

STRATEGIC SCHOOL STAFFING: TENNESSEE'S OPPORTUNITY TO SUSTAIN AND ELEVATE GREAT TEACHING

Introduction

Every student in Tennessee deserves access to a reliable, effective, and diverse educator workforce. No child should walk into a classroom to see long-term substitutes or adults “scrambling for coverage” of their class. However, in the fall of 2022, Tennessee had 1,000 vacant teaching positions — forcing many students to face that scenario.¹ Adding to this concern is a decade-long trend of declining completion in educator preparation programs (EPPs) in Tennessee, signaling the need for a more comprehensive solution to the gap in Tennessee’s educator pipeline. Given the research that points to student access to an effective educator as the number one school-based factor for improving outcomes, Tennessee has an obligation to identify policies and practices that will ensure its schools have access to a flourishing educator workforce.²

Tennessee’s state, district, and school leaders are already working hard to implement solutions designed to shore up this gap. Over the last few years, Tennessee has developed multiple pathways into the teaching profession at no cost to candidates, including Grow Your Own programs, the Teacher Occupation Apprenticeship model, and a new pre-apprenticeship pilot for high school students. More recently, Tennessee passed legislation to fund the Future Teacher Scholarship to cover full tuition and fees for juniors and seniors enrolled in an EPP. The state has also broadened opportunities for individuals to teach with an emergency permit while working toward a teaching license. Tennessee is also investing in teacher salary increases to ensure all educators have a minimum salary of \$50,000 by 2026. Similarly, district and

school leaders have the responsibility and opportunity to set overall compensation strategy with a mix of across-the-board raises to go above and beyond the minimum or to offer additional differentiated compensation to educators who take on additional responsibilities, teach in hard-to-staff areas, or have an outsized impact on student outcomes.

Despite the state’s recent investment in salaries and new pathways into the profession, these strategies in isolation, while important, are asking Tennessee’s current students to “play the long game.” These strategies also represent a big bet — that interest in the teaching profession as it’s currently configured will improve, that new teachers recruited through these pathways will stay, and that salary is a primary driver for attraction and retention.

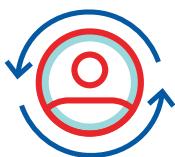
Recent data from a sampling of 15 districts across Tennessee suggest that these assumptions might not yield the needed return on the educator labor market. Given the 40-percent decline in EPP enrollment over the last decade, a 20-percent attrition rate for teachers in their first three years in Tennessee, and salary not making the top-three reasons Tennessee educators report for leaving, it is likely that strategies must go beyond addressing preparation barriers and increasing salaries.³ Given these trends, Tennessee is at a crossroads for ensuring students get the education they deserve and for reclaiming the status of teaching as a highly sought after profession.

In SCORE’s recent paper, [Understanding The Educator Labor Market: A Look At Tennessee’s Data](#), results were shared from an analysis of talent data from 15 districts across the state aligned to four key areas in a framework for addressing educator workforce

challenges, including: attracting new talent, leading for retention, maximizing current talent, and education industry in context. While Tennessee’s most recent initiatives are nation-leading in terms of working to attract new talent, Tennessee has an urgent need, and the opportunity, to respond to its teacher pipeline challenges more comprehensively.



Attracting new talent



Leading for retention



Maximizing current talent



Education industry in context

This paper is intended to help state and local leaders and practitioners connect the dots between national research, Tennessee’s data, and case studies of districts who are making strategic staffing decisions around the teacher role that reflect a real bridge between research and practice in schools. By acting on these data and promising examples, Tennessee schools can make strategic staffing decisions that maximize and retain the educator talent they have right now. Doing this work will enable schools to further deliver on the promise of an effective teacher in every classroom, while also designing a system that has the potential to attract and retain the next generation of educators.

Defining Strategic Staffing For The Educator Role

Tennessee stands at a crossroads to build a sustainable, reliable, and diverse teacher pipeline, and there is a growing body of research and set of promising practices that can be leveraged to build

and support that pipeline.⁴ Over the last few years, increased attention has been paid to topics such as “reimagining the teacher role,” “innovative staffing models,” and “advanced teacher roles” — among others. The design and implementation of various models aligned with these terms, the staffing structures they reflect, and the new roles they offer to effective educators are making an impact, both on the educator pipeline and on student outcomes.⁵ However, it is the long-standing research on educator talent behind these models that serves as the foundation. Drawing on this work and the research that supports it, Tennessee has an opportunity to develop a clear and robust vision for educator talent, one where schools have the structures and supports in place to consistently engage in practices that attract, support, and retain great educators and improve student outcomes.

In some ways, districts and schools in Tennessee regularly engage in this sort of strategic staffing work in its most basic form. They establish priorities or identify new initiatives and dedicate staff capacity to reach their goals. The most recent example of this being over the last several years as districts across the state worked hard to staff and implement high-dosage tutoring structures to support student learning following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a clear example of working to connect staff capacity to student outcomes around a researched-based priority.

While this sort of strategic staffing is critical and must continue as schools work to meet unique moments of innovation in the field or to address targeted student needs, they frequently come with new costs. Districts and schools must either hire additional staff, contract with vendors, or add responsibilities to current full-time staff to reach their goals for students. Additionally, in isolation this approach does not directly address the first part of the strategic staffing equation — attracting, supporting, and retaining great educators.

Importantly, there are opportunities to think about strategic staffing in ways that may be less resource intensive or burdensome. There are opportunities to rethink educator roles and responsibilities that work to address educator labor market challenges as well as student outcomes. Let’s consider how two different approaches to strategic staffing might play out in a pair of elementary schools.

Elementary School A. A school leader is reviewing data from the previous year and notes a substantial decline in student math performance in grades 3-5. To take urgent action on this data, the school leader chooses to use funds to hire an instructional coach for math at those grade levels. This role will be responsible for completing classroom walk-throughs and offering feedback to the math educators in their building to improve practice. They will also support assessment and data analysis to facilitate grade-level team meetings.

The principal works hard to support the new coach as they get up to speed on the high-quality instructional materials for math and work to deepen coaching relationships with faculty. As the year progresses, the school leader is thrilled to learn that student outcomes on formative assessments are improving. However, the school leader also learns the school's most effective fourth grade math educator is planning to leave at the end of the year to take an instructional coaching role in a neighboring district. In addition, the first-year educator they worked hard to recruit is struggling with classroom management and asking for additional support, and the funding for the math coaching role is in question for next year.

In planning next steps, this school leader sets a priority to identify funding to keep the math coach, looks for additional training on classroom management for novice educators, and prepares to post the math role quickly to avoid a vacancy for fourth grade math next year.

Elementary School B. A school leader down the road is also reviewing math data from the previous year and notes a similar decline in student performance in grades 3-5. Using the student outcome data, teacher effectiveness data, as well as perception data from other educators in the building who are asking for more time to observe their highly effective peers, this leader designs a master schedule that offers the two most effective math educators in the building time in a role that will ultimately extend their reach to more students and teachers. These two educators will spend half of their time each week in direct instruction with students and the other half doing live modeling and feedback in the classrooms of other educators during math instruction. They will also prepare for and lead data meetings.

One of the educators has been assigned to mentor the first-year math teacher in this grade-band as well. The teachers will receive additional compensation that leverages money from an educational assistant (EA) vacancy that the leader will deprioritize to support this new strategy. This school leader is similarly thrilled to learn that students are showing tremendous progress on formative math assessments over the course of the year. Results from a teacher perception survey also highlight more positive perceptions of support from teachers at a range of experience levels in the building, and the math teachers in the newly structured roles are excited to stay next year to continue to build on the strong student outcomes and teacher growth trends they saw this year.

