

## Building And Sustaining Diverse Talent Pipelines

**Founded in 2013, Nashville Classical Charter School (NCCS) serves a racially, economically, and geographically diverse group of 550 students in grades K-8. Seventy percent of NCCS students are Black or LatinX, and the student body represents 26 unique zip codes from across the greater Nashville area.**

NCCS ranks as one of the top-performing elementary and middle schools in Nashville and the state of Tennessee. Based on the 2021-22 TCAP assessment, NCCS ranked fifth in seventh-grade math proficiency among all Nashville middle schools. It also ranked in the top 2 percent for math growth among all elementary and middle schools in Tennessee.

NCCS is at the beginning of a process to open two new schools by 2030. Nashville Classical West will open with only kindergarten in the fall of 2023, expanding to serve students in grades K-8 by 2026. The following year, Nashville Classical hopes to open a high school, growing to full K-12 enrollment by 2030.

Over the last two years, COVID has exacerbated many of the existing challenges facing districts and schools, especially when it comes to recruiting, hiring, and retaining effective teachers and school leaders. This context, alongside the need to prepare for the staffing demands of opening two new schools, led NCCS leaders to create the Lead Mentor Teacher program. Leaders who are interested in strengthening the talent pipelines in their school or district can learn from this program and the processes that have been put in place to support it.

NCCS seeks to prepare all students for high school, college, and life by focusing on five pillars:



### A Diverse Community

A welcoming and diverse community benefits all students.



### Joyful, Rigorous Curriculum

A content-rich curriculum that requires rigorous thinking, reading, and writing is a necessary and joyful way for students to grow academically.



### Structured, Intentional Culture

Purposeful structure creates the safety students need to take risks and grow.



### A Foundation Of Knowledge

Science, social studies, and great books provide students with the foundation of knowledge needed to problem solve and effect change.



### Habits For High School, College, And Life

Habits, such as listening and demonstrating empathy, help students succeed in school and life.

## Lead Mentor Teacher And Resident Teacher Programs

The Lead Mentor Teacher program intends to strengthen the school's existing Resident Teacher program and support highly effective teachers to stay in the classroom long term or to assume school-level leadership positions in the future. Together, the Lead Mentor Teacher and Resident Teacher programs are focused on several key priorities:

- **Increase student achievement** by bolstering staff capacity to provide small-group interventions and in-classroom support, addressing the need for additional classroom coverage resulting from short-term and long-term vacancies, and retaining highly effective classroom teachers.
- **Accelerate leadership development** by offering lead mentor teachers (LMTs) robust professional development and on-the-job training opportunities that will equip them to take on dean, assistant principal, and principal roles in the future.
- **Improve teacher retention of new and veteran educators** by providing teacher residents with a gradual and supportive on-ramp to teaching, a clear picture of a teacher's daily responsibilities, and a subsidized path to certification. Includes offering LMTs increased compensation, flexibility, and a sense of purpose from a cohort model.
- **Build and sustain a diverse school community** by creating new teaching and leadership pathways to ensure the school's staff matches the diversity of the student body.

The Lead Mentor Teacher program launched in the summer of 2022 with seven mentor teachers who each support one resident teacher. A resident is an unlicensed novice teacher pursuing licensure and a full-time lead teaching position. A mentor teacher is a fully licensed and experienced NCCS teacher. Each mentor teacher receives an annual \$10,000 stipend for supporting the growth of one resident through three phases of development described in the school's [Scope and Sequence for Resident Development](#). These phases provide residents with a clear and ambitious roadmap for developing the necessary skills to step into a full-time teaching role by the end of the year.



Mentor teachers meet with their resident at least once per week to discuss progress, share feedback, and prepare for the upcoming week. The mentor teacher gives feedback on key skills related to curriculum and instruction that are aligned to the resident’s professional development needs. With the mentor’s support, the resident teacher then rehearses upcoming lessons that integrate that feedback. Residents, in turn, are responsible for observing their mentor teachers and supporting classroom instruction. Outside of the classroom, residents are expected to be on duty for arrival, lunch, recess, and dismissal.

There are many benefits to participating in the Resident Teacher and Lead Mentor Teacher programs that Nashville Classical leverages to recruit high-quality candidates to these programs.



