

Justification for Establishing a 200-Student Minimum Enrollment Floor for Elementary Schools

Lee's Summit R-7 School District

1. Ensuring Equitable Access to High-Quality Educational Programming

A minimum enrollment of 200 students supports the district's commitment to **equitable opportunity and consistent access** to essential elementary programming across all schools. Schools significantly below this threshold often face challenges such as:

- Limited ability to provide **full-time specialists** in art, music, physical education, library/media, and counseling.
- Reduced capacity to offer **intervention and extension services**, including reading/math specialists, social-emotional supports, and enrichment opportunities.
- Fewer grade-level peers for students, affecting **collaboration, accelerated groups, and targeted supports**.

A floor of 200 students ensures each building has enough enrollment to sustain the full breadth of LSR7's instructional model without compromising quality or equity.

2. Financial Sustainability and Efficient Use of District Resources

Elementary schools below 200 students create a structural imbalance between operating costs and the number of students served. Maintaining an enrollment floor helps the district:

- **Optimize staffing models**, aligning teacher allocations, specialists, and administration with state guidelines and district expectations.
- Ensure efficient use of **transportation, food service, custodial, and maintenance resources** across the district.
- Avoid supporting high-cost/low-enrollment sites where per-pupil expenditures can significantly exceed district norms.

By maintaining schools at or above 200 students, the district preserves financial resources that can be reinvested to improve classroom instruction, update facilities, and support strategic initiatives.

3. Maintaining Strong School Culture and Student Experience

Schools with fewer than 200 students often struggle to provide the social and extracurricular experiences that families expect in a thriving elementary environment. A minimum enrollment ensures:

- **Healthy class sizes** that support both strong teacher relationships and a robust peer environment.

- Sufficient numbers for **student leadership, clubs, music programs, intramurals, and family engagement events**.
- A vibrant school culture with diverse opportunities for friendships, teamwork, and inclusion.

A 200-student threshold provides the critical mass needed for a rich, engaging, and well-rounded elementary school experience.

4. Alignment With District Enrollment Trends and Long-Term Planning

Lee's Summit, like many suburban districts, is experiencing **changes in live birth rates, neighborhood turnover, and shifting enrollment patterns**. Establishing a 200-student floor:

- Helps guide decisions about **boundary adjustments, program placements, and future facility use**.
- Ensures the district can maintain an efficient network of elementary schools aligned to demographic realities.
- Supports long-term **fiscal planning and capital investment**, ensuring schools remain viable and appropriately sized for decades ahead.

This threshold provides a consistent, data-driven marker for evaluating building sustainability amid evolving population patterns.

5. Supporting Staff Collaboration, Professional Learning, and Program Delivery

School size directly affects the district's ability to deliver high-quality instruction through collaborative teams. Schools with fewer than 200 students often struggle to maintain:

- **Multiple teachers per grade level**, limiting PLC effectiveness, shared planning, and instructional consistency.
- Adequate staffing for **instructional coaching, special education programming, and MTSS** implementation.
- Flexibility in scheduling for interventions, small groups, and professional development.

A minimum of 200 students typically allows two or more sections per grade—an essential structure for maintaining stable staffing, instructional alignment, and teacher collaboration.

Research-based sources that support key aspects of the justification for a 200-student minimum enrollment floor:

1. **School size and student outcomes (elementary level)**
 - In a review titled *"School Size Effects: Review and Conceptual Analysis"* by Scheerens, Hendriks & Luyten, it is noted that for primary schools "from seven

school studies, it appeared that increasing school size from **200 up to 400–600 had little impact on student performance in elementary school.”” woodlandschools.org

- The same review finds that smaller schools are often associated with more positive non-cognitive-outcomes (student engagement, school climate) even if cognitive outcomes (achievement) show mixed effects. woodlandschools.org
- Another meta-review in “*School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance*” (Cotton, 1996) indicates “an appropriate and effective size is 300-400 students for an elementary school.” [Education Northwest](http://EducationNorthwest)
→ These findings support the notion that very small schools (well below 200 students) may face limitations in offering robust programming, while moderate sizes (200-400+) appear more viable.

