

Mentor Grant Program

Part I: Applicant Information and Executive Summary

Lead Local Education Provider (LEP) Information			
LEP Name:	Douglas County School District - Academy Charter School	Four-Digit LEP Code:	0011
Type of Education Provider:	District Charter School(s)	Region:	Metro
Requested Funding			
Is applicant requesting indirect costs based on their Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate?			Yes
Year 1 [07/01/23 – 09/30/24]	\$ \$50,208		
Previous Grant Information			
The following information will be verified by CDE and considered in the funding decision.			
Has the applicant previously received Mentor Grant Program funds?			No
If previously funded, were funds expended in a timely manner?			
If previously funded, were any unspent funds reverted back to CDE?			
If unspent funds were reverted, enter the year(s) and amount(s) of those reversions below:			
Executive Summary			

Academy Charter School, located in Castle Rock, Colorado, is a Kindergarten through 8th-grade charter school that has been providing exceptional educational opportunities since its founding in 1993. With a focus on the Core Knowledge Curriculum, core virtues, and rigorous academics, we have received recognition as a John Irwin Award-winning school. Currently serving 600 students, we are dedicated to delivering high-quality education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the demographics of our teaching staff. Many experienced teachers have retired or left the profession since 2020. Of our new hires since 2020, 65% are individuals who are new to the field of education, with limited or no formal training and a lack of in-person clinical experience. As a result, our Mentor teachers and Induction program have assumed the responsibility of filling in the gaps in their training. Challenges faced by individuals new to the teaching field include effectively managing a classroom, actionable interpretation of standardized testing data, and collaborative communication with parents. It is crucial for our newest staff to achieve success swiftly in order to serve our students and maintain a desire to have longevity in the education field.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our ability to sustain our natural Mentor program replenishing cycle. With the departure of many highly skilled teachers, we now face an experience gap within our school. We want to train new Mentors to support them adequately, and it is our goal to avoid assigning one mentor to two mentees, which limits the ability to provide the individualized feedback that some new educators require. We anticipate that this "learning gap" will persist unless we address the shortage of Mentors. The need for effective mentorship has never been greater. The purpose of this grant is to establish a Mentor-in-Training program, creating a pipeline of future Mentors and expanding the number of trained mentors by 100%. With this funding, we will address instructional skill deficiencies among teachers hired since 2020 through research-based tailored programming, thereby enhancing the skills of our probationary staff and future mentors. Furthermore, we aim to counter the significant decline in applications for open teaching positions by attracting high-potential candidates through a financial award upon successful completion of an Alternative Licensure pathway.

Your financial investment will provide the necessary funding to implement this project fully. We are fully committed to supporting our educators at every stage of their careers and cultivating a robust mentor base to drive our school forward. Ultimately, the investment of these funds will enable our students to thrive.

Thank you for considering our request. We appreciate your support in helping us achieve our goals.

Part III: Application Narrative

- 1) Current Programming:** Provide a description of the current mentoring program, including strengths and weaknesses. Include a description of mentor selection criteria.

Our current Mentors have 8+ years of instructional excellence history at our school. They have served in a variety of leadership roles and have demonstrated interest in being a mentor. Mentors participate in a Mentoring New Teachers by Boren and Johnson book study, are building resources for implementing Love and Logic in the Classroom (L &L), our school-wide behavior framework, and regularly support others to implement Teach Like a Champion (TLAC) instructional techniques.

Mentors establish rapport with their Mentees at the New Staff Orientation; they collaborate 1:1 to help set up school accounts, their classrooms and review critical elements to start the school year strong. Throughout the year Mentors/mentees meet weekly to discuss a variety of pre-determined topics such as upcoming events, staff expectations, school culture, and instructional techniques studied in TLAC and L &L. Conversations also focus on planning best practices, managing behavior, and the online gradebook. They conduct quarterly observation/feedback cycles and present mini-training to the greater Induction cohort at Induction meetings in collaboration with the Induction Coordinator. Mentors serve as an educational resource, critical friends, and examples of resiliency to their mentees.

