

Submitter: Michelle Nicola
On Behalf Of: Students and Educators in Oregon
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3652

My name is Michelle Nicola, and I am an instructional coach and Spanish teacher at Grant High School in Portland Public Schools. 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.

Recently I surveyed 9th grade students on what makes it easier for them to ask questions in class. Many students indicated that smaller class sizes make it less intimidating and easier for them to engage. As part of my duties as an instructional coach, I lead teams of teachers who work hard to make sure each student is known by name, strength and story when they enter the biggest high school in our district. However, that task proves impossible as our numbers grow. Anthropologist Robin Dunbar's work suggests that the average person can maintain stable social relationships with around 150 people, meaning they can remember and keep track of details about that many individuals in their network. When a high school teacher's caseload exceeds that, how are they supposed to adequately serve their students? I want our children to thrive in our schools, and to do that, we must be given the time, space and capacity to truly know them.

As a coach, I can personally attest to the fact that educator burnout is real. Excessive caseloads and large class sizes contribute to high turnover rates and negatively impact student learning- within the last four years our school has lost (at least) four exceptional new teachers due to the fact that it was physically impossible for them to meet the needs of all of their students within the school day. As one former teacher put it, "If I spend 3 minutes grading each of my 180 students' papers, that's 540 minutes, which is NINE HOURS, which is more than a full work day." I coached these teachers, and did my best to support them and keep them in the profession. Yet, when having to choose between their mental health and teaching, they chose their mental health. How do we expect to attract and retain quality teachers when we fill our classrooms to the brim, quite literally?

No cost, no mandate. HB 3652 does not require specific class size or caseload reductions—just a fair conversation in contract negotiations. This is a unifying issue—one that students, families and educators support. I urge you to VOTE YES on HB 3652—because every student deserves the attention and support they need to succeed!

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,

Michelle Nicola
Portland Public Schools