuing something other than an academic diploma because of greater academic or social needs, if the student or parent has drug/alcohol issues, if the student or parent is on probation, if a parent is or has been incarcerated, if the student has been placed in foster care at some point, if they have experienced physical/sexual abuse, what is the family's access to programs and resources, especially in rural areas like mine, etc. I could go on forever about the factors that I think should be considered when balancing caseloads, but most importantly, let's first get the conversation included in our bargaining efforts. I urge you to support SB 580 to make class size and caseloads a subject of collective bargaining. Thank you for your time.