Program strengths: Our Mentor/mentees develop strong bonds because our program has clear expectations and guidance – meeting frequency, structured discussion topics, a published training schedule, observation cycles, regular reflections, and an end-of-year celebration. Our Mentors strengthen their own practice as they support others.

Program weaknesses: The COVID-19 pandemic impacted our ability to support the natural Mentor program replenishing cycle. Several of our high-caliber teachers retired or left the profession. The teacher applicant pool shrank dramatically starting in 2020 and we have hired more Alternative Licensure candidates and those with initial licenses than ever before. We are now experiencing a fairly dramatic experience gap in our building. 60% of our teachers have been hired in the last three years yet we have not been able to train new Mentors. Our Mentors are matched with two mentees out of necessity and this is not ideal. Mentors report they are not able to give the individualized feedback they feel some of our brand new educators need. We anticipate this 'learning gap' will continue if we are not able to address this dearth of Mentors.

- 2) Needs Assessment:** Describe the needs of beginning teachers in the organization and how they are not being adequately met by current mentor programming. Specifically describe any “learning gaps” that have been observed among beginning teachers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the Fall of 2020, the majority of our teaching positions have been filled by initial license and Alternative Licensure candidates, those with the greatest need for a Mentor. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on the number of trained teachers in our established mentor pool. We have had to assign each Mentor two mentees putting a strain on our mentors. Each has been called upon each year to serve out of necessity so they are tired. In addition, mentoring two new staff members at the same time makes it difficult to provide adequate training to each one. Due to the lack of formal teacher training and the disruption caused by the pandemic, these new staff members face competency gaps in various areas, including classroom management, interpreting standardized testing data, and effectively communicating with parents. The need for effective mentorship is greater than ever.

With limited or no formal teacher training, or a truncated in-person clinical experience, we observe our beginning teachers face “learning gaps” in various aspects of their professional practice. General classroom management, a fundamental skill necessary for maintaining an optimal learning environment, has been adversely affected. The absence of comprehensive training has left teachers ill-equipped to handle behavioral challenges, effectively engage students, and create a conducive atmosphere for learning, thus increasing the burden on the Mentor teacher and Induction program to fill in the missing pieces that a competent teacher needs to be successful alongside a desire to stay in the field.

In addition to the deficiencies in classroom management, the disrupted training experiences have also affected new teachers' ability to interpret and utilize standardized testing data. Understanding and analyzing testing results is crucial for effective instruction and targeted interventions. However, due to the lack of comprehensive training and mentorship, new teachers may struggle to internalize the implications of testing data, leading to suboptimal instructional decision-making.

Furthermore, the disrupted training experiences have also resulted in diminished confidence among new teachers when it comes to engaging in direct communication with parents. Building a positive parent-teacher relationship is vital for fostering a supportive learning environment. However, without the opportunity to practice and receive guidance in face-to-face interactions with parents, new teachers may lack the necessary skills and confidence to effectively address parental concerns, discuss student progress, and collaborate with families in their children's education.

We find ourselves in unfamiliar territory because of the profound effects of the pandemic's negative impact on teacher training and mentorship programs, resulting in numerous challenges for our school. It is essential that we address the challenges we've identified and develop targeted interventions and support systems to address the specific needs of new teachers during these unprecedented times.

3) a. Proposed Programming – Vision: Describe the vision for the mentor program that will result from this grant and how it will align to the purposes of this grant program—deepening mentoring programs at the local level and broadening the skills of mentor teachers.

Our vision is to enhance and strengthen our existing Mentor program by developing a Mentor-in-Training program. This approach encompasses developing a future Mentor pipeline, address instructional skill deficits for teachers hired since 2020 through tailored programming, and attract high-potential candidates to fill our teacher openings by offering a financial award when successfully completing an Alternative Licensure pathway.

By building a Mentor-in-Training program, we aim to deepen our existing program by training qualified mentors within our institution. This expansion will provide us with additional resources to support new hires moving forward, while targeted training opportunities will broaden the skills of mentors themselves. Through activities such as a Mentoring New Teachers book study, shadowing experienced mentors to observe best practices, providing release time for classroom observations, and supporting the Induction Coordinator with mentee training on TLAC and L & L best practices we will empower mentors and mentees alike to excel in their roles.

