

Dear Chair Neron, Vice Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Madi Bourdon, and I am an elementary school counselor in Portland Public. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 3652, which would make class size and caseloads a mandatory subject of collective bargaining in all Oregon schools.

In schools around Oregon, but even more specifically at my school, I have seen how large class sizes and huge caseloads have affected my student's learning, their teachers ability to meet each of their needs, and for counselors like myself, caseloads recalculated year after year to justify cutting counseling positions. I have personally been cut twice due to these recalculations and lack of funding for our schools.

First, to speak to the large class sizes we are seeing in classrooms across the state, I want to paint a picture of what it looks like to walk into one of the 5th grade classrooms in my school this year. First, you walk in the room, pause to mentally plan how to make your way through the 34 student bodies, seats and desks shoved into a typical sized classroom, and attempt to move towards the front of the room. After making my body as small as possible to slide through to make it to the teacher at the front of the room, you can hear myself or my students whispering "excuse me" or "so sorry", or even the shifting of school materials to allow for me to pass just a little bit easier. Once you make it to the front, and have a chance to share whatever information you need to share with the teacher, you must then turn around to attempt to make it back out of the room without squashing any of the 5th graders whose bodies are just as big as my own. Oregon ranks 8th highest in class sizes nationwide. Large class sizes reduce student engagement, lower academic performance, and increase stress for both students and educators.

34 students in one classroom is unsafe, and especially when their teacher is required to meet each and every one of the student's unique needs - such as accommodations on 504s and IEPs, or for students who are considered Talented and Gifted. Overcrowding hurts vulnerable students the most. Students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), and low-income students benefit the most from smaller class sizes and lower student-to-teacher ratios.

Second, I am very concerned about caseloads. In my specific position as a school counselor, I have seen how high caseloads directly translate to less individualized support at a time when mental health needs are at an all-time high. We have less time to address each of our student's academic, emotional, and future-career needs effectively, as well as concerns about our student's access to:

1. Mental Health Interventions – It is no secret that our OR students struggle with anxiety, depression, and personal crises. High caseloads delay or eliminate the ability to receive timely help.
2. Increased Burnout for Counselors – As educators, we are dedicated to our students to the point where we often suppress our own needs and overwork ourselves and experience an unhealthy amount of stress and exhaustion, which in turn reduces the quality of our support.
3. Weakened Student-Counselor Relationships – With too many students, it's harder for us to water relationships, build trust and provide personalized guidance for each and every one of our students.
4. Higher Dropout Rates – Students who don't receive adequate academic or emotional support are be more likely to disengage and drop out.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a 250:1 student-to-counselor ratio, but in many schools, the ratio is far higher, reducing the effectiveness of counseling services. As I mentioned before, although the student to counselor ratio should be 250:1 based on recommendations from ASCA, we are seeing much higher ratios in our schools.

As a dedicated educator, I on behalf of my students, fellow educators, and school communities, urge the committee to support HB 3652 and its impact on students and educators.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Madi Bourdon

Portland Public Schools

Position: Support