



# Nova Classical Academy

Retain the Best - Staffing for Academic Excellence

Since March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed new demands and challenges on Nova's ability to continue providing a high-quality education to our students. The solutions implemented to overcome these obstacles fell largely on the shoulders of our talented staff members. For more than a calendar year, they have worked tirelessly to provide the best possible educational experience to Nova's scholars. This work has not been done without a cost. Nova's leadership has observed and received feedback from our staff about the toll this year has taken on them as educators and, more importantly, as individuals.

In its approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nova has recognized the importance of maintaining a high-quality staff throughout these turbulent times. The desire to support the staff culminated in the Board of Directors setting a goal for Dr. Wedlund which states, "Nova Classical Academy has taken steps to account for the continuity of teaching staff." While we are proud of the steps that have been taken to support the members of Nova's staff while they implemented new learning models, we feel it is equally important to further support them as we return to a more familiar instructional environment. To do this, Nova is proposing its Retain the Best plan. Designed to live alongside Nova's "Hire the Best" process for staff selection, the Retain the Best plan is intended to meet a wide range of needs that staff will have during this transition. The components of the Retain the Best plan include:

- Recommit
- Realign with Nova's Vision
- Rebalance
- Reconnect

Nova is honored to employ a dedicated and resilient staff of licensed educators, paraprofessionals, and program support staff who work together to ensure that our scholars receive the very best public education available in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Retain the Best plan fulfills Nova's commitment to providing our valued employees with opportunities for professional growth and development, strengthening their connection to our Classical Education model, encouraging each employee to maintain a healthy work-life balance, fostering employee pride in our institution, and recognizing staff enthusiasm and commitment to Nova.

## Recommit



Throughout the past 15 months, Nova’s staff has faced challenges never foreseen prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether it was being assigned to work in a different program at our school or simultaneously teaching students in person and students at home, each and every Nova staff member has repeatedly shown a deep commitment to our students by going above and beyond what has been expected of them in normal times. Their efforts occurred in ways that we were able to observe in the building or on Zoom, as well as in ways not easily quantifiable. A spouse of a Nova teacher gave a glimpse into this commitment, writing, “I don’t see my husband much during the regular school year—and emails during dinner and parent calls at 9:00pm or later was never unusual. The pandemic, however, has re-written the rules for everyone, so the emails arrive through the night and the saving grace of no commute is time for two or three more Zoom sessions with students or parents at 6:30am after retiring at 1am.”

Nova seeks to honor those staff members who have faced this challenge head on and who choose to recommit to Nova for the 2021-2022 school year. In appreciation of their continued commitment to Nova, all salaried employees will receive a one-time bonus of seven and a half percent of their annual salary during the 2021-2022 fiscal year, if they are still employed by Nova on October 25, 2021. Similarly, all benefits-eligible hourly employees who choose to recommit with Nova will receive a one-time bonus equivalent to 60 times their 2021-2022 hourly wage if they are still employed by Nova on October 25, 2021.

## Realign with Nova’s Vision



As we have navigated through the instructional environment caused by COVID-19, there have been times that logistics have driven decisions about the best way to instruct students. As we prepare to return to a more traditional learning model, it is extremely important for our teachers to realign with Nova’s Classical Education model. Nova will be expanding our Classical Education Certification (CEC) program. The CEC program has historically only been utilized with teachers throughout the first year they work at Nova.

The CEC program will be expanded from one course to four courses. Developed and delivered by experienced Nova teacher leaders, the courses will be:

### **CEC101 - Introduction to Classical Education** (New to Nova Teachers Only)

**PURPOSE:** To provide new teachers with basic knowledge of philosophy and practices essential to instructing in a classical model.

### **CEC201 - Great Ideas in the Ancient World** (Beauty)

**PURPOSE:** Delve into the Beauty of ideas and essential questions that have intrigued humanity since the ancient world through participation in the great conversation.

### **CEC301 - Philosophy of Classical Education and Classroom Applications (Goodness)**

PURPOSE: To build off the foundations of CEC101, this course will inculcate Classical pedagogy in existing teachers' continual practice. This will allow for teachers to know the deeper reasons of the trivium structure and refine their everyday classroom instruction.

### **CEC401 - Diversity in the Classical World; Using Logic and Rhetoric to Become Informed Citizens (Truth)**

PURPOSE: Seek the Truths that connect all peoples and create an Informed Citizenship for our students and our community to further develop a deep understanding of Classical terminology and pedagogies to support an education with effects beyond our community.

Under this plan, every Nova staff who currently serve in a role requiring a teaching or school counseling license are eligible to join a voluntary cohort and participate in one CEC course for each of the next three years. Stipends will be available to teachers upon the completion of each course, as well as for the teacher leaders who develop and deliver each course.

