

Greetings,

The following is my testimony regarding HB 3652.

I'm Katie Farlow, a 5th grade classroom teacher in the David Douglas School District in Portland. In my experiences over the past 5 years of student-teaching during COVID restrictions, teaching in 2nd (Bethel SD, Eugene), 4th (Parkrose SD, Portland), substituting (David Douglas SD, Portland) and 5th grade (David Douglas SD, Portland) class-size and caseload is tantamount to student, teacher, class and wider future success.

"I hope nobody else comes today!" "I like this." "It feels so calm." "Let's cancel school for the rest of the class!" "Let's lock the door!"

My 5th graders have genuinely said these things in the morning when the rest of the class is late arriving on the band, orchestra, and choir bus from the middle school. If nothing else sticks with you, this should. They don't say this out of maliciousness or dislike for their classmates. They say this because 32 students in a classroom that is NOT capped is antithetical to the environment they need to thrive. Caring about our youth is listening to them. I implore you to care for our kids in the ways that they need.

**From a student's perspective, we need smaller class sizes.** The following are complaints that my students have raised that are directly tied to class size.

- It is too loud. I can't focus. I can't focus in my buddy classroom either, it's crowded and loud. (A buddy classroom is another class that a student can visit to regulate or complete work when they need space from peers or our classroom).
- My chair keeps running into theirs! I'm crunched.
- I stand at the end of the cafeteria table so that I can have room. I don't want to touch people when I'm eating.
- I wanted to share! It's not fair! (When we have to move on from a topic to keep pace with instructional pacing guides).
- When is it going to be my turn? (For the bathroom, speaking, or water).
- It took SO LONG for you to get here (as I circulate, supporting my students).
- There isn't room for us to hide if the bad guys come. (During lockdown drills)

**The bottom line for students:** Large class sizes are physically restrictive. Students regularly are running into each other when they scoot out of their desk. We have to physically rearrange the room to wheel around our office chair that I use for rewarding positive choices. The physical limitations of our space are even more on display at lunch. My students are inches from each other while they eat lunch, knocking elbows, accidentally getting sauce or food on their clothes. When it comes to academics, there is not adequate time for them to share their ideas in a whole-group setting. They have to wait a significant amount of time to receive 1:1 attention that is paramount to motivation and understanding academic content thoroughly. They have to wait longer to go to the bathroom or get water. Think about how overstimulating and isolating that can be over time. Students can't get space when they need it because THERE IS NO SPACE.

My students deserve more and I can't give it to them. They deserve my time. They deserve to see to their needs and not be forced to wait. They deserve to be able to move around our room without running into their classmates by accident.

**From a teacher's perspective, we need smaller class sizes.** I love every single one of my students. I love them so much it hurts. I have enough love to share, but not enough time and certainly not enough space. I can't give my babies what they deserve and that is what is stressing me most in this profession, above all else, honestly.

- **Physical limitations:** I legitimately can't find a desk arrangement that honors students' needs to discuss and learn socially. There is not space. I will never put my students in lecture-like rows, because that implicitly communicates that I hold the knowledge and they are supposed to listen and absorb. However, when I put them in groups, there is barely room to navigate. I have to climb over chairs and take creative routes to be able to effectively monitor the classroom.
- **Prep time:** With larger classes, we are not provided with additional time to grade, prepare materials, prepare academic and behavior support plans, or prepare for conferences. This is incredibly taxing on physical health, mental health. I feel like I'm being forced to choose between innocent children's development and my own life outside of being a teacher.
- **Inability to support students and our specialists:** Our school counselor, behavior specialist, and our SPED educators are beyond overworked. Their caseloads are bulging at the seams. I always feel a bite of guilt when I refer a student for additional support that I know they need because I know the heavy weight that our specialists bear. They will never compromise student support and neither will I. But, in a time where burnout and turnover is at an all-time high, it is asinine to not prioritize caseload and class-sizes.
- **Increase in behaviors:** Anyone who is in education knows that student behaviors are increasing in intensity and frequency. Is it any wonder that this is occurring as class sizes are getting larger and we are relying more on technology to educate our young people? Of course our kids are exploding! Of course they are melting down and throwing chairs! Of course they are lashing out physically and verbally! They are overstimulated. There is so much sound in a full classroom, CONSTANTLY. No matter how skilled your classroom management is, people make sounds! People take up space. Imagine being in a room of 30+ adults every day. You would be overstimulated too! You would be more on edge. You couldn't be your best self without some time and space to feel calm. Additionally, of course we are having an increase in attention-seeking behaviors. Kids are experiencing a deficit of attention. At home, some have adults that are working multiple jobs or long hours to keep up with the economy. Some might dissociate into their phones and scroll when they're at home. And then at school, they have a teacher whose attention is constantly split, out of necessity. No matter how much I love my kids and believe in them it's impossible to consistently communicate that through my actions. I do not have enough time in the day to give them the attention they deserve, not out of any deficit in my own practice, but due to simple logistics. I'm only one person.

- Finally, I have serious academic concerns. The opportunity gap has been widened. Teachers are managing classes with a few who have the skills to learn on grade level and with the bulk of them multiple years behind. Through my skills as a teacher, I can identify those gaps they have in understanding, but I can't fill them all. I can't teach them all that they have missed and 5th grade content at the same time. There is not adequate time. So, the band-aid solution we have currently is to put them on AI computer programs and attempt expedited reteaching, but it's simply not enough and not what they deserve. Additionally, the reliance on AI computer programs to fill gaps further feeds the attention-seeking behaviors and motivational decrease we are seeing in our kids.

The common denominator of many problems we are facing in education is large class size/caseload. It doesn't take an academic study to identify that our kids are less motivated, coping with explosive behaviors, not learning at the pace they "should be" because they are in overcrowded and undersupported spaces. It doesn't take an academic study to identify that teachers are burning out because they know what their kids need and can't give it to them.

I became a teacher because I respect the beauty of childhood. I respect the vulnerability in growing, but also their superior ability to focus on joy and the things that matter in life. A child doesn't make a decision based on what is right for the budget. They make a decision for what is right for life, what is right for growing, what is right for joy. I hope you can be in touch with that part of yourself when you are making decisions about HB 3652 and beyond.

Thank you.