

JEFF REARDON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 48

June 8 2021



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Timothy G. Sekerak
Chief Clerk of the House
State Capitol Building, H271
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Vote Explanation on SB 580

Dear Chief Clerk Sekerak,

I would like to explain my reason for voting no SB 580. As I will explain, this bill increases costs, may require the elimination of effective programs, and may not actually achieve the goal of smaller classes.

I taught high school until 2012 when I ran for the office of state representative. During my last year teaching, I saw my woodworking class balloon to 40 students in a shop designed for 25 at the most. Since then, I've visited elementary classes with well over 30 students and I know we have all heard the stories from our teachers who are stretched thin by the adjustments over the last year and the overwhelming challenges they face each day.

We absolutely are in a crisis. But it's not a crisis caused by school boards making poor, uninformed decisions. No. School board members, as unpaid, elected community members -- many of whom are former educators, district alumni or motivated parents -- put students first in their decision-making. And they must consider the teachers, classified staff, facilities, administrators, parents and taxpayers when doing so.

I know that we often think through issues in abstracts but let us consider what this will look like for a district like David Douglas. David Douglas is

- A majority-minority district, with only 37% of students designated as white;
- A linguistically diverse district with over 65 different languages being spoken at home;
- Has a free/reduced lunch average over 70%; and
- Is a Title I district, serving all Title I schools except for its high schools.

School boards require flexibility to provide comprehensive education programs, meet students where they are physically, mentally and intellectually and be attuned to parent and community needs. And of course, they must maintain high employment standards. School boards don't have the luxury of putting one interest group above the other.

I am convinced that SB580 changes the dynamics of the bargaining process and puts one issue -- class size -- ahead of all others. Those of you who profess to believe in local control, who trust the voters who elected their school board members, should oppose this bill.

I mentioned that I was a high school teacher. I also served as a school board member at David Douglas for 10 years, during which time I was on the contract bargaining team. I remember very well that much



of the discussion had to do with first getting agreement about the size of the pie, and then how the pie should be divided. There are limits to any budget and that tough decisions have to be made.

Usually there are two things needed to decrease class size: Funding to pay the additional educators, and classrooms to put them in.

Personnel costs account for 80% of the budget, leaving 20% for things like transportation, school meals, supplies, operational costs, capital improvements and special programs.

I don't believe there is a school district in this state that believes that large class sizes benefit their students. If districts had the funding for additional staff, or space for additional classes, they would have already used them.

With SB 580, unions will be positioned to drive the class size discussion during bargaining. When this happens, districts like David Douglas will, in all likelihood, be forced into paying premiums for each student over a determined student-teacher ratio. The cost of the premium pay will require a reduction somewhere else in the budget. Ultimately, David Douglas could be forced to cut programs that meet the needs of their students. So, if you have to make one part of the pie larger, how might some of the other parts be sliced smaller, or cut completely?

There might possibly be reductions to a program providing early learning opportunities through free preschool in three elementary schools district wide, that the District had hoped to expand;

Or it could be to the bi-lingual elementary education program focused on minority enrollment;

They could have to cut the culturally and linguistically diverse educator pipeline program that helps classified staff obtain teaching degrees and certification;

Or perhaps, they could eliminate the need-based classroom assistant program that supports students who need additional help.

I have just given four, very real options from a current school board member at David Douglas. These are all examples of programs that are good for kids and have been discussed in the House Education committee and on this floor. So, do you really want to force school boards to cut programs such as these? Which would you choose to cut?

David Douglas has worked for years to focus on equity in schools and to close the achievement gap, establishing several programs to tackle these issues from multiple perspectives.

So why do I worry about mandatory bargaining for class size? While the David Douglas district was implementing programs to address the real needs of their students, the Portland Public School District bargained for an overage payment for educators teaching to larger class sizes. So, the teacher-student ratio remains unchanged, but the teacher gets more pay.

I'm not saying that the teacher doesn't deserve the bonus pay; but I would say it's an example of paying more money for the same outcome. Remember the students? Are they any better served when their teacher gets a raise?

Reporting by The Oregonian showed that, overwhelmingly, these overage payments went to teachers serving the historically best-served students. Because districts already know to concentrate students needing more attention and specialized instruction in smaller classes, and that high-performing students with affluent families can still succeed in larger classes.

It is the teacher of those larger classes that receive additional pay, not the teacher with a smaller class of high-needs students.

I don't mean to be flippant, but I want to be clear: this is not a labor issue. This is an education issue; this is a school district values issue.

Finally, I believe that SB 580 takes attention off of our biggest challenge: Safely reopening schools. Most Oregonians have gone without any in-person schooling for about a year. The ongoing pandemic and safety procedures have caused our elected school board members, volunteers dedicated to our students' wellbeing, to become public health experts practically overnight. This is not the time to complicate bargaining agreements.

I just want to share one last thing with you, the Fiscal Analysis from the Legislative Fiscal Office. If you're not persuaded by my view, please consider this:

Analysis: The measure amends the definition of "employment relations" to include class size and caseload limits as mandatory collective bargaining subjects for school districts. The -4 amendment restricts when class size can be included in the definition of "employment relations" to those schools qualifying for federal Title I funding. Qualifying for Title I is based on individual schools so districts may have some Title I schools while others are not. ODE states that currently, 744 of the total 1200 schools qualify as Title I schools in Oregon. School districts indicate that making class size and caseload limits could result in smaller class sizes which in turn would require hiring more teachers -- potentially create physical class space problems and schedule issues. One large School District indicated that lowering class sizes by one student may require the recruitment, hiring, and training of an additional 60 licensed staff across a range of content areas.

Because the outcomes of future bargaining are unknown, the fiscal impact of this measure on School Districts is indeterminate. There is no fiscal impact on the Oregon Department of Education's operations.

This bill does not have an immediate fiscal impact, but it will have considerable fiscal implications in future biennia.

Resources will always be scarce, and no solution will be perfect for every district across the State. Let's not tie districts' hands, but support our school districts and work collaboratively to address the layered and multidimensional issues facing our state's education system.

This is one of the most difficult votes I've had to give. I certainly have nothing to gain by opposing this bill. But as one who's been deeply committed to all levels of education in multiple ways for decades, I simply must advocate for what I believe to be the best policy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Reardon", with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

Representative Jeff Reardon



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