

May 3, 2024



Dear LWSD Elementary K-3 Families:

Each spring, Lake Washington School District begins planning for the upcoming academic year using updated enrollment projections to determine initial staffing allocations for schools. This year is no different, and we have again started the annual process for next year and beyond. We are reaching out to share information about a necessary change we will make in our elementary staffing model for the 2025-26 school year. Beginning in 2025-26, we will again utilize combination classes at the 4th- and 5th-grade level to balance staffing and enrollment and to align limited staffing resources to meet required K-3 class size ratios.

Enrollment Trends and Impact: Our district is experiencing a notable shift in enrollment trends since the 2019-20 school year. Since enrollment peaked during the 2019-20 school year, elementary enrollment has declined by over 1,500 students, nearly 10%. This downward trend is expected to continue, which necessitates changes to our staffing model at the elementary level.

Adjustments Coming for 2025-26: In response to the challenge of declining enrollment, the district must adjust its staffing strategy to meet required K-3 class size ratios and maintain fiscal responsibility by aligning staffing levels with enrollment. Our current model of not having combination classes results in larger and fewer K-3 classrooms by running smaller than funded 4th- and 5th-grade classes in straight grade-level configurations in many schools. This runs contrary to the intent of the class size reduction funding and early intervention efforts to support foundational learning, particularly in literacy. To address this challenge, we will reintroduce 4/5 combination classes as an option in staffing our general education program in the 2025-26 school year.

A combination classroom becomes an option when a school's 4th- and 5th-grade enrollment generates partial classes that could be served in a single 4/5 combination classroom instead of two straight grade-level classes. In 2015, the decision was made to move away from combination classrooms during a sustained period of rapid growth, which led to revenues regularly exceeding annual expenditures. At that time, the district could afford to supplement staffing levels and not utilize combination classes. As enrollment has declined over the past five years and elementary schools have gotten smaller, staffing them has become more challenging and less efficient. Consequently, we consistently spend more than we generate through enrollment in revenue and are forced to change staffing models.

We are not raising class sizes as neighboring districts have recently done to close larger budget gaps. Instead, we are maintaining our class size ratios already used and allowing combination classes in 4th and 5th grade, when necessary.

Support and Commitment to Quality Education: We remain committed to ensuring all classrooms, regardless of configuration, provide rich learning experiences. The district is dedicated to supporting teachers who will teach combination classes in 2025-26 by providing

aligned curricular resources, professional development, and strategies to manage multi-grade teaching effectively. Our Teaching and Learning department will be undertaking this work beginning now and through the 2024-25 school year. We will also utilize expertise from our programs that have consistently used combination classes, such as Quest, to develop further robust resources for general education teachers moving into the 2025-26 school year.

Why share this now? We believe sharing information about staffing processes is helpful for developing staff and community understanding of the parameters and processes that drive school staff allocations and class sizes throughout the district. As the work continues, we will continue to provide periodic updates, including collating this and other staffing information on the district's website.

Summary:

- The continued decline in enrollment at the elementary level necessitates a change for the 2025-26 school year in the staffing model.
- LWSD will reimplement the possibility of enrollment driven combination classes at 4th- and 5th-grade level for the 2025-26 school year to meet K-3 class size reduction requirements and continue to adjust overall staffing due to declining enrollment.
- District and school teams remain committed to ensuring high-quality learning in every classroom, regardless of configuration, and work is being done to ensure teachers and students are set for success in combination classrooms in the 2025-26 school year.

Here is a video that provides additional details about this change in the elementary staffing model for the 2025-26 school year: <https://youtu.be/foNN9I9v8a8> (33:40)



Thank you for your continued support as we adapt to reduced enrollment in our elementary schools and align resources to support our students.

Sincerely,

Lake Washington School District

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