

# LEADING WELL UNDER PRESSURE

2026 MASE Fall Leadership Conference

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## Building an Acuity-Based Staffing Model for Equitable Special Education Services

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## Session Overview and Outcomes

Examine the challenges of traditional special education staffing practices and the need for a more equitable, student-needs-driven approach.

Learn how Osseo Area Schools established a collaborative task force, gathered stakeholder input, and built consensus around staffing priorities.

Review how stakeholder feedback and district data were translated into a weighted staffing formula.

Consider lessons learned, potential challenges, and practical next steps for developing or refining staffing practices in participants' own districts.

# Osseo Area Schools

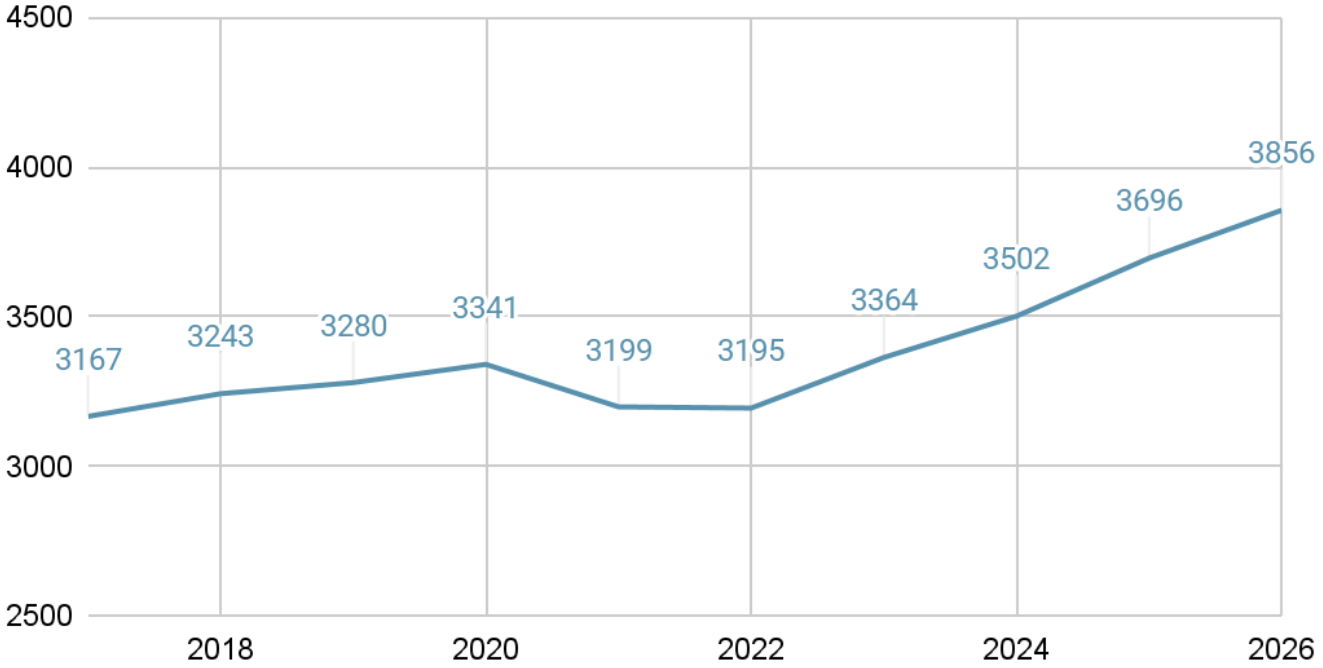
## Special Education Child Count Trends

Total Enrollment: 22,460

Child Count: 13.2%

Buildings/Programs:
- 2 preschools
- 17 elementary schools
- 4 middle schools
- 3 high schools
- ALC
- 6-12 Online
- Transition program

One in seven students represented in this increase required center-based programming



## Osseo Area Schools

Budgeting and Staffing

- Annual FTE allocations from 740 remained static absent an approved strategic investment, regardless of enrollment fluctuations
- Over the past five years, Student Services utilized 419, CEIS, and 372 to maintain staffing ratios as no strategic investments were approved.
- In the fall of 2025, it was evident this would not be sustainable moving into the 2026-2027 school year
- Strategic investment request was denied in October of 2025. The resulting staffing proposal, which required new ratios, caused alarm