### Compensation



### Professional Development



### Additional Benefits

<b>Teacher Resident</b>	Approximately <b>90 percent</b> of a starting teacher’s salary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly school professional development</li> <li>• Weekly 1-1 meeting with mentor teacher</li> <li>• Teach a full-length class once per week</li> <li>• Substitute teaching</li> </ul>	<b>Full tuition</b> reimbursement after three years at NCCS
<b>Lead Mentor Teacher</b>	<b>\$10,000</b> annual stipend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual 360 review</li> <li>• Biweekly cohort meetings</li> <li>• Biweekly school culture walk-throughs</li> </ul>	<b>\$1,500</b> professional learning stipend

## Differentiated Teacher Leadership Development

The Lead Mentor Teacher program aims to catalyze the leadership development of mentor teachers by providing robust and differentiated development opportunities throughout the school year. NCCS aims to accomplish two important goals through this program: retain highly effective teachers who want to stay in the classroom long term and develop a pipeline of future leaders who are prepared to step into leadership roles in the next several years. Over the next three years, NCCS leaders have set a goal of ensuring that 75 percent of vacant or new dean, director, and assistant principal roles are filled by lead mentor teachers.

Starting in July, mentor teachers attend school-based professional development on leading school culture and on classroom observation and feedback. Additionally, each mentor teacher engages in a 360-review process that is guided by a [leadership framework](#). After completing a self-assessment and receiving feedback from colleagues and their manager, each mentor teacher meets individually with the school’s founder and executive director to review their feedback and finalize an individual development plan for the semester.

Once the school year begins, lead mentor teachers attend biweekly professional development. These interactive sessions provide training on specific tools and skills, including building relationships with families, working across lines of difference, and real-time coaching. In addition to reviewing videos of lead mentors using a specific skill or tool, participants also have the chance to practice key leadership skills and receive immediate feedback from their colleagues. LMTs are also encouraged to take advantage of external professional development opportunities. Mentor teachers receive an annual \$1,500 professional development stipend that may be used to cover the cost of attending conferences, visiting other schools, or reimbursing tuition costs.

Several other routines and structures provide mentor teachers with opportunities to develop their instructional leadership skills and collaborate with the school's senior leadership team. Mentor teachers participate in a biweekly school culture walk-through led by the school principal and the director of talent and development. After visiting classrooms and norming around a vision for instructional excellence, mentor teachers prepare feedback to share with their grade-level teams and plan an upcoming professional development session. Near the end of each quarter, they participate in a formal school step-back meeting led by the principal. During these meetings, lead mentor teachers reflect on school-wide data, discuss feedback, and contribute to the creation of action plans that will be implemented on their grade levels during the upcoming quarter.

## Diversity, Inclusion, And Sustainability

The Lead Mentor Teacher and Resident Teacher programs seek to develop diverse and inclusive teacher and leader pipelines. Nashville Classical's recruitment and hiring process includes an explicit goal of hiring candidates who identify as Black, Indigenous or people of color for at least half of the lead mentor teacher and resident teacher positions. This goal ensures the school's staff matches the diversity of its student body. NCCS leaders recruit candidates for the teacher residency program from local teacher educator preparation and alternative certification programs, as well as non-education fields. Teachers who are interested in the lead mentor teacher position are required to complete a brief application and participate in an interview with the school's leadership team. While most of this year's mentor teachers have previously taught at Nashville Classical, the position is open to new hires. NCCS leaders seek LMTs with a diversity of career aspirations, setting a goal of ensuring that half of their mentor teachers plan to stay in the classroom over the long term.

Both programs are also designed to improve teacher retention by making the job more sustainable. The structured and supportive year-long on-ramp to teaching provided by the Resident Teacher program aims to ensure residents are set up for a strong first year of teaching — a critical step for ensuring







teachers will want to return to the classroom for a second year and beyond. The \$10,000 annual stipend for mentor teachers is meant to be meaningful compensation for the additional responsibilities that come with this role. “The lead mentor teacher role is a lot of work. The stipend matters — it allows me to have groceries delivered or order dinner,” explains one lead mentor teacher.



In addition to providing mentor teachers with valuable planning and in-classroom support, residents also serve as substitute teachers, freeing up lead teachers to attend professional development, observe other classrooms, or take PTO as needed. Not only does this in-house substitute system support the development of residents by providing them with valuable exposure to different classes, grade levels, and content areas, but it also benefits the overall culture of the school. Teachers are empowered to take a necessary day off without worrying about who will cover their classes, while students are always assured that a familiar face who knows the curriculum will be facilitating their learning.



The development and coaching opportunities that come with the lead mentor teacher role have the potential to add interest, variety, and challenge to the traditional teacher role, increasing the likelihood that an effective teacher will choose to stay in the classroom over the long term.

## Culture, Curriculum, And Capacity

Three factors — a positive and consistent school culture, the use of high-quality and vertically aligned curriculum, and the added capacity of a director of talent and development — have contributed to clear and consistent implementation of the Lead Mentor Teacher and Resident Teacher programs.



