

# Proposal: Increase 1.0 FTE Special Education Licensed Teacher (PK-2) at Humphrey Elementary School

## Summary

To maintain the quality of specialized instruction and ensure federal compliance for the 2026-27 school year, we propose the addition of **one (1) Special Education Teacher at the PK-2 level at Humphrey Elementary School**. Current projections show that starting the year with our existing three-teacher model will result in immediate "max-capacity" caseloads, leaving zero margin for the historical influx of students throughout the academic year.

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## Current Projections vs. Capacity

HLWW Public Schools is slated to begin the next school year with **40 students** holding Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in the PK-2 bracket at Humphrey Elementary School.

Metric	Current Staffing Model (3 teachers)	Proposed Staffing (4 teachers)
Opening Day Caseload	13.3 Students (high level)	10 Students (healthy margin)
Projected Year-End Caseload	~18+ Students (Non-Compliant / Critical / Not sustainable)	~14 Students (Manageable / Effective)

Starting at an average of 13.3 students per teacher is a "high" caseload. This provides no flexibility for the high-intensity needs of the PK-2 population, where early intervention is most critical for long-term district savings.

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## Analysis of Growth Trends

HLWW Public Schools has seen a consistent and significant influx of special education students after the school year begins, through both initial evaluations for special education and move-ins.

### Historical Influx Data (PK-4 District-Wide):

- **2023-24:** 32 new IEPs
- **2024-25:** 25 new IEPs
- **2025-26 (To Date):** 32 new IEPs

### Adjustments Already Made to FTE/Location:

To better align with current/projected enrollment trends, the district is already **transitioning ECSE staffing for the 2026-27 school year:**

- Winsted Elementary: Decreasing to 0.5 FTE ECSE (due to lower projected enrollment).
- Humphrey Elementary: Increasing to 1.5 FTE ECSE (to support the higher concentration of early childhood needs).

- There is no need to post for these changes as it will be managed internally and one ECSE teacher will be shared between the elementary schools, and one ECSE teacher will be full time at Humphrey Elementary School.

### The "Known Unknowns" for 2026-27:

1. We are already aware of **6 incoming students** with IEPs for the next school year (mostly birth-3 ECSE students turning 3). When combined with the average historical growth of ~30 students across the elementary level in both schools, our current three-teacher model will inevitably exceed manageable and equitable limits by the second quarter.
2. A new childcare facility is scheduled to open in Waverly this summer with a **capacity of 132 infants and toddlers (6 weeks of age to 2 years 9 months) and 60 preschool-age students (age 2 years 9 months to kindergarten)**. This represents a substantial variable for our PK-2 staffing for the following reasons:
  - **Child Find Mandates:** Under IDEA, the district is responsible for identifying and evaluating children with disabilities within its boundaries. A high-capacity center significantly increases the likelihood of new referrals.
  - **Service Provision:** Should any of these 60+ preschool aged children require IEP services (Speech, OT, or Specialized Instruction) while attending the center, our PK-2 staff will be responsible for service delivery.
  - **Immediate Impact:** Unlike residential move-ins, which happen gradually, the opening of a large child care facility physically located in the district creates a concentrated "surge" in potential caseload volume starting Day 1.

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### Justification: Compliance and Equity

1. **Instructional Fidelity:** High caseloads dilute the "Specially Designed Instruction" (SDI) required by law. Overburdened teachers cannot provide the frequency or intensity of intervention needed to close achievement gaps.
2. **District-Wide Equity:** To maintain morale and retention, caseloads must be equitable across all buildings. Adding this position ensures that our PK-2 site is not disproportionately burdened compared to other grade levels or buildings, which aligns with the district's reasons to reorganize Winsted and Humphrey Elementary schools to become "grade level buildings."
3. **Risk Mitigation:** Overloaded caseloads increase the risk of "failure to implement" claims and subsequent due process hearings, which often carry costs far exceeding a single teacher's salary.

### Recommendation

We recommend the immediate posting of one Special Education Teacher position. This proactive hire allows the district to secure high-quality talent in a competitive market, rather than seeking an emergency hire mid-year when caseloads reach a breaking point.

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