

Submitter: Una Maher
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure: SB5506

My name is Úna Maher. I am a kindergarten teacher and parent with Hillsboro School District. I have been teaching for over 22 years. Today, I am asking you to move our state to a quality education model. This means, at least, providing \$10.3B to maintain current levels.

As a mom and an educator, I can tell you that class size matters. It allows teachers to develop relationships with their students and vice versa. It allows teachers to really know the educational needs of the students and provide what they need, not just to meet the state standard, but instead to thrive.

I worked as an educator in Ireland before immigrating to Oregon. Before I left I worked with a state-mandated class size of 15 students. Yes, you heard that right, all elementary classes had no more than 15 students. Our students were provided the opportunity to have their academic, social, and emotional needs met while at school. Here in Oregon, a few years ago, I taught a split of kindergarten and first grade in a Title I school. This decision was made late in September due to what they called poor enrollment. I had 13 kindergartners for the month of September.

We thrived! Students had my attention. I met their needs. Even the unlucky students struggling with regulation challenges could settle into routines for school and learning because I had the time to meet with each one of them daily and provide the academic and otherwise support for their success. At the end of the day, I had time to complete all of the necessary paperwork; I could call parents and talk about the successes and struggles of the day.

By the beginning of October, 18 first graders joined our class. I know you can do the math but I will tell you that this put me at 31 students with a wide variety of academic and emotional needs. I worked so hard that year and suffered a lot of burnout, as a veteran educator who was “born to be a teacher,” I considered leaving. Moreover, this was before the pandemic.

Right now, because of the COVID pandemic, our students’ emotional vulnerabilities have been amplified. The need to support them is bigger than ever. The pressure for academic support is growing year after year and the responsibility is being left to the teachers. I believe in a rigorous, thorough, education. I have two of my own children, one still in the K-12 system and one a freshman at PSU. In order to reach this high academic level, students’ basic social and emotional needs need to be met. We are not herding sheep through a grid, we are humans supporting humans through a system that should be here to help, and not hinder them. We need a smaller class size. In order to provide this we need more funding. Just this week we heard about the possibility of losing 78 full-time teachers in our district instead of reaching out to recruit more.

Oregon Education needs more funding so districts can reduce the class sizes and

provide our students, the future of Oregon, and the world, with the best education we can, an education they deserve.

Thank you for your time,

Úna Maher