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Testimony of Lori Lipman Brown
Assembly Committee on Taxation, March 20, 2003

When I started teaching secondary English, speech, and drama for the Clark County School District in 1988, I taught 125 students in five classes per day. The school I worked in, Roy Martin Junior High, was (and still is) an at-risk school in what was realistically dubbed, "the heart of gang territory." Two-thirds of my students were minority children, and 100% of my students lived in poverty. My English classes included many English Language Learners and mainstreamed special education students.

I loved teaching in 1988. Despite all the additional needs of these at-risk students, I was able to teach them. I was able to have meaningful contact with the parents or guardians of nearly every student. I was able to give each child the individual attention and assistance that assured a superior education. I won awards for my teaching, but in large part my excellence was facilitated by the two factors which I believe are essential to a good education: small classes and parental involvement.

For anyone who doesn't agree that these two factors are essential to educational success, I direct your attention to two models of small classes combined with parental involvement. First, look at the educational pace of home-schooled children. With student-teacher ratios of approximately 2 to 1 and 100% parental involvement these children can move through the academic areas at their own pace, never slowing down to account for 40 other children's needs. It is like having a full-time private tutor for a couple of students at a time.

My second example is The Meadows, a private school with student-teacher ratios of 12 to 1. Parents are financially invested and presumably this leads to much parental involvement. Teacher pay is comparable to that of public school teachers and the excitement of teaching in small groups makes it easy for The Meadows to recruit excellent teachers. Tuition for Meadows students is double what the Clark County School District pays per pupil!

Which brings me to the question: What does money have to do with adequate education? When I resigned from the district, I was teaching 185 students per day, and there was talk of teaching over 200 a day the following year (still in five classes.) I have since substitute taught for teachers who managed up to 220 students in five classes each day. I use the term managed rather than taught because I don't believe much teaching goes on in these classes with upwards of 40 students. Additionally, I don't believe that teachers who are dealing with that many students will have much time to involve parents in a meaningful way in the education process.

The only way to lower class size is through additional funding. We are one of only four states in the nation which does not have a corporate tax. Both corporate taxes that the Chamber of Commerce has opposed, the profits tax put forth by educators a couple of years ago and the governor's proposed corporate tax have caps to keep small businesses out of the equation. Large corporations like Wal-Mart and Bank of America do not charge more for their goods or services in the 46 states which charge them a tax, and they haven't closed up shop in these states.

I expect we will pay for education one way or another. I hope we do it up front with meaningful revenue now, and not as a result of expensive litigation over not meeting our obligation to provide adequate education. I recognize that unlike tax cuts, a new tax requires two-thirds legislative approval. Keep in mind, your vote affects 100% of our public school children. Thank you.

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