

March 6, 2023

Good afternoon Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Wright and Hudson, members of the committee, my name is Sara Schmitt and I am here to speak in support of HB 2703.

I recently served as president of the Beaverton Education Association for 6 years and I have a great deal of experience with collective bargaining. I have served on my union's negotiating team for 7 successor bargaining agreements, starting back in 2009, and most recently for a contract that was ratified last year. I have also been a classroom teacher in both a Title I school and non-Title I school.

Students, parents and educators agree on the benefits of smaller class sizes and caseloads - students can access more individual attention from their teachers and counselors, and teachers can give students more frequent and in depth feedback on assignments. But HB 2703 is really about giving educators a voice. It's about strengthening collective bargaining rights and ensuring that local school districts work with their employees to improve student learning and educator working conditions.

Some people will say that SB 580 has already expanded the rights to bargain class size for Title I schools. SB 580 was passed in 2021 to make class size a mandatory subject of bargaining for designated Title I schools, however, this is insufficient for several reasons. While well intentioned, only bargaining class size for schools designated as Title I ignores the fact that there are students navigating poverty and from underserved populations in all our schools. In addition, to designate which schools receive Title I funding, districts use the number of students whose families have chosen to register to receive free and reduced price lunch. For a number of reasons, this data doesn't necessarily correlate with the level of poverty in the community, nor the academic, social and behavioral health needs of students.

The reality is that for decades, we have continually asked educators to do more with less. There is no better time to listen to educators and put class size and caseloads on the bargaining table than right now. As we recover from the pandemic, the needs of our students and their families have become substantially more broad and more urgent. Educators have been leaving the profession, retiring early or taking leaves of absence because the job has become too overwhelming and demanding.

Making class size and caseload a mandatory subject of bargaining is a necessary action to address Oregon's educator workforce crisis. As we focus on the recruitment and retention of educators, working conditions matter and educators should be involved in making decisions about our workloads.

This is the right move for Oregon and the right way to support educators in giving our students the education they deserve.

I urge you to support HB 2703.

