

March 3rd, 2021

Greetings Chair Dembrow and Committee Members,

My name is Emily Stewart, and I appreciate your willingness to address the issue of class sizes in Public Schools and listen to my testimony this afternoon. I am in my sixth year of teaching third grade at Dry Hollow Elementary in The Dalles, Oregon. I apologize that I could not be here “live,” but please do not hesitate to reach out to me for further insights into the extreme importance of class size and effective instruction in classrooms.

I could spend a lot of time crunching numbers here. I could talk about the hours of time outside of a teachers’ contracted day that it takes to properly assess, plan, re-plan, communicate with families, and prepare materials for each individual student. I could also talk about the dollar amount spent out of pocket each year by teachers for each student. However, neither of those adequately represent what I believe to be the biggest downfall of large class sizes: teacher-student connection.

I am still a relatively new teacher, but I know my strengths well. My strength is my ability to develop honest and meaningful relationships with not just my students, but also their families. I am able to connect to each student, meeting them on their level, wherever that may be. It is through this relationship that I am able to encourage my students, motivate my students, challenge my students, and much of the time just listen to my students. It is through this connection that I am able to make connections with families, as well. Research has proven time and time again that when schools, families, and communities are all working together for the success of our students, our students succeed!

I do not know if you, Chair Dembrow or the Committee Members, have children of your own. However if you do, I ask you to reflect for a moment on how children can be very....for the lack of a better term...demanding. They need guidance, support, praise, correction, and most importantly, to be heard. Now I ask you to reflect on if you had twenty children. Of the same age. Simultaneously. The thing is, twenty is manageable! Teaching is our passion, our craft, our

profession. However, when we start to have classrooms going on or past thirty students, the walls begin to crumble and it is our students who suffer.

I am for classroom size limits not because I can't handle it. Not because I don't want to spend extra money or time on my students. I am for classroom size restrictions because of the fact that it becomes physically impossible to connect to each student in the time we have them. The ones that often suffer are the ones who actually are not high needs. We will do what needs to be done to challenge our "high flyers," our students who always require more challenge and are incredibly active students in the classroom community. We will do what needs to be done for our students on Individualized Education Plans, or the ones who struggle to just BE in the classroom (it should be noted here that many Special Education students do not respond well to over stimulation or large groups...). However, when we are doing the best we can do for those students, the ones who are quiet, but not failing, suffer. The ones who have experienced trauma and who hide their pain by trying to not be noticed suffer. We lose an entire middle, not because we don't care. We would not be in this profession if we didn't care. We lose an entire middle, because the extremes literally took all of our connection time. All of our one-on-one time. All of our attention.

I am not known for being succinct, but I know I should probably wrap this up. Let me end by asking you one more time to reflect. What about your children? Your grandchildren? What sorts of classroom environment would you want them to be in? The career of an educator is certainly challenging. However, every educator knew that going into this field. What we did not prepare for was the emotional toll it would have on us when we know that we cannot possibly do what we are in this job to do, which is make sure every child is guided, challenged, and heard. Every child deserves our time. Every child deserves to know that they are important. Educators deserve to have structures in place to ensure that we are able to give those essentials of dignity to our students.

Thank you for your time,

Emily Stewart

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