# Phase One: Educating the School Board to Inspire Action



## Phase One: Educating the School Board to Inspire Action

- Memorandum to the School Board (written, podcast)
  - Present complex enrollment, staffing, and enrollment and financial trends in an accessible format.
  - Clearly outline the recommended investment and its anticipated impact.
  - Demonstrate projected outcomes of both investing and maintaining the status
- Present to the School Board
  - Deep dive into funding sources, cross subsidy, financial projections, enrollment, federal setting trends
  - Invite stakeholders to share firsthand experiences of being understaffed in special education

# Phase One: Educating the School Board to Inspire Action

- In February of 2026, the school board approved a one year Strategic Investment out of 740 equivalent to 18 licensed FTE and 18 paraprofessionals.
- As a condition of this investment, the board required Business Services and Student Services to establish a task force to transition from fixed annual staffing allocations from 740 to allocations based on projected enrollment and student acuity.



# Phase Two: Create a Cross-departmental Task Force to Improve Special Education Staffing



## Phase Two: Create a Cross-departmental Task Force to Improve Special Education Staffing

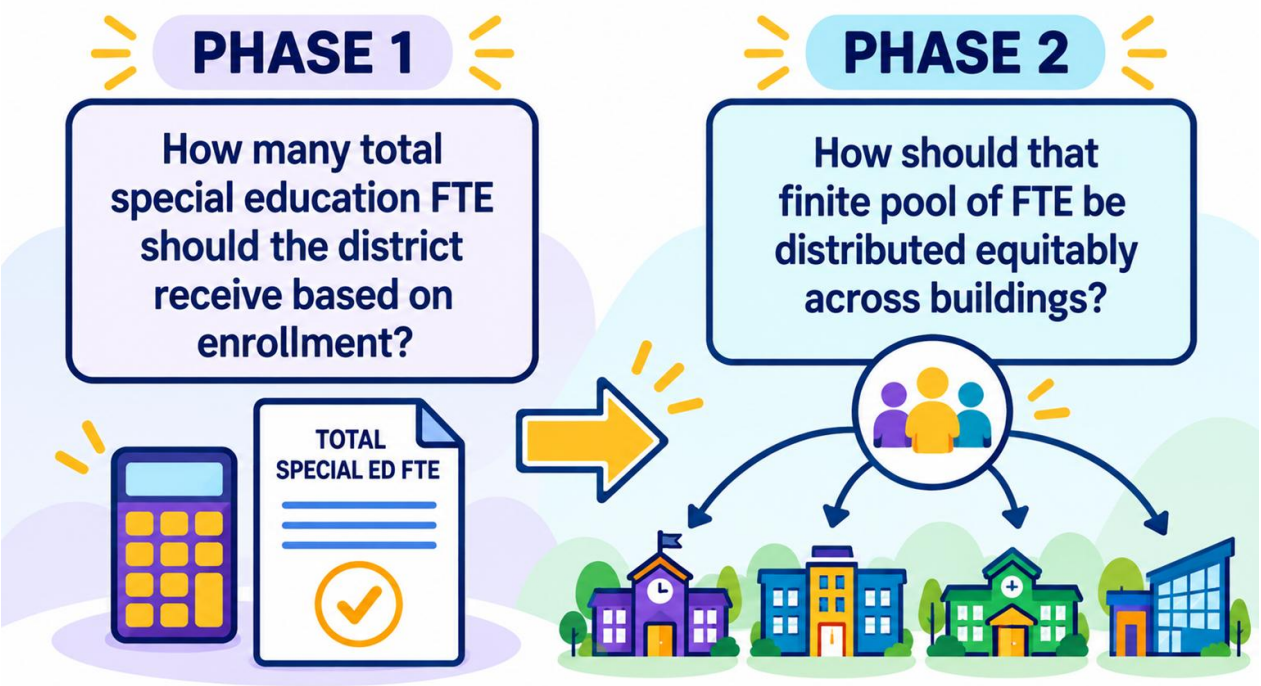
Special Education Enrollment Driven Staffing (SEEDS) Task Force

- Cross-departmental representation with members from business services, student services, EMO, and cabinet
- Meet twice monthly beginning in April, 2026 through September, 2026 with additional meetings as needed
- Develop an enrollment forecasting formula that integrates multiple weighted data points to project special education staffing needs and enable equitable enrollment-driven FTE allocations.

