

Reducing class size is vital for success

I am a fan of Dick Hughes and his columns. I have had Mr. Hughes in my classroom as a guest speaker and as a very supportive parent. But when I read his March 14 comments about not prioritizing money to reduce class size ("Teacher quality is vital for success"), I knew I had to share my story.

I am a middle school teacher, surrounded by outstanding educators, and I teach approximately 170 kids per day.

My first-period language arts class has 38 kids, and this is now the norm. Oregon has the third-largest class size in our nation. Class sizes have increased by about 10 kids per class in my school this past year. This is 40 to 50 more children per day.

This adds up in very challenging ways. With more students there are more academic needs. My seventh graders' reading levels range from second grade through high school — and all are in the same class of almost 40 students. Teachers have less time to work with each student, and more time must be spent managing behavior, planning curriculum, and correcting/analyzing student assessments.

Yes, teacher quality is important. The teacher does have the most significant impact on student learning, but even the greatest teacher's impact is affected when we pack our classrooms with nearly 40 children.

Last year I had a language arts class of 20 students; this is very rare. But what a blessing, as we read, wrote, and grew together. Over 90 percent passed their state reading test. I knew what book every



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kid was reading, and what each student was dealing with in his or her turbulent life of being a teen..

Smaller class sizes do improve student achievement and student well-being; I have witnessed it first hand. There is even more research to support smaller class sizes: Project STAR from Tennessee. This

long-term research project has determined that smaller class sizes perform better than larger classes.

Also, minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students made the most gains (NEA, fall 2012). Leonie Haimson, executive director of Class Size Matters sums it up well, "Many studies have shown that class-size reduction will pay for itself many times over with better health care, increased earning potential, and lower crime rates."

I have the data, and I have experienced smaller classes: it makes a positive difference for our children, it makes a positive difference for our future, and it needs to be a priority for our state's funding.

Lisa Hughes of Salem has taught for more than 25 years, is no relation to Editorial Page Editor Dick Hughes but has taught both of his children in classes of fewer than 30. Contact her at lisahughessalkeiz@gmail.com.

ONLINE

Go to StatesmanJournal.com/Opinion to read Dick Hughes' March 14 column, "How much does class size matter?"