2. **Class size, instructional supports & equity**

- The article “*Small Classes, Big Possibilities*” emphasizes that small class sizes (e.g., 15 : 1) in early grades lead to better achievement, more participation, improved behaviour—and that the benefits are especially strong for disadvantaged students. AASA
- A piece on Edutopia summarizing research, “*Research Is In: The Real Impact of Class Size and School...*”, states that smaller classes generally lead to higher test scores—especially in early grades and for students from disadvantaged backgrounds—if teachers adjust instruction accordingly. Edutopia
→ These support the portion of the justification about maintaining robust staffing and specialist services (intervention, enrichment, etc.) which are more feasible in schools with sufficient enrollment.

3. **Financial, operational & scale considerations**

- In the Scheerens et al. review (above) there is discussion of **economies of scale**: “From a cost-perspective the optimal school size is around 450 pupils and the costs remain virtually constant from the average school (200 pupils) onwards.” woodlandschools.org
→ This provides a rationale for the claim that extremely small enrollment makes per-pupil costs higher and resource deployment inefficient.

4. **School culture, student experience, and engagement**

- The same review (Scheerens et al) finds: “smaller schools are associated with greater student engagement conceived of in several different ways.” woodlandschools.org
→ This backs the argument around the need for sufficient student population to sustain peer groups, activities, student leadership, and a vibrant school culture.

How These Sources Map to the Justification

- **Equitable access to programming:** Research on class size & school size (items 1 & 2) show that smaller, under-resourced environments make it harder to deliver full programming especially for vulnerable students.
- **Financial/operational sustainability:** The cost-scale research (item 3) shows that very small schools risk inefficiencies.
- **Staffing & instructional quality:** Class size research (item 2) shows smaller classes are beneficial but only under certain supports; maintaining those supports requires a sufficient enrollment base.

- **School culture & experience:** Engagement and school climate findings (item 4) support that a school needs enough critical mass to realize full benefits.
 - **Planning & demographics:** While none of the sources directly address boundary planning or demographic shifts, the optimal size research gives indirect grounding for selecting a numeric floor that avoids the “too small” end.
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Bibliography

Optimal Elementary School Size, Climate & Achievement

1. Scheerens, J., Luyten, H., & Van der Werf, G. (2013). *School Size Effects: Review and Conceptual Analysis*.

- **Link (PDF):** woodlandschools.org
 - **Why it matters:** This review of international research finds that **increasing school size from about 200 up to roughly 400–600 students shows little negative impact on achievement in elementary schools**, and that very large schools can be problematic, especially for low-SES students. This supports the idea that a floor around 200 students is **educationally reasonable**—small enough to avoid big-school problems, but large enough to sustain programming.
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2. Cotton, K. (1996). *School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance*. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

- **Link (full report PDF):** [Education Northwest+1](#)
 - **Why it matters:** Cotton’s widely cited synthesis concludes that **moderate-sized schools (roughly 300–400 at the elementary level) tend to balance positive climate and strong outcomes**, and that both extremely small and very large schools present challenges. This supports setting a minimum enrollment that **moves schools out of the “too small to staff/program well” zone** without pushing them toward the “too large” end.
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3. Zoda, P., Combs, J., & Hooper, M. (2011). *Elementary School Size and Student Performance*. *Research in Higher Education Journal*.

- **Link (PDF / ERIC EJ974350):** [ERIC](#)
 - **Why it matters:** After reviewing multiple studies on school size and achievement, the authors propose **optimal size ranges** for elementary schools and emphasize that very small schools can struggle to provide the breadth of programming found in schools with a **critical mass of students**. This is directly aligned with the rationale for establishing a minimum enrollment floor.
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2. Economies of Scale, Per-Pupil Costs & Resource Efficiency

4. Bray, M. (1987). *School Size and Unit Costs: International Evidence and its Policy Implications*. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 5(1), 33–41.

