

What are the LWSD Staffing model changes that created a need for multiage?

On May 3, 2024, LWSD sent messaging to all K-3 families detailing the realignment of staffing models to meet the K-3 class size ratios and maintain fiscal responsibility. Rather than staff 4th and 5th grades separately, the same staffing ratio is applied to the combined number of students in 4th and 5th grade. This can result in a fewer number of teachers staffed in 4th and 5th grades. Here's [a link to the complete community message](#) sent last year.

This staffing model's design will reduce the overall number of 4th and 5th grade teachers across the district. Each year, elementary schools may need to make decisions if they will need to create multiage classrooms.

At Blackwell we will shift from six 4th & 5th grade teachers to five teachers allocated to teach 4th and 5th graders.

Why are traditional straight classrooms not possible?

Table 1: Current enrollment as of 5/2/25 in Grades 4 & 5

General Education 4 th and 5 th grade combined: 139 students Generates 5 teachers using LWSD staffing ratio of 26.75:1		
4 th grade: 67		5 th grade: 72
Running straight 4 th and 5 th would result in:		
4 th grade classes at 33 and 34 students		5 th grade classes at 24, 24, 24 students
Running a single split 4.5 class would result in:		
4 th grade classes: 28, 28	4.5 split class: 27 (11, 16)	5 th grade classes: 28, 28
Running five classes of multiage classes would result in:		
5 classes at 28, 28, 28, 28, 27 4 th : 14, 14, 13, 13, 13 5 th : 14, 14, 15, 15, 14		

Hosting 4th grade class beginning at 33 and 34 students is extreme and beyond the scope of expectations in LWSD elementary schools.

Regardless of model, our 4th and 5th grade classes will start at 27 (one class) and 28 (the rest) students in classes.

What would the classroom size be for 4th and 5th grades if we did not go to the 4/5 model next year? See the table: Our 4th grades would be 33 and 34 students. Our fifth grades would be 24 students

Same for following year (2026-27)? Rolling up the known enrollment two years from now would create an estimated enrollment for 4th/5th grades of approximately 142 students. This would continue to generate 5 teachers. This would create classes of 28 and 29 students.

Were the staffing model changes made due to the declining enrollment and to keep K-3 classroom sizes smaller? Did I understand that correctly? – Yes, see [LWSD messaging](#) sent last May.

Who makes the decision about the multiage model at Blackwell?

Our decision-making model followed the guidance given to schools by our district and teacher labor union. This is a building-based decision with the principal and 4/5 teaching staff. We agreed the multiage model is our best pathway forward. It creates an opportunity for students to loop with their current teacher beyond one year. It creates a collaborative team and work environment for our 5 teachers. It does not create any solo teaching positions without access to job-alike teammates. We receive support and resources from our LWSD Teaching and Learning team to support this transition.

How do the 4/5 teachers feel about this change?

Our teachers were part of the collaborative process to make this change. This collaboration decision is a key part of the district process we used to transition to the 4/5 multiage model for all classes.

Is this decision final? Based on current enrollment, this is our final decision. If enrollment changes significantly before school starts, we will revisit the decision.

What is the timeline for this transition? We are in the midst of our planning now with implementation when school starts this fall. We will create class placements for students, assign teachers to classes, plan our structures and systems this spring and summer for successful implementation.

Do teachers need additional specialized training to teach a multiage? Teachers do not need additional specialized training to teach in this setting. The district has created support materials for implementing multiage in 4th/5th grades.

What standards will be taught in classes?

All the standards for each grade level will be taught over the course of the two year commitment to the 4/5 multiage.

We will use a standards crosswalk showing the 4th and 5th grade standards in ELA. These standards are more similar than in other content areas. This will help our teachers in their differentiation of instruction and grade level expectations for students.

Math will be taught separately in 4th and 5th grade content areas. We will implement a “walk to math” instructional block for separately teaching 4th and 5th grade math. This is because of the differences in mathematics standards between the two grade levels.

Health and human growth/sexual education will be taught separately in grade content areas.

Writing will be integrated into all content areas

Science/Social Studies/Art will be taught in Strand A or Strand B. Strand A will be the 5th grade standards taught to all classes. Strand B are 4th grade standards. We will teach Strand A in the 2025-26 school year, followed by Strand B the next year. The standards in each of these content areas are written so they can be mastered regardless of the specific grade level of the student. Our teachers will use differentiation to ensure challenge and support for individual learning needs.

This will ensure all students receive instruction in all standards over the two year period.

What support is in place for teachers during this transition?

We will continue to work and plan together. Our district’s Teaching and Learning department will continue to provide resources, guidance, professional learning, and content support to our teachers.

What if I believe this is not a good match for my child? I would encourage you to talk to me or your child’s teacher this year. We are committed to meeting the needs of your child with our instructional model.

Why are we not having just one multiage (split) class?

Creating a solo multiage class creates a scenario with unique challenges:

- Creating balanced classes is challenging because much of the student work is done independently while the teacher instructs two sets of standards in the classroom. Creating a class made up of more independent and self-sufficient learners creates an imbalance of these traits in the remaining straight grade level classrooms.
- The solo teacher does not have a “Job-like teammate” to collaborate with on planning and problems of practice. Solo practitioners may be more challenged in their opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues.

- The solo teacher is responsible for teaching two sets of grade level standards.
- In the solo multiage classroom students are often divided into groups based on grade level for instructional purposes tailored to their grade level. This creates challenges in balancing the needs of all students and may lead to a less cohesive classroom environment.
- Students in solo multiage may leave their classrooms multiple times per day to be instructed by straight grade level teachers for specific content (Math, Science, Social Studies, etc.). This allows the solo teacher to teach one grade's set of standards while their grade level peers take the other grade level students to teach those standards. This can lead to a disjointed experience for students and a less than cohesive classroom experience.