The school leader also received a call from an effective math educator at another elementary school down the road who has learned about the new teacher-leader roles and is interested in becoming a part of that team should they have another opportunity. This leader is planning for how to also pilot this role for K-2 next year to identify how another effective math educator could further support student and teacher development in their school.

What is the difference between these two approaches? Both improve student outcomes in math but only the approach in Elementary School B results in a more stable and effective educator workforce heading into the next year. The approach in Elementary School B goes beyond a strategy to address student outcomes by incorporating key principles from educator talent research — **extending the reach of effective educators, supporting novice educators, giving teacher-leaders dedicated time to offer support, implementing differentiated compensation**, among others. The combined effect of these strategies gives Elementary School B the best chance of continuing to improve teaching and learning across the math teams and to build on the student progress made this year.

What We Know — And Think We Know — About Educator Talent

While these two scenarios and their potential outcomes are hypothetical, there are districts across the country making these kinds of strategic staffing shifts and experiencing the results outlined in Elementary School B. But why? Because the model and the educator roles outlined in the Elementary School B approach are grounded in some of the most fundamental educator talent research we have for the field. The approach of Elementary School B builds a bridge between localized student and educator data, staffing decisions, and the research we have on how to attract, support, and retain great educators.

So, what do we KNOW right now as a field from the research on educator talent, and how does this connect to strategic staffing data and opportunities in Tennessee? Following are five research pillars on educator talent that Tennessee should use as a guide as it works to address teacher pipeline challenges and improve student outcomes by attracting new talent, leading for retention, maximizing current talent, and contextualizing the education industry.

- 1. Access to an effective teacher is the number one school-based factor for improving student outcomes.** This same research shows that even access to a teacher performing around the average can have a significant impact on students' financial futures.⁶ Strategic staffing decisions that extend the reach of our most

effective educators without taking them out of the classroom create an opportunity that research tells us should improve student outcomes.⁷ Along these lines, teachers also put a high value on professional development that allows them to collaborate with each other and learn from effective educators, and this kind of job-embedded coaching has been found to be among the most effective.⁸

Tennessee's most recent educator effectiveness results from 2023 show that Tennessee currently has 4,702 members of its educator workforce (19 percent) performing at a Level 5 using the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) and another 2,942 (12 percent) performing at a Level 4, indicating these teachers had a tremendous impact on student growth last year. Creating roles for these educators that offer them greater access to more students along with dedicated time to support other teachers in their buildings may have a compounded effect on student outcomes as effective practices make their way into more classrooms.

- 2. Novice teachers need more support.** On average, during their first few years on the job teachers are less effective than more tenured educators.⁹ However, in a traditional school staffing model, the job description and set of responsibilities for novice educators are nearly identical to educators who have been in their roles for significantly longer. Promisingly, research highlights the potential of solutions like mentors or "sheltered roles" for novice educators — where they have smaller class sizes or more limited subject areas to prepare for. This gives educators time to develop and is a positive way to support retention.¹⁰ Research has also shown that one of the most salient factors in supporting new educators is having common planning time with other teachers in the same subject or collaboration with other teachers on instruction.¹¹

Given that Tennessee is losing one out of five teachers in their first three years on the job, making staffing decisions that offer these educators more support may foster greater

retention and allow them the time they need to deepen their impact on student learning.¹² As schools consider more strategic and expansive roles for their most effective educators, it is also important to identify roles and responsibilities that create meaningful and more targeted access points for new educators or educator candidates to practice and contribute to instructional priorities. This has the potential to not only impact students but to also support recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts.

3. Increased access to teachers with shared racial identity makes an impact on performance for students of color.

Studies have found that students of color with same-race teachers are more likely to take more advanced math classes and be placed in gifted programs.¹³ Research has also shown a causal relationship between Black students having Black teachers and increases in attendance rates, math and reading scores, high school graduation, and college enrollment.¹⁴ Students of other races exposed to Black teachers may also experience decreases in absenteeism and increases in test scores.¹⁵ In terms of recruitment, multiple studies show that schools that hire earlier, recruit from colleges and organizations with Black and Latinx students, and meaningfully include current teachers of color in the hiring processes increased the number of teachers of color in their buildings.¹⁶

In Tennessee, while the racial make-up of the teacher workforce overall is somewhat comparable with the population of our state, there are many districts and schools in which students' racial identities are not proportionally represented by their teachers, suggesting an untapped pool of potential educators Tennessee should strive to recruit and develop. There are also larger gaps between the percent of residents who are black and teachers who identify as black compared to white residents and educator percentages.¹⁷ Tennessee schools have an opportunity to work toward implementation of research-based recruitment and retention strategies to increase the diversity of our educator workforce while simultaneously supporting student outcomes.

4. Stable and effective school leadership matters for retention of effective educators and student outcomes. Research has shown repeatedly that teacher turnover rates are lower under more effective principals.¹⁸ More recent research points to an increase in teacher attrition in schools with less-experienced principals —and those effects are compounded in schools with higher rates of economically disadvantaged students.¹⁹ Importantly, research conducted in Tennessee looked at the impact of effective school leaders on strategic retention, showing that more effective school leaders keep more of their effective educators over time while simultaneously seeing increased attrition of less effective educators.²⁰ In terms of student outcomes, the impact of an effective school principal on outcomes is comparable to that of an effective teacher in the classroom.²¹

Evaluating Tennessee's data against this research is critical. Currently, 39 percent of administrators in Tennessee are in their first three years on the job.²² Results from the 2023 Tennessee Educator Survey show that teachers in the state cite "leadership" as the second most important factor influencing their plans to not teach next year, second only to "leaving on my own for other reasons."²³ Nationally, data indicate that school leaders are pointing to job-induced stress caused by a heavier workload as a top reason influencing their decision to stay or leave their roles.²⁴ Strategic staffing models that result in fewer direct reports and more distributed leadership may help districts keep and develop more school leaders and teachers over time.

5. Differentiated compensation models can improve retention of effective educators and improve student outcomes. Research conducted through meta-analyses and a comprehensive review of studies on teacher retention all confirm that salaries are a key component in retention for teachers in general.²⁵ However, research also highlights that across-the-board salary increases may not result in an improvement in the overall quality of instruction and that a more comprehensive approach that reflects differentiated compensation

and teacher support can make an impact on student outcomes.²⁶ This makes the policies and practices around differentiated compensation — as it relates to the educator pipeline and student performance — central to strategic staffing work.²⁷ At the most basic level, higher salaries can attract more high-performing educators to positions in low-performing and hard-to-staff schools, and higher pay for teacher-leader roles can improve retention.²⁸ Connecting pay to student outcomes, however, can make an impact for improvements in both reading and math, and teacher compensation tied to student achievement or graduation rates has been shown to improve retention.²⁹

Finally, increased rates of pay tied to student outcomes can also improve educator performance, creating a strong cycle of pay, improvement, retention, and increases in student outcomes.³⁰ Given Tennessee’s requirement that districts implement a differentiated compensation model designed to support hard-to-staff schools, offer pay for additional roles and responsibilities, or honor strong performance based on teacher evaluation outcomes, schools across the state have an opportunity to think strategically about how to connect teacher salaries and stipends to strategies that can successfully increase educator retention and improve student outcomes.