SEEDS
Special Education Enrollment Driven Staffing
OSSEO AREA SCHOOLS

**Committee Members**

- Teachers
- Assistant Supts.
- Building Principals
- Business Services
- Enrollment
- Human Resources
- Information Systems
- Leadership Interns
- Student Services
- Transportation
- Union Representatives

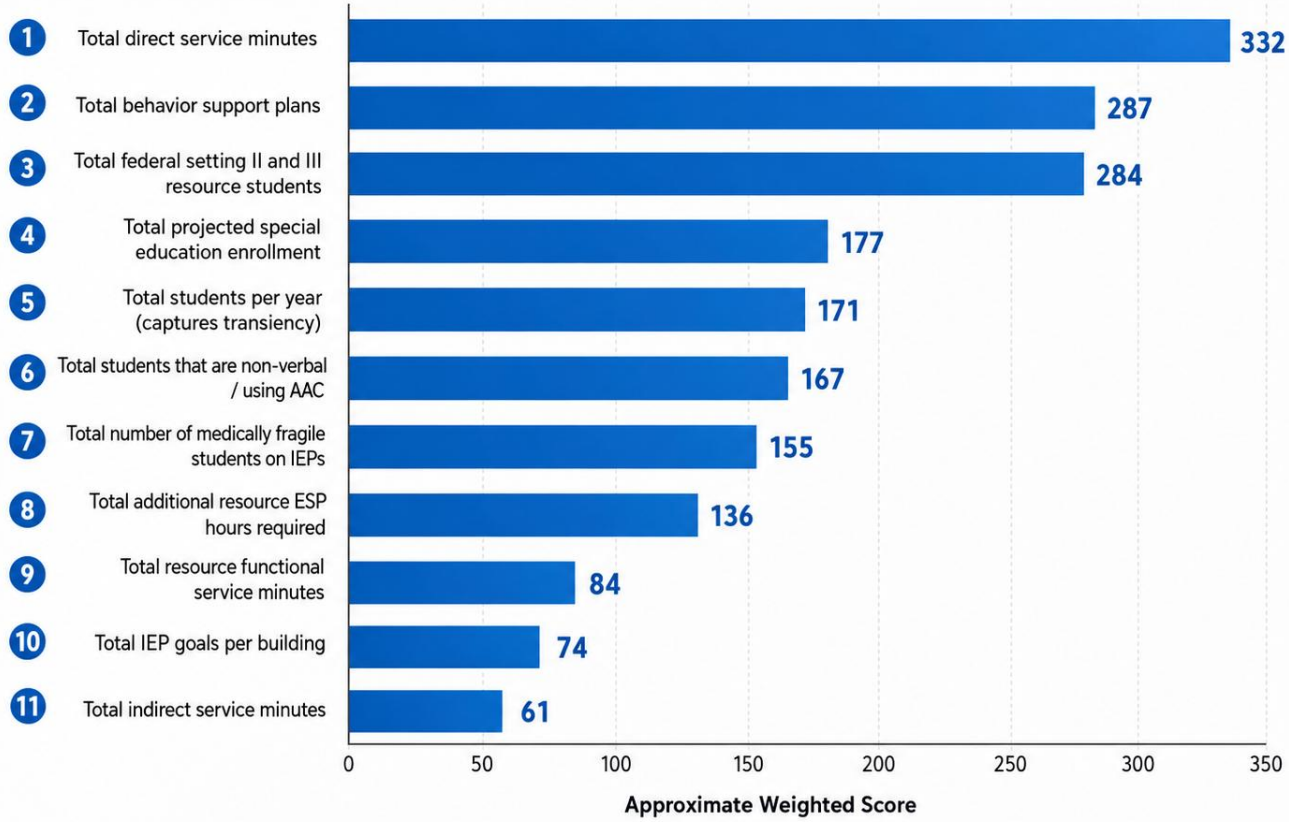


# Phase Three: Engage Stakeholders and Identify Acuity Metrics



# Special Education Staffing Survey: Approximate Weighted Summary

*One combined score per factor based on ranked survey responses*



## Survey One Results

### Identified Factors

1. Total direct service minutes
2. Total behavior support plans ★
3. Total federal setting II and III resource students ★
4. Total projected special education enrollment
5. Total students per year (captures transiency)