To further enhance instructional capacity, we envision purchasing Teach Like A Champion Online module “seats” for our current Mentors, Mentors-in-Training, and staff hired since Fall 2020. This investment will address teaching skill deficits resulting from the impact of COVID-19 and the less robust 1:1 mentor coaching experienced by probationary teachers. Our Mentors, supported by our Mentors-in-Training, will utilize TLAC Plug and Play Professional Development modules to train our whole staff on best practices, thereby internalizing the information and deepening their skills and serve as a more well-rounded resources. By incorporating tailored instructional training, we will respond to the specific needs of our probationary teachers and nurture the skill sets of our current mentors and the Mentor-in-Training pipeline.

Recognizing the significant decline in applications for open positions since the onset of COVID-19, our vision includes offering two Alternate Licensure Tuition Awards. This initiative aims to encourage individuals who are interested in teaching but hesitant due to financial commitments. By providing financial support, we hope to attract passionate and talented individuals to pursue a career in education, effectively filling our staffing needs and enriching our teaching community.

Through this three-pronged approach, our vision is to empower excellence in teaching. By developing a robust Mentor pipeline, addressing instructional skill deficits, and offering financial incentives, we strive to create an environment that fosters growth, supports educators at every stage of their careers, and ultimately enable our students to thrive.

- 3) b. Proposed Programming - Plan:** Include a description of the intended audiences for grant activities, the plan to select and train mentors, how mentors will be provided training and support, and structures that will be in place for mentor and mentee interactions.

There are three intended audiences for this grant:

Our current Mentor pool, is a group of four seasoned teachers hired prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. They were selected because they have 8+ history of instructional excellence at our school, have served in a variety of leadership roles, and have expressed a desire to serve as a mentor to new staff. They have received additional training on TLAC and L&L techniques, classroom observation “look fors” and how to give feedback. This grant will facilitate our existing Mentors to work with only one new teacher at a time as we onboard our Mentor-in-Training group and have access to customized TLAC Online skill training modules for new teachers based on need. There will be breakout sessions at Back to School Training on how to use the TLAC Online skill modules and the shadowing process for Mentors-in-Training.

Our Mentor-in-Training Cohort, an identified group of four teachers with fewer than 5 years of instructional excellence at our school and has expressed a desire to be a Mentor-in-Training. This team has all participated on a curriculum development team and was nominated by their former Mentor. This grant will allow us to develop our Mentor pipeline by working directly with the Induction Coordinator on a Mentoring Beginning Teachers book study, self-reflect on instructional areas they wish to grow, and spend time using the TLAC Online training modules to improve their classroom practice. They will observe Mentors' classrooms then reflect on the process and shadow Mentors meeting with their Mentees throughout the year. Mentors-in-Training will assist the Induction Coordinator to train those currently in the Induction program on foundational skills and present at least two whole school PD sessions using TLAC Plug and Play PD to strengthen their instructional leadership role skills.

New teacher candidates completing an Alternate Licensure pathway, adults wanting to join our teaching staff. Those chosen are either current/former parents or current staff members in a non-teaching role with a track record of supporting our school's success. Two selected candidates will enroll in an Alternative Licensure program. This grant will reward such an intense undertaking, foster strong bonds with our institution and create an incentive to stay in the education field. Mentors establish rapport with their Alternative Licensure mentee at the New Staff Orientation; they collaborate 1:1 to help set up school accounts, their classrooms and review critical elements to start the school year strong. Throughout the year Mentors/mentees meet weekly to discuss a variety of pre-determined topics such as upcoming events, staff expectations, school culture, and instructional techniques studied in TLAC and L &L. Conversations also focus on planning best practices, managing behavior, and the online gradebook. They conduct quarterly observation/feedback cycles and present mini trainings to the greater Induction cohort at Induction meetings in collaboration with the Induction Coordinator. Mentors serve as an educational resource, critical friend,s and examples of resiliency to their mentees.