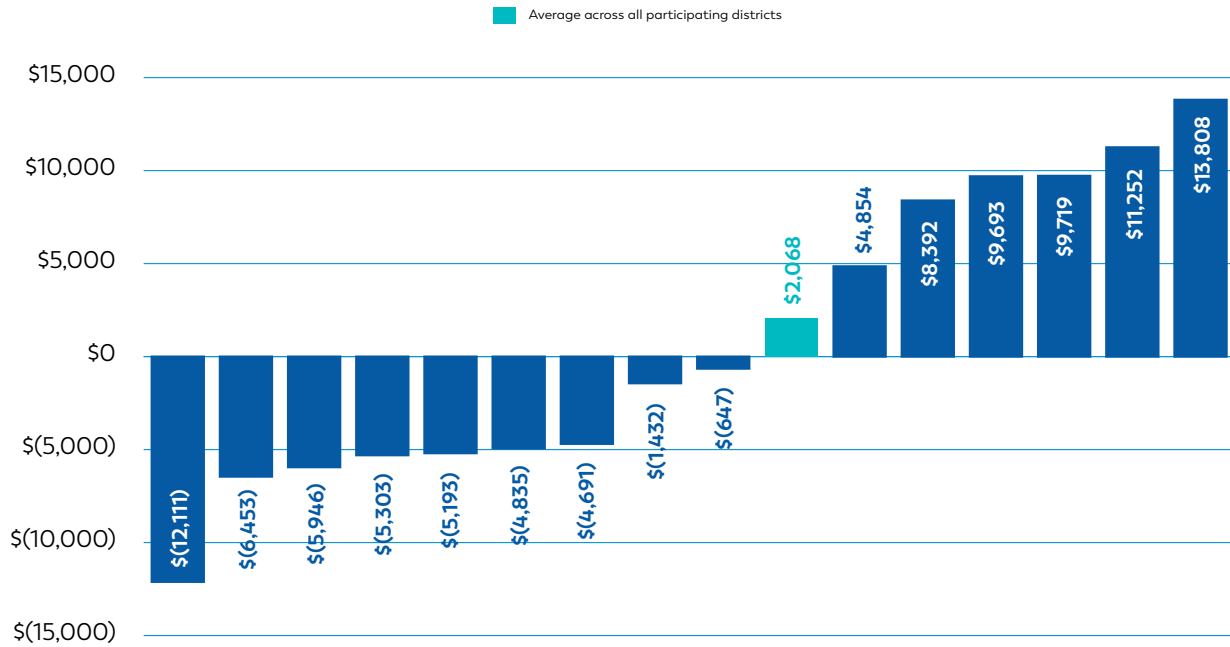
Outside of research focused on retention and student outcomes, it is also important to reflect more broadly on what teachers are telling us. The role of the classroom teacher, as currently configured, is feeling untenable to a majority of educators, and they want to spend more time on tasks related directly to teaching.³¹ Nationally, 87 percent of educators have shared that they feel classroom teachers have too many responsibilities to be effective. Survey data also indicate that these educators want to get back to the core of their role, spending more time on activities related to instruction rather than additional tasks like hall duty, lunch monitoring, and counseling. Given that teachers in Tennessee also cite “workload” as a top issue for leaving the profession, identifying tasks that do not need to be owned by classroom teachers may be a promising strategy to incorporate into strategic staffing decisions.³²

But what do we only *think* we know about educator talent, and how should this inform the work in Tennessee to build a robust teacher pipeline? Even as districts and schools work hard to make strategic staffing decisions that align with the research and their local needs, ongoing work on the ground to build an accurate understanding of the profession should also be prioritized. A recent analysis outlined two key misconceptions about the teaching role that need to be addressed to ensure current and future educators are making decisions about their interest in the profession with a clear understanding of the data.³³

- » **Are teacher salaries really too low to attract new talent into the profession?** Teachers clearly point to higher salaries as a key driver for attraction and retention into the profession, a perspective which should not be ignored.³⁴ However, recent research also highlights a potential misunderstanding in the general public around what teachers actually make, consistently reporting salaries around 50 percent lower than the average.³⁵ The data show that, during the 2021-22 school year, the average teacher salary was \$66,745.³⁶ Americans guessed the average was \$22,000 lower, on average. Similarly, results from a study of STEM major college students’ perception of teacher salaries found that students’ estimates were thousands of dollars lower than reality. When asked how much money they would need to consider teaching, the average amount they shared was aligned to current teacher salaries.³⁷

In all of these discussions, the context of the local economy and highly localized nature of the educator labor market should also be central in the conversation. SCORE’s recent analysis highlighted in [Understanding Tennessee’s Educator Labor Market](#) showed the difference between average school staff salary in each district and the median family income can offer a strong indicator of the extent to which local districts and schools are creating a strong market to attract the talent they want in their schools. In seven of the 15 districts included in this analysis, the average staff salary of a district employee was higher than that of the median family income in the county.

Difference between average staff salary in each district and family median income in each county, 2022



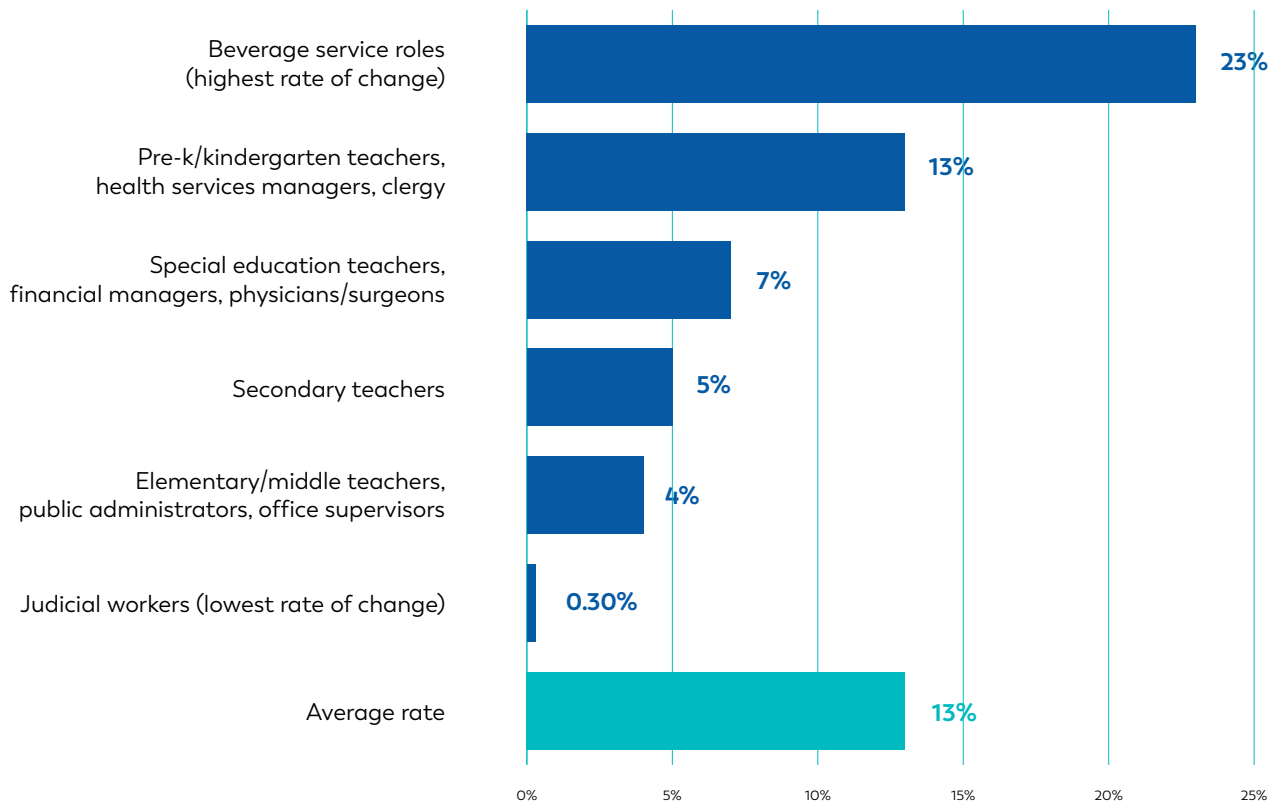
This analysis does not reflect the total set of benefits offered to teachers across the state. Tennessee, in particular, was recently ranked second in the nation, behind South Dakota, for the strength and stability of its teacher retirement system and another study found the system to be well-funded and stable.³⁸ Understanding the relative salary as well as total compensation packages for educators in the state relative to other industries, and then sharing and responding to those findings broadly, is an important step for Tennessee to take as it thinks about education as an industry in a broader context to attract and retain top talent.