## Survey Two Results

### Identified Factors

1. Total direct service minutes
2. Total federal setting II and III resource students ★
3. Total behavior support plans ★
4. Total projected special education enrollment
5. Total students per year (captures transiency)

# Special Education Staffing Survey: Approximate Weighted Summary

*One combined score per factor based on ranked survey responses*



# Phase Four: Weight Acuity Factors and Complete Staffing Stimulations



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## Proposed Weighted Allocations

sustaining 20% level-based workload parameter

| | Identified Factors | Weight |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Service Intensity | 45% |
| 2 | Total projected special education enrollment | 35% |
| 3 | Total behavior support plans | 20% |
| 4 | Transiency Modifier | Modifier |

- 20% workload parameter maintains secondary resource caseloads 20% higher than elementary
- Student intensity: direct service minutes + setting I/II resource students
- Transiency is a modifier based on building's transiency ranking

| | A | C | D | E | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Proposed Weighted Allocations: Sustaining 20% Workload Factor | | | | |
| 2 | School Code Name | SY26-27 Resource Teacher Allocation | Proposed Weighted Allocations | Difference | Average Caseload |
| 3 | ELEM10 | 3.5 | 3 | -0.5 | 18 |
| 4 | ELEM9 | 2.5 | 1.5 | -1 | 25 |
| 5 | ELEM8 | 2.5 | 3 | 0.5 | 11 |
| 6 | ELEM7 | 7 | 6 | -1 | 18 |
| 7 | ELEM6 | 5 | 4 | -1 | 19 |
| 8 | ELEM5 | 4 | 4.5 | 0.5 | 13 |
| 9 | ELEM4 | 2.5 | 2 | -0.5 | 19 |
| 10 | ELEM3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 12 |
| 11 | ELEM2 | 3 | 2.5 | -0.5 | 17 |
| 12 | ELEM1 | 4.5 | 5.5 | 1 | 12 |
| 13 | ELEM11 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 16 |
| 14 | ELEM12 | 3 | 2.5 | -0.5 | 20 |
| 15 | ELEM13 | 3.5 | 4 | 0.5 | 13 |
| 16 | ELEM14 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 16 |
| 17 | ELEM15 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 12 |
| 18 | ELEM16 | 3 | 2 | -1 | 22 |

# Phase Five: Pressure Test until the Formula Works



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| District-wide Measure | Current Formula | Formula using Survey 1 | Proposed Formula |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Resource FTE Allocated | 121 | 121 | 121 |
| Buildings with an FTE increase | 18 | 11 | 10 |
| Buildings with no change | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| Buildings with an FTE decrease | 5 | 10 | 13 |
| Largest increase | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Largest decrease | 1 | -2.5 | -1 |
| Buildings inside target caseload range | 26 | 12 | 16 |
| Buildings outside target range | 0 | 14 | 10 |

# Phase Five: Pressure Test until the Formula Works

## Caseload Guardrails

| Level | Elementary | Secondary |
|---|---|---|
| Contractual range | 15–23 | 18–25 |
| Base staffing anchor | 18 | 21 |
| Preferred operational range | 15–21 | 18–23 |
| Growth buffer | 22 | 24 |
| Absolute maximum | 23 | 25 |

- Prevent extreme staffing shifts
- Support a stable first-year transition
- Allow time to test and refine the model
- Protect against unintended outcomes
  - (Ex: resource = CB numbers)
  - Extreme ESP allocation shifts

# Phase Six: Determine Finalized Weights, Proration Factor, and Normalization Factor



# Phase Seven: Stakeholder Communication and School Board Update



## Phase Seven: Stakeholder Communication and School Board Update

- Stakeholder Communication
  - Memorandum and podcast
  - Voluntary informational meetings
- Present to the School Board
  - Share how the strategic investment was utilized (fill rate)
  - Demonstrate how the new formula will be used
  - Be clear on the impacts and likely feedback the board will receive

# Phase Eight: Relish, Repair, Refine, Roll out