4) Progress Monitoring and Evaluation: Describe how you will evaluate the effectiveness of your program and monitor progress towards the measurable goals for this program, including what processes will be in place for improvement if goals are not being met.

To ensure the effectiveness and success of our comprehensive three-pronged approach to enhance teaching excellence, we have developed a robust monitoring and evaluation plan. This plan will allow us to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and make data-driven decisions to continually enhance our program. Through ongoing monitoring and evaluation, we will ensure that our initiatives align with our vision and effectively meet the needs of our teachers and students.

Data Collection: We will implement a systematic data collection process to gather relevant information on various aspects of the program. This will include collecting data on mentor-mentee interactions, participation in training activities, feedback from participants, and student outcomes. We will utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, such as surveys, observations, interviews, and student performance assessments.

Success Indicators: We will establish a set of indicators such as improvements in instructional practice, student achievement data, and new teacher retention rates that align with our goals and objectives. These indicators will serve as measures of success and allow us to assess the impact of this mentorship program.

Feedback: We value the input and perspectives of our mentors and mentees involved in our program. We will actively seek feedback from mentors, mentees, Mentors-in-Training, the Induction Coordinator, and other staff members to gather their insights on the program's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

Professional Development: We recognize the importance of ongoing learning and development for our mentors and mentees. As part of our monitoring and evaluation plan, we will offer regular professional development opportunities and support as part of our Induction program and whole school initiatives.

Through the systematic implementation of this monitoring and evaluation plan, we will have a comprehensive understanding of the progress and impact of our initiatives. The data and feedback collected will guide our decision-making process, allowing us to continuously improve our program, enhance teaching excellence, and ultimately provide the best possible educational experience for our students.

5) Budget Narrative: Describe the proposed uses of grant funds and provide an explanation of how the proposed uses of funds align with the purposes of this grant program.

We are requesting:

\$10,000 (\$2,500 x 4) – Current Mentor stipends. These funds will support our current Mentors as they 1. Support their Mentee, an educator in their first three years of teaching and 2. as they collaborate with our Mentor-in-Training group which will expand our mentoring program.

\$8,000 (\$1,000 x 8) – Current Mentee stipend. These funds will support our beginning teachers as they train with their Mentors on PD opportunities through Induction that are specifically designed for beginning teachers in their first years in the classroom.

\$6,000 (\$1,500 x 4) – Mentor-in-Training stipends. These funds will allow us to expand our existing mentoring program by training our future Mentor pool and provide opportunities for mentors to meet, learn and trouble-shoot strategies continuing the mentor's professional development. Our vision is this cohort will be qualified to join in our Mentor pool for the 2024 – 2025 school year.

\$3,200 (\$200 x 16) – Substitute teacher costs to allow classroom leave time for our Mentee and Mentors- in-Training so they may observe Mentor classroom for best practices, broaden skills, discuss observations and collaborate at Mentor/Mentee weekly meetings.

\$1,176 (\$42x28) – 1 year subscription to Teach Like a Champion Online instruction modules for each teacher hired since Fall 2020 still on staff (17), active Mentors (4), Mentors-in-Training (4), our Building Resource Teacher (1), our Induction Coordinator (1) and Dean of Students (1). These expenses are essential to creating and managing this mentorship program; it will support our current probationary teachers as they train on professional development specifically designed for beginning teachers and it will train mentors on the skills of instructional strategies. These customized online modules will support critical staff as they address observed learning gaps and broaden their instructional practice.

\$1,025 - TLAC Plug and Play "Ratio Pathways" Bundle - A ready-to-use PD material bundle so our Mentors-in-Training can practice delivering high-quality whole-staff PD sessions aligned with Teach Like Champion techniques. This will develop confidence in training others and set them up as school experts and a resource.

\$10,000 (\$5,000 x 2) An Alternative Licensure Program Successful Completion Stipend– these funds will support our newest teachers taking on their student teaching AND serving as a first-year educator in a professional setting at the same time.

\$8,761 - Employee Benefits - benefit costs (PERA, Medicare, Unemployment) for all stipends above

\$2,046 - Indirect line items - indirect rate (4.25%) for district as fiscal

Grand Total: \$50,208