» **Do teachers really not like their jobs?**

There are multiple sources of evidence that compare teaching to other professions that call this into question. Results from various sources reveal findings that point to comparisons like teaching being

one of the top occupations for overall well-being and satisfaction being high and very stable overtime (even during the pandemic) compared to the general national workforce overall.³⁹ Turnover rates for K-12 educators are also much lower than many other fields. On average, 13 percent of workers changed occupations between 2020 and 2021. Out of the 100 occupations included in this analysis, rates of occupation change from a specific field ranged from less than 1 percent for judicial workers to between 21 to 23 percent for various roles in food and beverage industries. Occupation-changing rates for K-12 educators fell between 13 percent for pre-k/kindergarten teachers (63rd on the list) to only 4 percent for elementary and middle school teachers (30th on the list).⁴⁰ Tennessee leaders, educators, and education stakeholders have an opportunity to more deeply understand the context of education as a career across the state and to ensure potential educators have all the facts as they consider the profession.

Rates of occupation change for Americans between 2020-21
out of 100 job categories



Case Studies In Strategic School Staffing

Understanding the research and policy opportunity to support strategic staffing around the educator role is only the first step. Making the leap from theory to practice in shifting staffing models is hard work. Making these shifts requires thoughtful design of new roles and support structures while also attending to their implications for funding, evaluation, training, and master schedules, among others. To support districts and schools in taking their first steps toward more strategic school staffing models, SCORE has compiled case studies and a summary of guiding principles learned from districts both within and beyond Tennessee's borders. The case studies are structured to share detailed insights into:

- **The "why"** behind each district's decision to pilot new staffing models.
- **Model design and early implementation** experiences in each district.
- **Funding** approaches to design and sustain each model.
- **The results** these districts are seeing for students and educators.

The four districts highlighted in this report represent diverse districts of different sizes to offer a range of examples for the different local contexts of Tennessee's school districts. Each case study offers a different perspective on how they began their work and what they are seeing now.

Clarksville-Montgomery County School System, Tennessee: Building And Diversifying A Local Teacher Pipeline

Clarksville-Montgomery County School System ⁴¹								
Total schools	Total students	White students	Black students	Hispanic students	Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other	Economically disadvantaged	English learners	Students with disabilities
44	37,043	48%	32%	15%	4%	25%	4%	14%

Their “why.” In 2018, the Human Resources Department in Clarksville-Montgomery County Schools System (CMCSS) realized they were experiencing a teacher shortage, and, given emerging trends, predicted the reduction in its recruitment pool would continue. The district also had concerns about the diversity of its educator workforce (only 16 percent of teachers in CMCSS are racially diverse, compared to 52 percent of its students). These trends motivated the district to apply for a Diversity Innovation Planning Grant offered by the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) with the goal of creating a local model for teacher recruitment and preparation with a focus on diverse candidates.

Model design and early implementation. To design their model, CMCSS conducted extensive research on the Opportunity Culture® model and visited the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) and Fresno Unified (California) school districts to observe similar programs. CMCSS then partnered with Nashville Teacher Residency and Austin Peay State University (APSU) to create a model to recruit and place potential candidates into a teacher residency program. Eligible candidates would be district staff already serving in instructional support positions, local community members, and high school students interested in pursuing a bachelor’s degree and getting their teaching license. At the same time, CMCSS also invested in the development of new teacher-leader roles. These parallel initiatives were designed to work together to create mutually beneficial strategies. The new teacher-leader roles would allow effective educators in CMCSS to earn more money and extend their reach to more students and colleagues, while the structure of the roles also provided an integrated mentorship model for the new teacher resident program.

CMCSS developed two primary teacher-leader roles — a Multi-Classroom Leader™ (MCL™) role at the elementary school level and a primary mentor teacher (PMT) role at the middle school level. Those in the MCL™ role act as mentors for up to two teacher residents in their building and do on-the-job training for their mentees. They also have grade-level responsibilities to support their peers so are released for half of the day for coaching. The PMTs focus solely on mentorship responsibilities for their teacher residents. They are assigned no more than two teacher residents for a portion of the day, two class periods and a planning period. Then the residents support the school as educational assistants (EAs) in other parts of the building. Teacher residents are only assigned to Title I schools, creating this additional set of responsibilities uniquely for the teacher-leaders in those buildings.

The model is designed to provide ongoing support, with departments across CMCSS working together to ensure that residents and educators get the support they need. While resident teacher recruitment and ongoing mentoring support from teacher-leaders is overseen by the instruction and curriculum department, training for teacher-leaders on subject specific coaching is overseen by teaching and learning. Eligibility criteria for both the MCL™ and PMT roles requires that these educators have 1) Three years of successful teaching experience, 2) evidence of successful leadership experience/roles within a school average, and 3) an average performance at the above expectations level of effectiveness on the [Tennessee’s Educator Acceleration Model \(TEAM\)](#) for the previous two years. For compensation, the MCL™ role earns an additional \$6,500 a year and PMTs earn an additional \$3,000.

To support recruitment for the teacher residency program, diverse educator recruitment in particular, each fall the CMCSS communications department works with a teacher residency pathways team and a minority recruitment team to push out a recruitment campaign. They focus deeply on recruitment of their classified staff, high school seniors, and community members, with the goal of identifying candidates who are invested in the community and want to stay. Public interest sessions each November, in addition to outreach through local media and social media, help the district share the history and “the why” behind the program. The minority recruitment team also focuses on deepening relationships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in Tennessee and Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs) in the Southeast region. These efforts make clear that CMCSS is committed to supporting future educators and, specifically, diverse future educators.

Once there is a potential teacher residency pool, the instruction and curriculum team begins selection. Many applicants have previous college experience, and some may have GPAs that indicate they would struggle in the program. CMCSS engages with their university partners to review transcripts and determine which candidates will be a good fit. They acknowledge the model is not for everyone — the combination of work responsibilities, school responsibilities, and licensure assessment requirements are difficult to balance. However, the district is committed to supporting candidates with demonstrated interest and commitment to the work and to helping them on their path to becoming a licensed educator.