## **Rebalance**



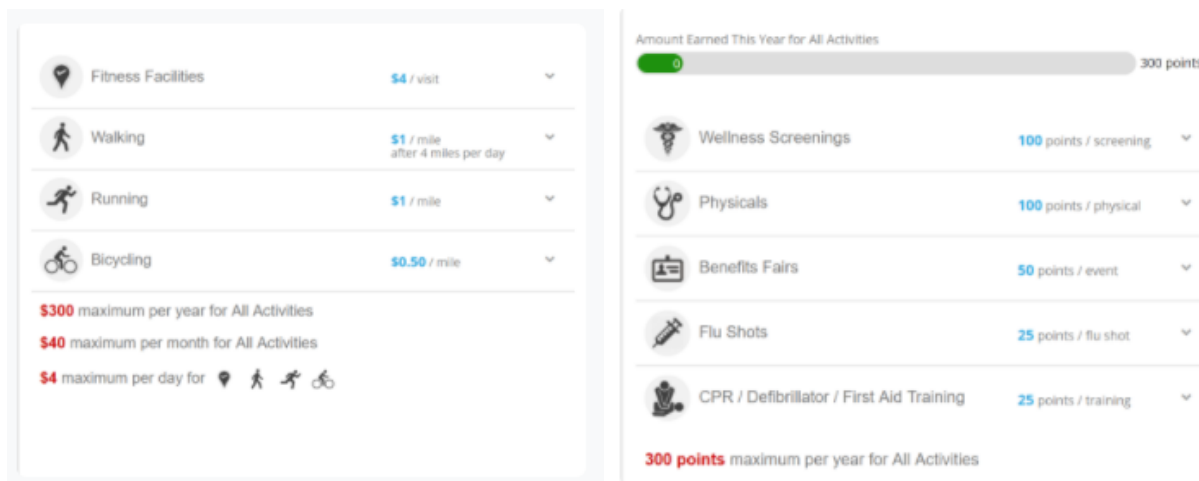
Over the course of the past 15 months, we have heard time and again the negative impact this year has had on the work-life balance of our staff. With the introduction of distance learning, many boundaries our staff had previously established between their work and home lives were dissolved. As aforementioned, the hours have become endless with no public delineation of when our staff members were working and when they were not. We recognize, and are grateful, for the commitment and efforts of our staff; however, we also recognize that this work was done through a community health crisis and is not sustainable as we prepare to transition back to a more traditional model. It is important that we support Nova's staff in rebalancing the role of work in their lives so that the Nova community may continue to benefit from their commitment and passion long into the future.

In support of the wellness of each benefits-eligible employee, Nova will initiate two programs to ensure that staff are encouraged to seek out opportunities to rebalance their career with their life outside of work. This balance will help Nova staff to be and do their best while at work. Recognizing that wellness comes in many forms — nutrition, sleep, mindfulness, gym-based activities, hydration, work-life balance — Nova endeavors to champion the employee by delivering supports that are both individualized and comprehensive in their approach.

IncentFit is a benefit that will reward Nova employees for prioritizing their wellness in a flexible, individualized way. Through this program, Nova will implement an Activity Rewards program. This program will provide financial incentives to encourage the formation and maintenance of habits for a healthy life, every day. Nova will also implement a Wellness Challenges program that will provide for individual



and team-based competitions. Examples of Incentifit programs designed to meet the needs of other organizations can be seen below:



Through an organizational membership with the Minnesota Employee Resource and Service Council (MERSC), Nova will provide staff with access to discounts for a variety of services, activities, travel, and events. Nova believes that by providing access to MERSC's discount program, it will emphasize to staff that it is important to take advantage of activities and services which help improve their health, connection to friends and families, work-life balance, and overall well-being.



Finally, our administrative team is making a commitment to our staff to help them rebalance the amount of work time available for their core job duties. We will be evaluating how we hold meetings, the procedures in place at the school, and the expectation on the staff, so that we can remove any demands that were placed on our staff's time and attention before, or during, the pandemic which are no longer needed. In addition, staff will be encouraged to actively participate in an ongoing dialogue about how we can help them regain focused time.

## Reconnect



Social interaction has changed drastically during the pandemic. The components of the Retain the Best plan have been designed to help reconnect Nova's staff members with one another as well as with the school. For example, the CEC program will be run utilizing a cohort model and the Wellness Challenges will allow our staff to reconnect as they compete with, and against, one another. These activities will foster and build deeper and consistent connections between colleagues throughout the three year implementation of the program.

Nova will begin regular Spirit Wear days for staff as an opportunity to demonstrate unity with one another, pride in our institution, and to encourage school spirit throughout our community. Not to be seen as an ordinary casual Friday, Nova staff will have the opportunity to wear Nova-branded apparel

that displays professionalism, while promoting unity. To ensure that staff have access to high performance, branded attire, Nova will host an online store. This will provide staff an opportunity to purchase traditional Nova spirit wear as well as a curated catalog of branded apparel that exemplifies the professional standards that Nova’s staff exhibit on a daily basis.

## Budget



The budget for this proposal is \$636,575. The Recommitment Pay will be a one-time expenditure occurring during the fall of 2021 and the remaining expenses of the Retain the Best Plan will be incurred over the next three years (July 2021-June 2024). Approval of this Retain the Best plan will also establish a \$20,000 contingency fund so that any new positions added to Nova in the next three years are able to participate in the applicable professional development and wellness programs established by the Retain the Best plan. The contingency fund will also be utilized to cover any unexpected expenses related to the Retain the Best plan (e.g. increased vendor fees).

Item	Allocation
Recommitment Pay (1 Time)	\$375,000.00
CEC Program (3 Year)	\$147,000.00
MERSC (3 Year)	\$1,575.00
Incentfit (3 Years @ \$250/yr Benefit Eligible Staff)	\$82,500.00
Incentfit Fees (3 Years @ \$3500/yr)	\$10,500.00
Contingency Funds	\$20,000.00
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>\$636,575</b>

Nova staff members have demonstrated both the character virtues of justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude, and the intellectual virtues of wisdom, science, and good sense in how they have supported our scholars through the implementation of new learning models over the past 15 months. Showing continued support to our staff through the implementation of the Retain the Best plan is imperative to the success not only of our staff, but of the Nova community.