- Link (PDF): jrre.psu.edu
 - **Why it matters:** Analyzing cost data across systems, Bray shows that **per-pupil costs decline as enrollment rises up to a certain point**, and gives examples in which moving from around 200 to 400 students substantially reduces cost per pupil while maintaining quality. This underpins your claim that **very small schools are structurally more expensive per student** and harder to sustain.
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5. Lewis, W. C. (2005). *Scale Economies in Public Education*. *Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy*.

- Link (PDF): rap.scholasticahq.com
 - **Why it matters:** Lewis finds clear **economies of scale** in school operations and capital costs: smaller schools and districts pay more per student because fixed costs are spread over fewer students. This supports your point that schools well under 200 students **strain district budgets relative to the services they can provide**.
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6. Gutierrez, E., Kolbe, T., & Cushing, E. (2022). *Small and Sparse: Defining Rural School Districts for K–12 Funding*. Urban Institute.

- Link (PDF): [Urban Institute](http://UrbanInstitute)
 - **Why it matters:** Although focused on rural systems, the report shows that **small school size is a major driver of higher education costs** and interacts with geography and density. The finding that small size makes it harder to achieve economies of scale provides a generalizable foundation for LSR7's argument that **very small elementary schools are fiscally inefficient**.
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3. Class Size, Instructional Supports & Equity

These studies support the idea that maintaining **multiple sections per grade and adequate staffing** (which requires a sufficient enrollment base) is critical for instructional quality and equity.

7. Filges, T., Sonne-Schmidt, C., & Nielsen, B. C. (2018). *Small class sizes for improving student achievement in primary and secondary schools: A systematic review*. Campbell Systematic Reviews.

- Link (systematic review – PubMed summary): PubMed

- **Why it matters:** This Campbell Collaboration review synthesizes 148 reports and finds that **reducing class size can yield modest but real gains in achievement**, especially in early grades, when coupled with effective instruction. For your purposes, it reinforces that **to run appropriately sized classes and targeted intervention groups, schools need enough students (and staff) to schedule flexibly**, which is hard to do in very small buildings.
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8. Shin, I.-S., & Chung, J. Y. (2009). *Class size and student achievement in the United States: A meta-analysis*. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 6(2), 3–19.

- **Link (meta-analysis summary):** [ResearchGate](#)
 - **Why it matters:** This meta-analysis of U.S. studies shows that **class size reduction has overall positive effects on achievement**, though effects vary by context and grade level. The implication for LSR7 is that if you want **reasonable class sizes plus specialists and interventionists**, buildings must be large enough (≈200+ students) to support staffing models with **multiple sections per grade and shared support staff**.
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4. School Size, Extracurriculars, Engagement & School Culture

9. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (1995). *Extracurricular Participation and Student Engagement*.

- **Link (NCES brief):** [National Center for Education Statistics](#)
 - **Why it matters:** NCES summarizes research showing that **participation in extracurricular activities is associated with higher engagement, lower dropout risk, and better academic outcomes**. While not about size per se, it supports your claim that schools need enough students to field clubs, activities, and leadership opportunities—things that are **harder to offer consistently in very small schools**.
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10. Meier, A., Hartmann, D., & Larson, R. (2018). *Inequalities by race, class, gender and age? Patterns and trends in school-based extracurricular participation*. *Social Sciences*, 7(11), 1–30.

- **Link (open-access article):** [PMC](#)
- **Why it matters:** This article documents how extracurricular participation is linked to academic and social benefits, and how access varies across student groups. It strengthens the argument that LSR7 should maintain schools large enough to offer **equitable extracurricular and enrichment opportunities**, which is more feasible when schools meet a **minimum enrollment threshold**.