Funding. In 2018, CMCSS was awarded a Diversity Innovation Grant from TDOE and used the funds to visit districts working on strategic staffing models designed to increase teacher supply and diversity. They investigated [Public Impact’s Opportunity Culture®](#) model and began design work around roles and funding. Given the number of vacant teacher positions in the district, CMCSS was supported to reallocate those funds to pay for roles associated with the teacher resident component of their model. Using the class size waiver option in Tennessee to staff classrooms, they funded compensation for two teacher residents — positions equivalent to education assistants — in exchange for one funded teacher position. To support costs associated with

postsecondary partners, teacher residents engaged in the Nashville State Community College and APSU pathways complete the FAFSA. All financial aid and grant funding is applied before CMCSS absorbs any costs, and APSU splits the remaining cost with CMCSS. To offset costs associated with tuition, textbooks, and fees, the district works directly with EPPs to apply for Grow Your Own grant funding from TDOE. Lipscomb University provides a tuition discount using these funds as well. After grants, financial aid, and other discounts are applied, any remaining tuition costs are covered by the district general purpose budget. Stipends for the MCL™ and PMT roles are covered by Title funds.

The Results. CMCSS currently has over 50 teachers in either the MCL™ or PMT teacher-leader roles, and this structure appears to be effective for supporting teacher residents with their coursework. It also has had the added benefit — when roles are safeguarded for resident support and coaching — of alleviating teacher coaching caseloads for principals. CMCSS is planning to continue to invest in and refine this model to build up a local and diverse educator workforce and expand the reach of excellent educators to support the transition from candidate to novice educator in their school system. Currently, plans are being developed to build capacity by providing even more in-depth professional development for mentors and residents.

The first cohort of the CMCSS teacher residency program with Nashville Teacher Residency — Clarksville Teaching Fellows (CTF) — graduated in 2019. All 11 participants were hired in middle schools in the district. That August, CMCSS’ Grow Your Own programs expanded to include the Early Learning Teacher Residency, with a cohort of 20 classified employees and 20 CMCSS 2019 high school graduates. The residents completed a three-year accelerated program at APSU while serving as EAs/residents in a Title I school. A second CTF cohort with 14 new residents also started that year. These residents worked to obtain licensure in middle school ELA, middle school Math, and high school math. In 2020, CMCSS transitioned this work into a partnership with Lipscomb University known as the Lipscomb Middle Teacher Residents pathway, which allows candidates to work toward teacher credentials and a master’s degree.

As of the 2023-24 school year, CMCSS has seen two, three-year cohorts graduate, and there are now 143 teacher resident graduates employed as full-time teachers in the district. In terms of growth, the district has 157 applicants for the 2024-25 cohort. The model in CMCSS is also making a difference for educator diversity. Of their current cohort of 110 residents, 33 percent are staff of color — compared to a 19-percent rate for staff of color across the district as a whole. These rates have also held for program graduates where 30 percent of the now 143 full-time teacher resident program graduates are racially diverse. Additionally, analysis of the district has shown no significant difference when looking at overall levels of effectiveness outcomes between first-year teachers

who were residency prepared compared to those who were traditionally prepared when using the TEAM teacher evaluation model.

The district intends to continue to focus on Praxis passing rates for its residents. Out of the 150 teachers who have come through the program over the last several years, 18 percent are still on permits — though not for lack of studying and taking the Praxis, sometimes multiple times. Unfortunately, they have found their racially diverse candidates are struggling the most, and the district recruitment and support teams are working to identify and offer more tailored supports to help all residents make it to licensure.

Ector County Independent School District (ECISD), Texas: Addressing Teacher Vacancies

Ector County Independent School District, Texas ⁴²								
Total schools	Total students	White students	Black students	Hispanic students	Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other	Economically disadvantaged	English learners	Students with disabilities
44	31,762	14.7%	3.7%	78.9%	1.4%	62.1%	22.5%	9.9%

Their “why.” When the superintendent of Ector County Independent School District (ECISD) assumed that role in the summer of 2019, the district faced a daunting challenge: They were preparing to start the school year with 350 teacher vacancies. Unfortunately, those vacancies would remain unfilled for the entire year. In addition, district and school leaders knew they were keeping educators employed who, year after year, were not making an impact on student outcomes — just to avoid more teacher vacancies. The district then sought to dramatically change how it was attracting, supporting, and retaining educators, and set out on a journey to find support that would ultimately lead them to rethink vacancies, budgets, master schedules, and teacher-leader roles to recruit and retain more effective educators in their district.

Model design and early implementation. Designing and implementing a new way of thinking about teacher roles in ECISD began with reflection at the central office level. The superintendent and human resources department started their new efforts with a sense of shared accountability, one that acknowledged

their existing recruitment and vacancy trends were the outcomes they were currently designed to achieve. And changing that would require them to rethink the roles and responsibilities. Their focus shifted from hiring and firing to include talent acquisition and development, restructuring as a human capital department with both human resources and talent development teams.

These shifts set the stage for the teacher-focused role design work that would come next and give the management and support for that work a place to land in the ECISD central office. At this point, the team asked: How can we improve opportunities for teachers? What would attract people to come here? How can we keep our best teachers? What do we do about our current vacancies? The superintendent sought technical assistance to design an approach to reduce vacancies in the short-term while also building toward a different and more nuanced educator role for the long-term.

With support from technical assistance, they identified 90 of the 350 vacancies that allowed them to reclaim

funds while still maintaining staffing stability at the campus level. From there, the district needed to identify schools where a pilot of a new educator model could be implemented. The potential for partnership with the technical assistance provider and a vision for the work was shared with all 45 district schools as an all call. Ten of the principals raised their hand and became the pilot schools for the 2020-21 school year. The district- and school-level teams spent a full year designing the Opportunity Culture® model for these 10 schools, including the hiring of their first cadre of new teacher-leaders in that timeframe.

Given the new vision and goals of the restructured human capital department, the model was ultimately designed to reflect a continuum of distinct educator roles that would leverage the strengths of staff at various experience levels — from educational assistants (EAs) to teacher candidates to educators with multiple years of proven effectiveness. These new roles included:

- » **Multi-Classroom Leader™ (MCL™) role:** This is a released teacher role and also has the same level of proven effectiveness as the team reach teacher role. They teach for half a day — with more students in their classroom — and spend the second half of the day coaching peers. They have two to four teachers on their teams. If they coach more than four teachers, they will have a higher stipend. However, ECISD’s vision for the role is to stay at four teachers or less in order to offer deep coaching to educators. They receive an extra \$17,000 a year in compensation, and the district is responsible for identifying this pool of educators. The ECISD model is grounded in a bar of effectiveness for this role, so the district works to understand the effectiveness of each applicant, conducts the interviews, and manages their support centrally through the talent development team. Principals are then able to hire from this pool of MCL™ educators.
- » **Team Reach Teacher:™**⁴³ These roles are filled by educators with a track record of effectiveness in improving student outcomes as demonstrated by three years of student growth data as well as educator evaluation data. These are also educators who are willing to have a larger class size but who do not wish to coach like the MCL™ teacher role. They receive \$15,000 more a year

and get support from a full-time reach associate paraprofessional to support a larger class size.

