



The Blake School

Minneapolis, MN
PK-12 Coed Day School
1,360 students

Contributors

Dan Kelley, Chief Financial and Operations Officer
Anne Graybeal, Ed.D, Associate Head of School

Case Study Focus

Performance Recognition System and Faculty Excellence Fund

Background

The Blake School is an independent PK-12, private, non-sectarian, coeducational, college preparatory day school with campuses in Minneapolis, Hopkins and Wayzata, Minnesota. Founded in 1900, The Blake School has the advantage of facilities and campuses designed for specific developmental ages. Blake's mission is to engage students with a dynamic, academically challenging education in a diverse and supportive community committed to pluralism and a common set of values. Students pursue an integrated program of academic, artistic and athletic activities, preparing for college, lifelong learning and purposeful lives as community and global citizens.

The Blake School has developed a performance-based bonus pay program for faculty. School leaders use the [Danielson Framework](#), one of the most widely adopted comprehensive approaches to teacher professional learning throughout the world. Research has shown this approach improves student learning. The framework's four domains include: (1) Planning and Preparation, (2) Classroom Environment, (3) Instruction and (4) Professional Responsibilities. Adhering to these domains and the 22 components within ensures accurate identification of teaching indicators, impactful conversations among educators, and alignment to the core values of the system.

Teachers undergo an in-depth review every four years with multiple classroom observations from directors, department chairs and peers. During odd years, teachers receive feedback and classroom visits that are less extensive than during the full evaluation cycle. New teachers receive additional feedback and coaching during their early years.

The compensation program includes a cash bonus and professional development dollars. The bonus is awarded to teachers based on their evaluation results, and they have to re-qualify for it every four years. The school is fortunate to have an endowment that generates a draw each year to fund these benefits.

The bonus program has evolved over time, with the school shifting its focus to prioritize professional development funds over cash bonuses. Previously, the program had three levels of bonuses based on performance rankings, but the school found that it was more beneficial to put more funds into professional development. This change was well-received by teachers, as they value having agency in directing their professional growth.

History and Process

Blake's Effective Teaching Initiative began in 2006. It is led by the Effective Teaching Committee (ETC), a standing committee comprised of division directors, department chairs, and elected faculty representatives from each division. In 2016, this group conducted a survey of Blake faculty's experience. The survey revealed that in the 10 years since the initiative began, efforts to enhance the system of teaching evaluation found some measure of success.

Helpful actions included: writing about the teaching process; conducting supportive and productive classroom observations; documenting fall goals and spring reflections to help the chair and/or divisional administrators come to know faculty members' practice more fully.

The school found room for improvement in clarifying the criteria for performance recognition. Lack of clarity sometimes caused unhelpful stress during the evaluation process and devalued performance recognition-related compensation. These conditions threatened the culture of "mutual support and collaboration" that had been a hoped-for outcome of the Enhanced Teaching Initiative.

As a result, Blake leadership charged the ETC with revising the model of tiered performance recognition. The committee reviewed current research on motivation and professional development, contacted peer schools with similar performance recognition programs about their experiences, conducted faculty focus groups, offered a mid-year update at each division, and held feedback sessions in the spring to gather questions and comments on the draft proposal. The focus groups asked about priorities for professional learning and the conditions necessary for effective feedback, and the results of these groups significantly influenced the ETC's thinking about the design of the new system.

The goals of the revised system are to:

- Recognize and reward excellent teaching.
- Maximize professional development opportunities for faculty by minimizing the bureaucracy required to access PD funds and by making access to funds more predictable.
- Demonstrate trust in the professionalism of Blake faculty to identify the professional learning that is right for them.
- Preserve the practice of financial recognition of excellent teaching, which has become part of the experience of many faculty.

The business office was an essential partner in the work, creating financial models based on the committee's evolving recommendations and researching tax implications of a redesign.

The ETC believes that the revised system of performance recognition honors the original purpose of the faculty excellence fund and feedback from faculty: to recognize and reward excellence in teaching, and to ensure a robust evaluation process. But like any good system, this one will continue to evolve with the changing needs of the institution and its faculty.

Enhanced Performance Review (EPR) Process

For middle and upper school faculty as well as lower school faculty specialists, the EPR team includes the faculty member on the EPR, the department chair, and either the division director or assistant director. For Lower School classroom teachers, the EPR team includes the division director and assistant director.

