
HUMPHREY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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WINSTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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To: HLWW School Board
From: Jennifer Olson, Elementary Principal
RE: Staffing Adjustment Communication

I received a request from Heather Johnson, teacher at Humphrey Elementary for consideration of a co-teaching opportunity for the 2023-24 school year to reduce to a .6 FTE position (3 days/week). After a lot of contemplation, I am not recommending this be approved. While it sounds like a simple opportunity, communication, consistency, and quality staffing are my biggest concerns. Ultimately, the decision needs to be about the best interests of the students.

Given this particular class dynamic, and the merge from 3 to 2 (even with the transfer of 6 students/families specific to this grade), these students need to have the reliability and consistency of a single individual.

Additional costs—in order to address the involvement of both staff members in a co-teaching model, any staff work days, Welcome Days, P/T conference days and professional development days (including late starts) would need to be available for each of the teachers. There would also be costs associated with benefits of two staff members, and the overall source of tools/resources provided to teachers.

Communication and planning—even in the best of collaborative roles and teams, communication would be essential for classroom and student success. Yes, putting both teachers on a single email when needing questions answered from home, and involving them with building/district communication are “easy,” the who do I go to and when may be frustrating for parents, staff, and even students in certain circumstances. Planning and instruction would require additional time together which is a hidden factor to consider. Both teachers would need to be prepped and prepared for the upcoming week both instructionally and with overall student/classroom awareness. A notebook about day to day occurrences and situations that crop up in the classroom could be used. When does planning take place collaboratively? It should not be a I’ll plan, you teach partnership. Also, to be an effective partnership additional time together is necessary. This is the hidden factor... it’s additional costs both in time and finances for both teachers to make this happen. A minimum of an hour a week, in my opinion, would be needed to plan effectively as a team...bare minimum. When does this happen? Whose day? Who’s stuck with the additional time and at what point will compensation for additional planning and collaboration time on their off instructional days be requested due to contractual language? With recent requests, it is an honest and real factor to take into consideration.

Staffing—in a coteaching model, both staff members would need to be employed by the district. Given the shortage of teachers, hiring of staff could be challenging for a part time position, and likely not able to be done until August after schools/districts have secured their own hires. I hate to risk the quality experience students should have with an unknown teaching partner. Even considering a retired teacher returning would negate any retirement benefits (a cost THEY need to consider, not us) and/or be up for discussion about placement on the salary schedule to be in compliance with contractual expectations.

With a teaming/co-teaching model, there are benefits for students and staff. Collaboration in a strong team makes the learning spaces for the students positive. “Two heads are better than one” with problem solving, creativity and support would be a plus for all involved with the teachers (students, parents, grade level teams and building team), and yes, having two consistent adults advocating for students is an advantage. Learning from each other professionally and developing strong communication are also benefits for the both members of the teaching team.

Mr. Sellner and I have spoken about potential alternatives for Heather knowing she is looking for a reduced teaching assignment for the upcoming year. I appreciate the investment and willingness of Heather, and the desire to remain in the district. If we can do that without impact to students, I would like to do that. She is a capable and caring teacher that I’d like to have remain on staff in the HLWW community. We have the ability to consider a reduced contract with a temporary change in assignment via the EL position. The services could still be supported within her preferred schedule, and this position would also allow her an opportunity to “keep Humphrey roots” by servicing students with EL needs AT Humphrey along with the MS/HS students requiring EL support. Heather has been presented this potential idea, and while not the desired outcome of her proposal, felt with some support and additional dialog, it may be a viable alternative.

It is a challenging situation regardless due to yet another adjustment in staffing and I recognize that fully.

I am open to conversation and questions, and apologize for not being there to address them in person today. It is a warm day in Kansas City and the list of pre-wedding “to-dos” is growing. Looking forward to celebrating my youngest son and his soon to be bride on Saturday.

Thank you,

Jen