- » **Teacher residents:** These staff members are teacher candidates who are going to school but also working full-time in the district. They work only in classrooms with educators in the MCL™ role to ensure they are able to learn from excellent educators. They co-teach in the morning and take on the role of the teacher in the afternoon while their MCL™ supports other educators in the building. This is a paid residency where teacher residents are making approximately \$45,000 a year while still finishing their bachelor’s degree from an EPP, situating their salary in a range that is higher than that of an EA but lower than a first-year full-time teacher.
- » **Team Reach Associate™:** These staff members fill the traditional EA role. They support small-group instruction and in schools with the other advanced teacher role they stay in the classroom to offer support given the larger class sizes managed by these educators. Their salary follows the salary schedule the district has established for this role.

Importantly, while these four roles were designed to reflect the overall district pathways strategy for educators and instructional support staff, the opportunities and roles vary by campus. School leaders and school-based teams, in both the pilot year and in subsequent years, spend an entire calendar year planning together for what roles they will have in their buildings and where those roles will focus their time. The MCL™ role is the most consistently used opportunity, but school leaders have discretion within their own budgets to offer additional roles and find funding to support them. It is important that the schools hold tight to some key principles about the roles: that there is time for both teaching and coaching and that coaching is offered to small teacher teams to ensure deep support.

In terms of implementation, at the elementary school level, most MCL™ roles are filled by subject or grade-band leaders. At the high school level, the work is by subject only. At a system level, the district employs three talent development coaches who oversee support for teacher-leaders at all schools.

The district now has a robust MCL™ pipeline and approximately 100 educators in the MCL™ role in the system. While there are more schools in the district that want to have the MCL™ role, the district is at a tipping point where there are not enough educators who meet the level of effectiveness ECISD holds itself to for placement in those roles. Despite this, they are committed to maintaining the integrity of the model and are working to develop and prepare teachers to serve more students and support their peers.

Funding. At the outset, ECISD worked to identify fundings opportunities by “trading in” vacancies and rethinking how to organize students and schedules to increase staffing stability and student access to excellent educators. This work required them to think differently about capacity from the beginning of the design process and has resulted in a system that is running more efficiently and effectively with less staff. However, this work would not have been possible without state-level policy flexibility offered in Texas where districts can become “Districts of Innovation” and take action that includes waivers for certification and waivers for class size. The combination of innovative staffing design as well as the flexibility in these policy waivers ultimately allowed the district to pay for and fill positions that would support their new educator roles. Finally, because of the Teacher Incentive Allotment in Texas, where districts can opt-in for additional teacher pay based on student performance, ECISD has teachers making above the additional compensation they are receiving in their new teacher-leader roles. This stackable compensation

is adding additional value to the work in the district and increasing the desire of schools to invest in these roles to attract and retain great teachers.

The results. Following the initial pilot of 10 schools, ECISD again offered a school leader training on the model and asked who would be interested in engaging in design and implementation work for Year 2. By the third year, 23 schools were offering one or more of these roles, and this number will likely increase to 30 of the 45 schools in the district by the 2024-25 school year. In terms of impact, by the third year of implementation, ECISD opened the school year with only 36 vacancies — a far cry from the 350 openings in 2019. Additionally, given that ECISD now has teachers consistently making over \$100,000, those educators do not want to leave the district or the classroom to move into administrator roles. To understand the impact on student outcomes, ECISD developed a research partnership with Texas Tech University to do an annual analysis. Overall, they have found that teachers in schools with the MCL™ role are outperforming their peers in district schools without these roles and are getting more growth and increased rates of proficiency on state annual assessments for their students. From a pipeline perspective, while not all educators want the MCL™ role, many do — and schools want to hire more of them. For teachers who do not want that role, the district is seeing a growing desire to be on an MCL™ team for the kind of coaching they would experience. ECISD is excited by the results they are seeing and is planning to continue to invest in these roles for the long-term.

Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS), North Carolina: Retaining Excellent Educators

Edgecombe County Public Schools, North Carolina ⁴⁴								
Total schools	Total students	White students	Black students	Hispanic students	Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other	Economically disadvantaged	English learners	Students with disabilities
14	5,279	23.7%	59.2%	12.6%	0%	68.5%	4.9%	17%

Their “why.” After years of observing incremental gains in student outcomes, the newly hired superintendent in Edgecombe County Public Schools (ECPS) decided to act on research pointing to leadership quality as a catalyst for improving educator staffing trends. He believed that innovation around talent should

begin with an investment in the principal role, so he prioritized recruitment of top school leader talent from the leadership program at North Carolina State University to bring new principals into the district. However, there remained another problem to solve: The district was consistently losing one out of every

five teachers, on average, for nearly 10 years running. Not wanting to play the long game, in 2017, one of the school leaders hired during the first wave of talent investment was hired into an innovation director role and attended an event where Public Impact, a technical assistance provider, was sharing about their work to support schools with designing roles for educators at varying levels of tenure and expertise as a path forward to support retention. In an effort to support student outcomes and address their concerns about the rate of teacher attrition, they chose to partner with Public Impact to design a teacher-leader model for their district.

Model design and early implementation. District leadership in ECPS began their work with a vision for the new teacher roles they would create and by carefully considering their approach to a first-year implementation pilot. Historically, ECPS schools had used Title I dollars to fund instructional coach positions. However, school leaders and the coaches alike seemed to struggle with providing deep, effective instructional support with coaching loads of sometimes 40 teachers at a time. The district wanted to design a role that would support teachers differently while also making an impact on retention.

ECPS wanted to create an opportunity for teacher leadership that would:

- Be filled, as much as possible, by excellent educators already in the district — to support retention and build on their expertise.
- Offer excellent educators time to support both students and other teachers — and not take their most excellent educators completely out of the classroom.
- Foster deeper instructional coaching than under the current full-time instructional coach model — where no more than six teachers would be supported by one teacher-leader role, as compared to the traditional “whole school” or “whole subject area” model.

Ultimately, they used the Opportunity Culture® teacher-leader role, known as a Multi-Classroom Leader™ (MCL™). This role would be responsible for helping teachers make additional academic performance gains with students by modeling, co-

teaching, supporting lesson planning, pulling small groups, and supporting analysis of student data. The goal would be clear to both educators in the MCL™ role and school leadership teams that these positions were intended simply to support teachers to support student learning. To align with this vision, ECPS also designed an approach to evaluation for these roles that would incorporate weighted student growth outcomes for the students in the rooms of the teachers they were coaching. They envisioned a role where the increased level of responsibility and compensation should be tied to the outcomes of students in their reach.

In terms of scale, though they believed all schools in the district could benefit, they decided to start with their three lowest-performing and hardest-to-staff schools at the time. This also resulted in their starting within one of their three feeder patterns, with the goal being to implement in a second feeder pattern in Year 2 and the final feeder pattern in Year 3. The rationale for this was simple. ECPS wanted to learn from implementation to make improvements over time while also being strategic in targeting this approach to support the students who needed it most.

In terms of communication, however, the district prioritized keeping all schools and educators up to date on the work throughout the design phases as well as throughout implementation in Year 1 and Year 2. For schools who would not be implementing until Year 3, this strategy created a scenario where they knew about the work and were ready to deeply engage and incorporate key learnings when it was their turn to design models of their own. For educators, keeping them up to date on the work was about equity. In each year, there were educators from other schools who wanted to move into the schools who were already starting the work ahead of them. This was an important component to support the key design principle of supporting the most effective educators and for being transparent about the opportunities in the district. This effort gave prospective educators for the MCL™ role a chance to understand the model and its expectations so that, when the opportunity arose, they were well positioned to apply and stay in the district.

