

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

My name is Katharine Saunders, and I am Special Education Teacher at Gresham Barlow School District. 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.

I work in a special education classroom, known as Learning Essentials 1 in the Gresham Barlow School District, which serves students with significant cognitive, functional, communication and behavioral needs. Currently, our district only budgets for 2.5 staff to supporting these classrooms regardless of student need and caseload size. Prior to the pandemic and in the few years immediately following its effects, my classroom's caseload size averaged around 9 students. When hired I was told that 10 was a typical caseload. This year I have 13. Last year I had 15 at my classroom's peak. This has coincided with increased student need as we are experiencing, in real time, the developmental effects of the pandemic on students entering into the public education system. Students are entering school with significant behavioral support needs, with behaviors ranging from physical aggression towards peers and staff with significant injury, communication needs, and potty training needs, including those without IEPs or 504s in place. Layer these increased needs with stagnant staffing ratio changes and you can see why our state ranks 45th when assessed for quality and safety measures. With my caseload this year, 5 of my students have a need for a one on one anytime they leave my classroom due to safety concerns for themselves and others. Only one of those students is provided staffing from the district to support them with a one on one. Including myself, that leaves 3.5 adults to support 4 more students with one on needs and the remaining 8 students. To support student growth and help Oregon students achieve a quality education in a safe environment, we need to be able to even get school districts to come to the table and in good conscience discuss the need for additional staffing in our buildings that are associated with our class sizes and caseloads. When teachers are asked to serve more students than what best practices dictate, learning achievement is compromised. Student safety is compromised. Teacher and staff safety is compromised. Teacher and staff morale is compromised. And districts' ability to retain qualified and quality educators are compromised. This bill won't guarantee changes to our schools class sizes and caseload sizes but it will guarantee that districts cannot ignore our teacher unions when they are discussing contractual changes. Gresham Barlow and GBEA finalized our contract in December 2024 and despite attempts to get Gresham Barlow to come to the table to negotiate class sizes and caseload sizes they chose to ignore it. The occupational therapist I work with to support my students has over 120 students that she serves on a weekly basis across 7 schools. We began this school year with a 4th/5th grade blend classroom that had 34

students. In fact, every single one of our 4th and 5th grade classrooms had more than 30 students in them. Currently we have specials classes in our school district (music, PE, library) that have 50 elementary aged students working with 1, sometimes 2 adults. To give you some perspective, our state mandates that if students are participating in a childcare program that is licensed, they must adhere to a ratio of 1 adult for every 15 students. A change is needed and you have the power to help us, the ones you entrust with your children's well being and learning. Help us advocate for better educational outcomes for our students. Thank you for your time and consideration.

A need for smaller class sizes will help educators in working to improve student's academic and social emotional outcomes. By increasing the ability for teachers to give more one on one time with students by decreasing their caseload and class sizes we can begin to address the shortfalls of our public education system in Oregon.

I urge you to support HB 3652 to help educators in advocating for better educational outcomes for our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katharine Saunders
Gresham Barlow School District