

Submitter: Valerie Turner  
On Behalf Of: My middle school students  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3652

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

My name is Valerie Turner and I teach English Language Arts and Social Sciences to my amazing 8th grade students at Mt. Tabor Middle School in Portland, OR. 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.

This year, I see 145 students every day. This number is lower than my most recent 5 years, when my highest caseload was 168 students each day. My class sizes range from 26-36 students. If you're not aware, a room with more than about 28 8th-graders starts to feel really crowded and honestly, quite smelly. In any given year, roughly 20% of my students have IEPs, 504s, are TAG-identified, and/or are English learners. Of course many more students have needs that are not documented. The more students I have in each class, the less there is of my support to go around. It's not fair to the kids in my largest classes.

In order for me to be the best I can be for serving and supporting all my students well, class sizes would be right-sized at no more than 28 students in the room. Without class caps, the potential for overloading educators remains a real risk. My union contract has target class sizes - yet my school district regularly pushes educators over those numbers. Receiving some additional amount of money for being overloaded acknowledges the extra work but does nothing to actually make the classroom better for students.

Here is some math from an English teacher: if I give a written assignment and spend 5 minutes reading, scoring, and providing feedback on student work, multiplied by 140 students (class sizes of 28), I will spend 11.7 hours grading student work. If I have 155 students (class sizes of 31), I will spend almost 13 hours on grading. For ONE assignment. The workload is immense even with "smaller" classes, and feels overwhelming with large classes. I have seriously considered leaving education in the years when I had over 155 students; it's absolutely crushing.

Middle school students are in one of the most wonderful, awkward, painful phases of personal development. Having smaller classes helps me make individual connections that really matter - and this is an age when we definitely don't want any child falling through the cracks. Adolescents crave being seen and understood.

Please pass this bill making class size a mandatory bargaining issue. Our kids need right-sized classes to thrive, and educators need right-sized classes to simply survive this career. I've been teaching for 18 years and absolutely know there is a difference with student connection and achievement when classes are smaller. Please help educators be the best we can be for our kids. Please support HB 3652 and help bring smaller class sizes to Oregon students.

Thank you for your tireless work and consideration.

Sincerely,

Valerie Turner  
Portland Association of Teachers