

To Chair Graber, Vice-Chair Muñoz, Vice-Chair Scharf, and Members of the House Committee on Labor and Workforce Development,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 4011, which mirrors HB 3652 from the previous session. Our board appreciates the intent behind this bill and the desire to support educators and students. Our concerns are rooted in the very real financial, logistical, and educational consequences this bill would create for districts like Forest Grove.

My husband and I are both middle school teachers, and while I am now semi-retired, education has been the center of our professional lives. We understand firsthand why reasonable class sizes are important. They *sound* like an obvious solution. Our district has prioritized low class size in the early grades K-2, where research shows it has strong impacts on student outcomes. But the reality of continuing to focus on class size as a solution inside school systems is far more complex—and far more expensive—than it appears on the surface.

To put this in practical terms: in Forest Grove School District, reducing class size ratios by **just one student at each level** would cost approximately **\$1 million**. That amount would fund about **seven educators**—and even then, the reduction would not be evenly distributed. Many educators would see **no change at all** in their class sizes.

To meaningfully reduce class sizes across *all* schools and classrooms, the district would need **many millions more** than we currently receive from the State School Fund, simply to cover staffing. And staffing is only part of the equation.

Forest Grove does not have empty classrooms waiting to be filled. Any large-scale class size reduction effort would require new facilities—portable classrooms, building additions, or entirely new schools. The least expensive option, a portable classroom, costs roughly **\$200,000 for the structure alone**, not including electricity, water, safety systems, furnishings, and installation. Even then, these solutions take **a year or more** due to permitting, construction timelines, and supply lead times. New structures are both costly and slow, making class size mandates an especially unrealistic policy lever.

In short: reducing class sizes is expensive—and it becomes **exponentially more expensive** when the goal is to reduce class size in *every* classroom. Under our current funding formulas and facility limitations, **class size caps are mathematically impossible to meet**.

This is widely understood in labor negotiations, which is why many contracts include **penalty payments** when districts cannot meet class size caps. For a clear example, I encourage you to review



Article 8.3 of the Portland Public Schools licensed collective bargaining agreement. These types of provisions contribute directly to the **structural deficits** now facing nearly every Oregon school district.

Forest Grove is in a different position than PPS. We are facing **years of declining enrollment** and a **decade-long structural deficit** driven by costs that continue to outpace revenues. As a result, we must reduce staff—not add positions. If we were bound by contractual class size caps with penalties, we would likely be forced to eliminate entire programs simply to remain solvent.

HB 4011 also expands class size and caseload into **mandatory subjects of bargaining**, introducing additional financial and systemic pressure. If anyone doubts that class size can trigger labor actions, we need only look to the **2023 Portland Public Schools strike** or the **current situation in Centennial School District**. Strikes damage trust between educators, leaders, and communities. Those relationships take years to repair—if they ever fully recover. Organizational culture suffers, and students experience real and lasting disruption to their learning. Our district's relationship with our union is strong - built over many years of intention between our local union leaders and district leadership. Our board reviews class size publicly in nearly every board meeting, and also it was part of our discussions under our recently completed collective bargaining - it is already allowed and happening as a **permissive practice** in all districts around the state.

All of this raises an important question: **Are we getting meaningful returns on this investment?**

From our experience, the answer is often no. The difference between 31 students and 26 students—an example of the variation in my husband's current class periods—rarely translates into measurable differences in student outcomes, especially when the teacher is highly effective. In fact, his highest-performing class this year is also his *largest*.

What *does* make a difference is instructional quality. My husband's success comes from years of targeted feedback, strong instructional frameworks, professional development, coaching, and collaborative work with peers. When lessons are well designed and students are engaged, differences in class size do not impact student outcomes in any measurable way.

Research supports this reality. Class size reduction shows consistent benefits primarily in **early grades**, which is why Forest Grove—like many districts—has already prioritized smaller class sizes in K–2. Beyond that, the evidence becomes far less clear, while the cost grows dramatically. And without full funding through the QEM model, districts must make hard choices about what will actually improve outcomes for students *now*.

If we redirected \$1 million toward **instructional coaching, mentorship, materials, training, and time for collaboration**, we would see real gains. Measurable ones. Those investments support teachers in ways that scale, rather than draining resources into a policy that offers more optics than impact.

Oregon needs to be willing to have an honest conversation. Yes, smaller class sizes can improve teacher satisfaction in some cases. But if we truly care about student learning, we must stop treating class size as the silver bullet. It never has been. It is an extraordinarily expensive policy that diverts



attention from strategies we know actually work. Monies need to be prioritized now to educational practice that does have a great impact on our students.

Thank you for your leadership and for your willingness to consider research and diverse perspectives. Your openness to these conversations is noticed and appreciated—especially in today's political climate. I am grateful for the time and care you dedicate to this work, and I urge you to consider the long-term consequences HB 4011 would create for districts, educators, and students across Oregon.



On behalf of the Forest Grove School Board
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