What will be the mix of students in these classes? We will create balanced classes using the same processes we use for creating straight grade classes. See Table 1 for the grade level mix in each classroom.

What other LWSD elementary schools have used the 4/5 model outside of Quest Highly Capable? Prior to 2015, 4/5 splits were a common way to staff elementary schools in LWSD. From our past experiences, we are well aware of the challenges and drawbacks associated with solo classrooms in a split grade scenario. This is why the change to the staffing model was done in 2015 when it was fiscally viable.

Since its inception and up until the mid 2010's, Rachel Carson Elementary ran all its 4th and 5th grade classrooms as multiage. This was Carson's standard way of doing things because it made the most sense to their staff and community. When the staffing model changed in 2015, they returned to straight grade levels soon after because the need for "split" classes no longer existed.

Outside of Montessori I have not heard of combined classrooms in public schools. Do we have any research on how this is beneficial for students? Straight grade levels are the preferred classroom configuration. When this is not possible, we use the research base to inform our decision making about learning environments for students. Specifically, we consider the options multiage provides within the context of meta analysis of hundreds of educational research studies by John Hattie (see [Visual Learning research data base](#))

Relationships between teachers- student is a key component of academic success in any classroom with a positive effect size of 0.72 (Hattie). The opportunity to continue a positive relationship for two years in a multiage class is beneficial. Combine this with the high correlation of student success when students have the belief in their teacher's credibility. This is the belief by the student that they will learn from their teacher because their teacher is competent, trustworthy, dynamic, and responsive (effect size 0.90, Hattie)

There is a solid, positive research base for increased student academic success when teachers work collaboratively together in Professional Learning Communities. This collective teacher efficacy has the highest positive effect size of any educational research on increasing students' achievement (effect size of 1.57, Hattie). Planning together, analyzing student data, and creating programming to support student needs are part of the proven instructional strategies that increase student achievement. A dedicated team without singleton teachers creates an environment of collective teacher efficacy. Creating a team of multiage teachers leans into this positive effect size.

Multiple-grade/age classrooms have a low/neutral effect size of 0.04. (Hattie) These studies focus on split classrooms where two sets of standards are taught. There are few research studies where classrooms use an A and B strand approach planned in LWSD.

What are the benefits of this model over traditional setting? The traditional model of straight age classrooms is the typical public school experience. We are not able to maintain this model for 4th and 5th grades. The research about collective teacher efficacy is best realized when teachers are able to collaborate and work together. Creating class configurations with a team of teachers increases collaboration.

Who else is doing this model? Each elementary school faced with this decision is making their own decision about implementation with their staff. Based on enrollment data from earlier this month (May, 2025), this includes up to one third of our elementary schools. Some are waiting until August due to potential changes in enrollment to make their multiage decisions. At Blackwell, the likelihood of 4th/5th grade enrollment shifting enough to generate another teacher is extremely slim for next year.

Will this affect the specialized services of special education and multi-language support? This will not affect the specialized services and supports some of our students receive. Special education and multi-language support will continue in the same manner as individual IEPs are written and our ML supports are conducted. Our staffing and resources for these services will remain the same.

Will fifth graders still have their special projects, perks, and end of year celebration? We will maintain our specials events for our fifth graders and their families. These include our end of year 5th grade celebration, legacy projects, middle school visits, and unique field trips.

Does this affect the Quest Highly Capable 4th/5th Classrooms? This does not affect our 4/5 HiCap classrooms. The HiCap program uses its own staffing processes based on the number of students who qualify for the program each year. It is nice to have access to

multiage practitioners in our school who can share their experiences and insights as we launch this program at Blackwell in the fall.

What is the planned classroom size for the Quest Highly Capable 4/5 this year? The HiCap program works under the same staffing ratios as the general education classes (26.75:1) The class sizes for our 4/5 HiCap classes will be less than our general education classes as this is directly related to the number of students who qualify for this program.

Same for next year? Predicting HiCap numbers is not as easy because students need to qualify for the program. We've consistently run two 4th and 5th grade HiCap classrooms for many years. This could change if fewer students qualify.

My child was tested to be pulled out for math in the CBS HiCap model. What will this look under the 4/5 model? What would it have looked like without the 4/5 model? This will look like it will look in all classrooms where we have students in the CBS model. The model itself will not look different because of multi-age classrooms.

What does 4.5 mean? 4.5 is the short hand for a 4th and 5th grade multiage classroom. You will also see this expressed as 4/5 or 4th/5th or combination classes. It does not mean 4 and half, or that there will be any "accelerated" or "missed" learning in these classrooms.

Why didn't the 3rd grade families get asked about their teacher for next year? None of our current 3rd grade teachers will be teaching 4th/5th grade next year. Our 4th grade teachers will be part of the staffing of the 4/5 multiage classes. This gives us a data point to consider when creating next year's classes. There is positive research associated with teachers who are able to loop (teach another year) with their same students and we wanted to gather additional parent input around that possibility.

What if I believe this is not a good match for my child? I would encourage you to talk to me or your child's teacher this year. We are committed to meeting the needs of your child with our instructional model.

Will there be a town hall meeting where parents can come and ask questions? While some may believe a large group setting is the best venue to provide information, I believe 1:1 family conversation creates the best opportunity to answer questions specific to individual student and family needs.

If you'd like to set up a meeting, please contact Lisa or Linda in the front office.

FAQ compiled from questions and inquiries from our community. Answers written by Jim Eaton, Blackwell principal.