Beginning of Year

- Review recommendations from previous years.
- Complete draft of fall reflection and goal setting form
- Meet with EPR team to discuss and revise goals (as necessary) and to agree on supplemental materials.
- Schedule formal observations and post-observation meetings.
 - Generally, EPR should include at least:
 - Two long (or full-class) observations and 10 short observations per year, or at least five long (or full-class) observations
 - Note: formal observations should include pre- and post-observation forms and a post observation meeting.
 - When possible, observations should include both department chairs (MS/US) and divisional administrators.

During the Year

- Divisional administrators observe class. Generally, observers should share observations, ask questions and offer feedback within 24 hours, whether in person or via email.
- Divisional administrators conduct formal observations and post observation meetings.
- Collect supplemental documents as agreed on during Fall meeting.
- Reflect on fall goals and the Danielson Framework.
- Hold a mid-year reflection meeting for ongoing feedback and support.

End of Year

- Complete and submit spring reflection form.
- Submit supplemental materials prior to final meeting.
- Meet with EPR team to discuss Spring Reflection Form and review materials.

The participating administrators, sometimes in consultation with associate head of school and head of school, determine whether faculty successfully complete EPR.

Successful completion of EPR with performance recognition:

- EPR 1
 - Faculty will move from Lane 1 to Lane 2 in the compensation scale. Note: Movement between lanes is not to the same step, but to the step that most closely matches with the Lane 1 salary.
 - Faculty are eligible for annual professional development funds.
- EPR 2
 - Faculty receive additional annual professional funds and a performance bonus in annual cash payments until their next EPR cycle.

Successful completion of EPR without performance recognition:

Participating faculty whose practice is described as “basic” in any criterion of the Danielson Framework do not qualify for performance recognition, but they do pass EPR.

Unsuccessful completion of EPR:

It is very rare that a faculty member does not pass EPR. Should that come to pass, faculty may be placed on assessment to focus on improvements based on the results of EPR; faculty may also be given an additional year to fulfill the requirements of EPR.

Eligibility to forgo EPR during one’s final year on a regular faculty contract.

Any faculty member who intends to retire may request to forgo an EPR review during their final year on a regular faculty contract. If granted, the faculty member will be awarded the same tier bonus they were awarded at the end of the previous year.

Examples of Eligible Professional Development Experiences and Expenses

The following are eligible experiences/expenses:

- Purchasing or renting media (e.g., movies, books, journals, digital subscriptions) related to areas of professional relevance and interest.
- Domestic or international workshop and conference registration related to areas of professional relevance and interest, including travel, lodging and per diem expenses.
- Domestic or international travel related to areas of professional relevance and interest (e.g., seeing a play, visiting a museum, visiting a lab, touring

historical sites, shadowing or collaborating with someone at another school), including lodging and per diem expenses.

- Graduate courses or certificate programs related to areas of professional relevance and interest.
- Software related to areas of professional relevance and interest.
- Costs for current faculty colleagues accompanying you for these experiences.
- Laptops, iPads, etc. for personal use.

The following are *not* eligible experiences/expenses:

- All costs for friends or family members accompanying you.
- Local drinks or meals for individual faculty or faculty groups.
- Purely recreational media, materials or travel.

Examples of Blake faculty experiences funded through the faculty excellence fund:

- Writing retreat on the North Shore of Lake Superior.
- Purchase of a neighborhood Little Free Library.
- Recording and editing equipment for creating audiobooks.
- Travel to Paris, Lake Tahoe, New York City, Hawaii, Palo Alto.
- Musical instruments.
- Attending the Learning and the Brain conference.
- Yoga training.
- Retiring faculty have used their funds to purchase personal laptops & accessories.

The performance recognition system and faculty excellence fund at Blake help attract and retain high-quality teachers and support ongoing growth and development. Teachers at all career levels are given the freedom to direct their professional growth and development. Additionally, the school's competitive compensation and benefits package, including a significant tuition remission benefit for faculty and staff, contribute to its appeal in the job market. The school is considering future initiatives to attract and retain excellent teachers, such as stipends for exemplary teachers to mentor others and assistance with housing for new hires. These programs aim to provide additional support and incentives to keep talented educators at the school.