Over the last decade, Nashville Classical has established a positive and consistent school culture rooted in high expectations for student behavior and consistent routines and procedures that maximize instructional time. This positive and consistent school culture has supported the development of both teacher residents and lead mentor teachers. Consistent expectations, routines, and procedures across the school give resident teachers a clear vision of a successful classroom, enabling them to step into any classroom in the school and support effective instruction. The school's culture of feedback enhances the ability of mentor teachers to provide their residents with specific and actionable feedback that will help them quickly achieve their developmental milestones.

High-quality and vertically aligned curriculum has been another key to the program's success. Nashville Classical uses the Core Knowledge Language Arts curriculum for English language arts and Achievement First's Navigator for math. The school allocates substantial time prior to the start of the school year for teachers to review and internalize curriculum units and assessments. During the school year, teachers prioritize internalizing and refining lesson plans and daily assessments rather than writing them from scratch. This system has substantial benefits for residents. Rather than focusing on *what* to teach, residents spend most of the time with their mentor teacher preparing *how* to teach a lesson effectively. This process involves anticipating student misunderstandings and rehearsing key portions of the lesson ahead of time.

The newly added role of [director of talent development](#) has also been essential to the Lead Mentor Teacher program's early success by ensuring consistent implementation of new systems and structures. This position is responsible for recruiting and developing mentors and residents; reviewing and providing feedback on mentor teachers' monthly video submissions; and monitoring residents' progress on a quarterly basis. As Nashville Classical expands in the coming years, the director of talent and development will oversee the growth of the Lead Mentor Teacher and Resident Teacher programs on new campuses.

## Looking Ahead

Although the Lead Mentor Teacher program is still new, there are indications it is having a positive impact on the development of mentor teachers. According to the [TNTP Insight Survey](#) — an anonymous survey of staff culture — the school's instructional culture ranks in the nation's 88th percentile. On the same survey, teachers reported an average of 13 observations in the first semester — more than double the national average of four observations per semester. Similarly, on a mid-year survey, one LMT shared: "I am really excited about the development that I've experienced as a lead mentor teacher, including the intentional feedback I am getting from video submissions around areas of focus for myself. This is the best on-site leadership development I have been given in my career."

Another lead mentor teacher who is interested in pursuing school leadership in the future notes that LMT training and the experience of coaching a resident has already impacted how she thinks about goal setting for her own development and that of others: "This program has really pushed me to think of actionable steps to get to a goal ... [and] to break down what exactly needs to happen by what date to get to that goal."

As NCCS leaders reflect on how to improve and scale the Lead Mentor Teacher and Resident Teacher programs, they are focused on several priorities. First, they want to continue to refine the biweekly professional development to ensure mentor teachers have the necessary tools to effectively coach their residents, especially when residents might be struggling to develop a particular skill. Second, school leaders are considering how to adjust support for a resident who is asked to step into a classroom as a long-term substitute. As several teachers are preparing to start their maternity leave, this is a particularly pressing question. Third, they are considering ways to financially

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sustain the programs in the future. Currently, the programs are grant funded. Moving forward, leaders are looking for ways to adjust school budgets to help cover the cost. Part of this process involves deciding on the appropriate number of residents and mentor teachers for new schools that will open over the next several years.

## Adding Your Own Residency Program

If your school or district is planning to add a residency program, consider some of the steps Nashville Classical took to launch their Lead Mentor Teacher program:

- **Establish the vision:** NCCS leaders considered the challenges they were trying to resolve — developing and retaining highly effective teachers and building leadership pipeline for future schools — and established a vision for the program that prioritizes teacher leadership development.
- **Set goals to measure success:** NCCS leaders set clear and measurable hiring goals for residents and lead mentor teachers to measure the success of the program.
- **Dedicate staff capacity:** The director of talent and development is responsible for overseeing the development of the Lead Mentor Teacher program. If hiring an additional administrator is not possible, consider the capacity and skills of other leaders on your team to support a residency program.
- **Prioritize professional learning:** The annual 360-review process, school culture walk-throughs, and biweekly professional development ensure that lead mentor teachers receive consistent and high-quality professional learning.

## Resources

[Scope And Sequence For Resident Development](#)

[LMT Video Submission Guide](#)

[Lead Mentor Teacher PD Overview](#)

[NCCS Leadership Framework](#)

[LMT And Resident Coaching Video](#)

[Director Of Talent Development Job Description](#)

[Lead Mentor Teacher Professional Development Sample](#)

