

March 3, 2021

Chair Dembrow and Committee members,

“We can all agree that the value of class sizes is vital, but smaller class sizes can help teachers provide a more effective education...instead of focusing on the relationship between class size and pupil attainment, we should be looking at the relationship between class size and effective teaching,” (Jerkins, 2015) the researcher Peter Blatchford stated in an article in 2015. This past year, children have been at home and class sizes were a non-issue, but as schools are beginning to open, class sizes, behaviors and educational delays are becoming a real dilemma. Oregon educators believe that class size and caseload is a vital part of the students educational and emotional support. Shouldn't it be the first item of discussion during contract negotiations?

My name is Christina DeRosa and I work in Marion County as an Early Childhood Education Specialist at Willamette Education Service District. I have been working in education for over twenty years. Previously, I was a Preschool Teacher for Head Start managing a classroom with two additional Instructional Assistants. The classroom consisted of twenty students ranging from three to five years old. I encountered many families and their children who had developmental and emotional needs requiring extra support and time. Due to the large class size and the lack of resources, I could not provide what the children needed and what was necessary for success and growth. Several of my students had behavioral needs and often required additional support in the classroom. One child would throw blocks, scratch and bite the teachers and peers, and run out of the classroom. The trauma that the child was going through was that his father was in jail and his mother had just recently left and walked out permanently, leaving him with his grandmother. I would pour time and energy into him individually throughout the day, yet still having to coordinate schedules, home visits, conferences, write lesson plans and teach the other students. As the International Journal of Educational Research states, there are “many challenges in providing individualized support, including time for multi-level instruction, management of multiple groups and flexibility for uneven pacing of students' progress” (Solheim, Opheim, 2009).

As teachers are overwhelmed with class sizes, the burnout level is high. This causes change for children and their educational achievement due to higher turn-over rates resulting in lack of trust and strong relationships as well as developmental learning. For teachers, there is emotional exhaustion due to high caseloads, causing them to leave the classroom and look elsewhere, seeking emotional support. According to a Scholastic report, it “estimates that teachers spend an average of 11 hours working each day” (The Graide Network, 2019). At Willamette Education Service District, we serve children with disabilities, supporting their IFSP goals and educating the families. My current caseload is twenty-five students. However, the former Specialist's caseload was forty students last year.

Children who are given the opportunity for consistency and trust, respond with educational success. For Oregonians, placing value on educators and children is a necessary means towards strengthening our next generation. Our students need us to remind them that they are worthy and each interaction we as educators have with them is an opportunity for change and growth. Therefore, I am urging you to vote yes on SB 580: Making class size and caseload mandatory subjects of collective bargaining. Thank you.

References

Jerkins, M. (2015). *Too Many Kids: School districts are packing more and more students into classrooms—and that's pushing teachers out*. The Atlantic: Education.

Solheim, O.J., Opheim, V. (2009). *Beyond class size reduction: Towards more flexible ways of implementing a reduced pupil–teacher ratio*. *International Journal of Educational Research* (Volume 96, p. 146-153)

The Graide Network. (2019). *Why Some States Have Higher Turnover Rates Than Others*. School Leader Resources.