Finally, the district-level design component of the work, rather than being prescriptive about the specific roles

in a building, focused on the aspects of implementing new teacher-leader roles that needed to be consistent across schools. This work required staff from the human capital team, professional development team, and staff supporting data analysis in the district to come to the table where they focused on:

- Setting the bar for the level of teacher effectiveness that would be required to fill a new teacher-leader role.
- Establishing how a teacher-leader would be evaluated — including the decision for which evaluation rubric to use as well as how to weight student performance and growth outcomes across the classrooms of educators they would be coaching.
- Deciding the structure by which new teacher-leaders would be supported at the district level and the kinds of professional development they would receive.

Once the district established key parameters for the teacher-leader roles, they wanted to allow school leaders the space to work on key design and implementation details on their own with support from Public Impact. At the school level, the principal-led design team in each building worked together to learn more about teacher-leader roles from the technical assistance provider, identify priority areas of support in their student data, work through budgets to arrive at stipend amounts, revise master schedules, and engage their teachers in the change process. For master scheduling, they made sure teacher-leaders had coverage from other educators or support staff in the building to engage in the coaching portion of their role. By the time Year 1 schools were ready to launch new roles, they were well-versed in their own models and felt prepared to lead them, and teacher-leader areas of focus looked different across schools. The elementary school had created three teacher-leader positions to focus on improving literacy among students in third grade and younger. The middle school focused on high-quality math instruction and hired a teacher-leader to support a small team of teachers in that subject area. The high school hired teacher-leaders in math and science.

Funding. ECPS used a variety of funding opportunities and strategies to support their work. The state of

North Carolina had just passed legislation in 2016 known as the Advanced Teaching Roles Initiative. This legislation established a school leadership re-design model to design new teaching roles that would offer advancement opportunities and increased pay for teachers without fully pulling them out of the classroom while also offering class-size waivers to schools doing this work.⁴⁵ The district applied for state-level grant funds associated with this initiative to contract with a technical assistance partner who would help them design and implement a pilot aligned to this model.⁴⁶ Details on the state-level grant can be found here: [Teacher Compensation Models And Advanced Teaching Roles, Request for Proposals, September 2016](#). Finally, given the schools that ECPS had chosen to focus on in Year 1, schools used their “restart schools” state designation to access additional funding flexibility.

Importantly, while ECPS used grant funds to pay for the technical assistance support, the district would not use any funds to support the compensation associated with the new teacher-leader roles. They worked within existing funds at the school level to ensure sustainability for the roles over time. To fund these roles, school design teams looked at current vacancies as opportunities to repurpose funds to support stipends for new roles. They also leveraged class size waivers and other opportunities to fund new roles. This approach to funding within existing budgets has remained consistent, and affordable, to their schools since 2017.

The results. Edgecombe’s work to design and implement new teacher-leader roles has had an impact on both their students and educator pipeline. Specifically, ECPS has seen a tremendous increase in student growth. In 2016-17, only six of Edgecombe’s schools met or exceeded growth expectations — a number that went up to 12 out of 14 by 2018-19. In terms of the teacher pipeline, where schools were consistently opening with between two to four vacancies, they are now opening fully staffed. Additionally, since implementation, only one of the teacher-leaders has left their position, and this was to move into an administrative role. The new roles are also making an impact on teacher experiences more broadly with survey results consistently including comments like, “I do not know what I would do without our Multi-Classroom Leader.”TM

Hamilton County Schools, Tennessee: Changing The Conversation About Educator Roles

Hamilton County Schools, Tennessee ⁴⁷								
Total schools	Total students	White students	Black students	Hispanic students	Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other	Economically disadvantaged	English learners	Students with disabilities
79	44,186	48%	30%	18%	4%	28%	11%	13%

Their “why.” Hamilton County Schools (HCS) has a central philosophy around teacher support: “Everyone deserves a coach.” For several years, prior to the disruption of COVID-19 in 2020, HCS had been working hard to implement a full-time instructional coach position alongside a teacher development framework that would offer educators a clear path into leadership roles in the district. The model also extended into the assistant principal and principal roles through HCS’ Leadership Exploration and Development program and worked to align opportunities for development and support along the pathway. However, during the 2020-21 school year, the district decided it needed to create a different kind of opportunity, one where excellent educators could still make a direct impact on student learning in the classroom while also spending time supporting their peers. Their rationale for this was multi-faceted. They wanted to identify a talent strategy that would support student learning, keep their most effective educators in the district, but also help the next generation see a career narrative for themselves in the education field that involved more choice and possibility.

Model design and early implementation. Defining exactly how a new teacher-leader role would fit into their teacher development framework and the associated roles along that pathway was at the heart of HCS’ work. This was complex work that involved incubation in the human resources department but crossed quickly in talent acquisition and teaching and learning teams. After a collaborative design process, HCS arrived at a vision for the role they believed would be attractive to veteran teachers, would support their most effective educators, and would integrate into the teacher development framework overall.

HCS worked to define this new role with several key parameters. The role would be that of a teacher-

leader, reflecting the time these teachers would spend during the day teaching and fulfilling responsibilities to teacher coaching and support. This new teacher-leader role would also:

1. At its core, maintain a designation as a teacher role in the district, with teacher of record status for a class of students.
2. Offer a new career opportunity for excellent veteran educators who want to continue to work directly with students but who also want to support other educators and align their pay with instructional coach and assistant principal positions.
3. Fill a support gap for the district by offering focused support to a small team of teachers in a specific subject area, grade level, or role (as compared to the more generalist instructional coaching model across a larger team of teachers or across a whole building).

This cross-departmental team also discussed other key components of the teacher-leader role that needed design or oversight from the central office including eligibility, pay, support, and accountability. In terms of eligibility, the district requires new teacher-leaders to have been a full-time, licensed educator for at least five years and to be engaged in professional learning related to leadership development work the district already offers. They must also have a track-record of success with students.

Once hired into the position, teacher-leaders are paid a stipend of \$10,000 annually through quarterly payments.⁴⁸ Importantly, the work of teacher-leaders is managed tightly through coaching logs they must submit to receive their stipend. A portion of their evaluation also aligns to the rubric for instructional

coaches, where an additional domain that addresses their work as a teacher-coach is reflected. The remainder of their evaluation follows the local evaluation framework known as Project COACH which is a model approved by the state.

In terms of support, teacher-leader experiences are integrated into the work already happening with district full-time instructional coaches. This requires deep collaboration across staff who manage instructional coaches as well as content-specific staff on the teaching and learning team. Teacher-leaders attend subject-specific instructional coach training two days a month, with part of that time dedicated to work and support that is unique to their teacher-leader role and offers them critical time to engage with peers to connect and problem-solve.

With these key parameters in place, school leaders began the work of identifying priorities in their building that would benefit most from the support of a new teacher-leader role. In December 2020, the district selected three schools in which to pilot these new roles and offered deep design support through a technical assistance provider. To move beyond Year 1, the district took key learnings to expand the model to 12 schools in the 2021-22 school year and 31 MCLs™ in 2023-24. Now, elementary, middle, and high schools across the district are implementing site-specific versions of these new teacher-leader roles.

