

Executive Director's Report to the Board

Date of the Report: March 24, 2025

Report Prepared By: Dr. Brett Wedlund



FY26 Budget Update

The state has determined a **2.74% increase** to the general education formula for FY26. This aligns with prior legislative guidance, which indicated an expected range of **2-3%**.

We have also **completed a compensation analysis** for our licensed instructional staff. This year, we expanded our comparison set by **adding Seven Hills** and incorporating data from the **Minnesota Association of Charter Schools' (MACS) compensation analysis** for schools with enrollments over 1,000. This broader dataset provides valuable context as we continue refining our compensation strategy. As a reminder, **last year we transitioned from percentage-based raises to a flat dollar amount increase**. This approach has proven effective in **closing the gap in average starting salaries** between Nova and comparable schools.

- In **FY24**, Nova's starting teacher salary was **\$5,542 below** the average of comparable schools.
- In **FY25**, that gap **narrowed to \$1,328 below** the average.
- At the **highest end of the salary scale**, Nova moved from **\$2,513 above** the comparable average in FY24 to **\$566 above** in FY25.

Our overall strategy of **flat dollar increases is achieving its intended goal**—raising salaries at the lower end of the scale while maintaining competitive positioning overall.

We **recommend continuing this strategy for FY26** and will bring a **draft budget** to the **Finance Committee and Board in April**.

Licensed Instructional Staff

	St. Croix Prep	Eagle Ridge	Seven Hills Prep	Average of Comps	MACS Schools 1000+ Enrollment	Nova Classical Academy	Difference from Average 24-25
Starting	\$44,428	\$36,458	\$40,800	\$40,562	\$38,571	\$39,234	-\$1,328
Mean	\$58,718	\$54,651	\$55,849	\$56,406	\$55,766	\$55,545	-\$861
Median	\$56,200	\$56,601	\$53,346	\$55,382	N/A	\$55,649	\$267
Highest	\$88,668	\$89,453	\$81,600	\$86,574	\$87,500	\$87,140	\$566

General Education Instructional Staff

	St. Croix Prep	Eagle Ridge	Seven Hills Prep	Average of Comps	Nova Classical Academy	Difference from Average 24-25
Starting	\$44,428	\$36,458	\$40,800	\$40,562	\$39,234	-\$1,328
Mean	\$58,512	\$54,661	\$58,106	\$57,093	\$54,851	-\$2,242
Median	\$57,325	\$53,084	\$55,230	\$55,230	\$54,205	-\$1,008
Highest	\$82,915	\$89,453	\$81,600	\$81,600	\$80,563	-\$4,093

Licensed Special Education Instructional Staff

	St. Croix Prep	Eagle Ridge	Seven Hills Prep	Average of Comps	MACS Schools 1000+ Enrollment	Nova Classical Academy	Difference from Average 24-25
Starting	\$44,428	\$48,994	\$40,800	\$44,741	\$40,800	\$56,670	\$11,929
Mean	\$59,305	\$58,387	\$49,644	\$55,779	\$60,794	\$63,142	\$7,363
Median	\$55,649	\$55,739	\$42,000	\$51,129	N/A	\$57,550	\$6,421
Highest	\$88,668	\$67,219	\$77,010	\$77,632	\$87,500	\$87,140	\$9,508

Legislative Update

A bill was introduced in the state legislature that would have placed a **moratorium on new charter schools, grade level expansions, and building expansions**. If passed, this would have had a significant impact on the charter school sector. However, it is important to note that over **5,000 bills** are introduced every two years, and most do not gain traction. The next step, had this bill advanced, would have been a **committee hearing**. At this time, it **seems unlikely that the moratorium bill will receive a hearing**, as most committees have **only one or two more weeks** to hear new bills for the first time.

On a related note, last week I **testified before the Senate Education Policy Committee** on a bill introduced by the **Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS)**. This bill was seen as an effort to **address the root causes of concerns** raised in last year's *Star Tribune* series on charter schools. Among other provisions, it focused on **strengthening authorizer oversight**, including new training requirements in areas identified by MDE. Many viewed the MACS bill as an **alternative to a moratorium**, making it a critical piece of legislation for our sector.

For those interested, a [link to the committee meeting](#) is available for review. The accountability and transparency bill begins 40 minutes into the meeting.

Lower School Principal Hired

I am pleased to share that **Carolyn Farrell has officially accepted our offer to be our next Lower School Principal!** Pending Board ratification of her contract at the March meeting, Ms. Farrell will officially begin her role at Nova Classical in July 2025.

Ms. Farrell is an accomplished educational leader with extensive experience in classical education and student support. **Since 2022, she has served as the Interim Executive Director and K-5 Principal at Seven Hills Preparatory Academy**, a K-8 classical charter school with campuses in Richfield and Burnsville, where she first became K-8 Principal in 2016.

Over her 14 years at Seven Hills, she has also served as an Associate Principal, Dean of Students, Special Education Coordinator, and Special Education Director. Prior to that, she worked as a Special Education Teacher in a suburban district, further strengthening her expertise in student services. **Under her leadership, Seven Hills Preparatory Academy was recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School in 2022, and she played a key role in the expansion of their Burnsville campus.**

Her leadership experience and deep commitment to character education, instructional coaching, and classical learning align closely with Nova's mission and values. Throughout the selection process, **we prioritized the qualities our community and staff identified as most important for this role**. Ms. Farrell brings:

- A talent for building joyful connections with students and collaborative relationships with staff and parents

- Oversight of character and virtue education
- Commitment to classical education
- Extensive experience in instructional coaching
- Expertise in student support services, including special education
- Elementary teaching experience

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to the selection team, including **Adam Eberhardt (Reading Teacher), Caroline Herman (Latin Teacher), Maria Marchand (4th Grade Teacher), and Dr. Johnson.** Their work was vital to this process, including reviewing stakeholder feedback to develop our candidate profile, evaluating **25 applicants to select finalists**, interviewing **five finalists**, and determining the best fit for the position.

Ms. Farrell shared, "I am so excited to be joining the Nova team and to begin my journey learning, growing, and embracing new opportunities in this amazing community. I look forward to meeting the staff, students, and families!"

We look forward to welcoming her in July and will share more updates as we prepare for this exciting transition.

Spring Athletics

Spring sports are officially underway, and Nova students are actively participating across multiple teams. This season, we have **73 students in Track & Field, 36 in Middle School Track, and five students competing in Boys Volleyball.**

Additionally, we have **one student in Boys Lacrosse and five in Girls Lacrosse.** In our hosted **Baseball cooperative**, we have **27 total athletes** across all participating schools.

It's great to see such strong participation across our spring sports, and we look forward to an exciting season ahead!