The final design of the roles looks different across schools and school levels. At the elementary level, most teacher-leaders are assigned to a certain subject or grade level and have additional planning time as well as access to an educational assistant to cover a portion of their day while they coach other educators. Roles at the secondary level often follow a similar model but rather than having a full teaching load will have three classes where they are the teacher of record and two blocks free for coaching. Over time, new specialty teacher-leader roles have evolved to focus on a specific teacher type — like new educators or special educators — but still under the split-time model for engaging in their own instructional responsibilities as well as coaching work. There are also some buildings in the district where multiple teacher-leaders have been hired and a teacher-leader has been hired at an entirely new level to manage their work as a team within a single school.

HCS plans to continue to responsibly manage expansion of this model over time as they gain understanding of the impact on students and educators and as schools demonstrate need and readiness for this work. As a part of that process, before a school can engage in this work, staff from the talent department meet with individual school leaders to share the vision for the work and the importance of implementation fidelity to key parameters of the role. They also use this meeting time to understand individual school-level priorities for which the school wants to allocate a teacher-leader. Ongoing conversations between the district and individual schools are key as HCS moves forward and remains committed to a teacher-leader role that offers a career choice for their effective veteran educators and makes an impact on student outcomes.

Funding. In December 2020, the three teacher-leader pilot schools were not required to use their own funding to invest in this work. HCS leveraged ESSER funds to pay for technical assistance with model development and to support stipends associated with the new roles. The district maintained the ESSER-funded model as it expanded to 12 schools in the 2021-22 school year. However, at the start of the third year, HCS wanted to build toward sustainable funding practices for the role and supported schools with moving teacher-leader stipends off of ESSER funds.

Given the HCS priority on teacher coaching, the district includes one instructional coach in the base budget for every school. From there, schools are able to use supplemental budget funds to design their teacher-leader roles. Some have chosen to hire additional instructional coaches and others to fund one or more teacher-leader roles. Depending on school size and funding, schools are investing in these new roles for multiple reasons — some to increase support for educators with only the costs associated with the teacher-leader role stipend and others to support increased retention of effective veteran educators. Despite the shift in funding source, no school has stopped investing in this model given the impact they feel they are seeing on retention of their most effective and veteran educators.

The results. Over the last four years, HCS has scaled the model from three schools to 14 and is continuing to work toward model expansion in future years. While

they continue to refine their approach to measuring direct impact on student outcomes, their results for teacher retention are encouraging. Thus far, they have had only one Multi-Classroom Leader™ leave the district since beginning the work, and they have had no trouble recruiting educators into these roles.

In terms of working toward direct measurement of student outcomes, the district has been very intentional around creating data collection systems that link teacher-leaders back to the teachers they are coaching — allowing them to also link to the students of those educators. So that they can understand, from a qualitative perspective, the work happening in the teacher-leader teams to support educator development and student learning, the district also requires teacher-leaders to log their coaching work. HCS is currently working to establish a research partner to understand the impact of their work on student outcomes.

Guiding Principles For Tennessee Districts And Schools

- 1. Assess your readiness for strategic staffing work before you start this journey.** Designing and implementing new roles and staffing models is hard and may not be a fit for every district or school. Take the time to understand all components involved in this work and think about your enabling conditions. Doing the work to assess the readiness of your district and schools will go a long way to supporting implementation with a strong foundation in place and on a timeline that makes sense for staff. Additionally, consider a strategic roll-out of the work and accept that even if your district takes this work on, not every school may be ready for or in need of this model. Consider questions like:
 - a. How could we prioritize this work within school budgets?
 - b. Do we already have a clear vision for leadership coaching at the district level?
 - c. Do we have a team in place with the capacity to work with technical assistance providers or to take on district and school-level design support?

- d. Do we have the physical space to accommodate potential increases in class sizes? (Please see [Tennessee's Local Education Waiver Request](#) for additional information.)
- e. Do we have school leaders who are ready to take on the change management this work requires? Where could we most successfully launch a pilot to learn from this model over time?

- 2. This work is cross-departmental — get everyone to the table.** On the front end, doing this work well requires thinking through the answers to a wide range of questions that cuts across finance, curriculum and instruction, talent, professional development, accountability, and other roles. However, even as your strategic staffing model evolves, do not silo this work. This work requires a clear vision from top to bottom to make it work in the long run — from content and coaching supports for new teacher-leaders, to commitment from principals and principal managers to implement roles with fidelity, and engagement from staff across departments to ensure sustainability of the model and that all educators understand the work and opportunities they have. All of these departments need to be involved to make this work as you answer questions like:

- a. What roles do we need to create?
- b. What are the criteria for applying to the role?
- c. What will be the stipend level or new salary level for the teacher-leader roles?
- d. How will new teacher-leaders be trained and supported? What about principals who have new teacher-leader roles in their buildings?
- e. How will we measure success on the front end to assess the extent to which this model is working to meet our goals?

- 3. Commit to implementation fidelity around who is placed in teacher-leader roles and to how their time is used.** Educators placed in leadership roles are extending their reach to support more teachers, and, when class-size

waivers are used as a funding strategy, to more students as well. These educators can also become a support to school leaders, creating a need for deep trust in these new instructional roles. Set a clear bar for who is eligible to apply (and why) and for how their time should be used.

4. Plan for dedicated capacity to support new teacher-leaders and work to integrate their support into a consistent coaching framework across the district. In many cases, new teacher-leader roles will be occupied with effective educators who are coaching for the first time. Offering effective coaching to educators requires a unique skill set, and creating clear and consistent training and ongoing support opportunities for these roles is central to the success of the model. Additionally, putting these practices in place supports implementation fidelity, particularly when new teacher-leaders are hired into their roles and need the same training sequence. Along these lines, content-specific training or leadership development work for educators in this role should not feel separate or different in terms of district- and school-level expectations for other staff who support educators and are engaged in coaching or leadership development work. Teachers already receive support and feedback from a variety of sources, and districts should work to ensure that the approach to feedback and support used by new teacher-leaders is aligned to the work of other coaches and leaders in the district or school.

5. Let your strategic staffing work evolve over time, monitor the results, and share your story. The role of the district to understand the “why” for their work and to set a clear vision for the roles and other key parameters — like evaluation, support, and pay — is critical. After this, districts should allow school-level teams to identify the opportunities they have for teacher-leader roles in their buildings and to design master schedules that support positive outcomes for both their educators and students. The district’s role around monitoring implementation fidelity, offering support, and understanding the impact of these models is what is needed most once new roles are filled.

As new learnings are gathered through the work, you can begin to identify new opportunities to evolve the model over time to achieve new goals for your educator pipeline and for students. There are also opportunities to partner with research organizations (two of the four districts in our featured case studies partnered with local universities) to understand the impact of their models and begin to share the results and implementation practices to support more opportunities for these promising practices to scale for more educators and students.

Tennessee’s Opportunity

While Tennessee is doing incredibly important work to reduce barriers to enter the teaching profession, recruiting new educators into schools that do not reflect the research principles outlined here will likely not allow these programs to reach their full potential. Importantly, Tennessee districts and schools have the policy infrastructure they need to take action on all fronts to implement innovative approaches to school staffing. Measures of educator effectiveness from the TEAM model, differentiated compensation policies, opportunities to center instruction on common and high-quality instructional materials, and robust educator and student datasets all work together to set the foundation for a new approach that can make an impact for teachers at all experience levels. Taking advantage of these policies, the research on school staffing, and models offered by other districts in our case studies have the potential to improve student outcomes, slow down educator attrition, and increase educator satisfaction in the short term. However, they also offer Tennessee an opportunity to innovate more deeply, to learn, and to shift the conversation about what a career as an educator has to offer to the next generation of educators.

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