



Graland Country Day School

Denver, CO
Grades PK-8 Coed Day School
700+ students

Contributor

Josh Cobb, Head of School

Case Study Focus

Cultivating a Dynamic, Inclusive Workplace and Transitioning to a Banded System

Background

Graland Country Day School's mission is to achieve intellectual excellence, build strong character, enrich learning through the arts and athletics, and prepare students to be engaged citizens and thoughtful leaders. Founded in 1927, Graland has throughout its history delivered an intellectually robust, character-based educational experience derived from current research about how children learn. The school's leaders are continually looking for ways to improve the program and keep it relevant for the next generation of students.

Portions of this case study were developed from "Reimagining and Implementing a New Faculty Compensation Model" by Josh Cobb, published by NAIS' Independent School Magazine in the Fall 2021 issue. Other portions came from an interview conducted for the MAX project.

Graland's faculty and staff enjoy a collaborative, supportive environment where each member is encouraged to be a lifelong learner. Graland defines an ideal teacher as such:

- *They seek out the most effective ways to engage each child. They collaborate across departments to gain fresh perspective and insight.*
- *They directly influence program growth.*
- *Their professional excellence is key to equipping students for success, and teachers are given the time and space to grow their skills.*

Key elements that support their organizational culture include:

- **Competitive salaries** coupled with a robust benefits package allow Graland to attract and retain the highest quality faculty and staff.
- The school's thoughtful and effective **onboarding program** includes:
 - New Educator Orientation through first year.
 - "Buddy" Program that pairs each new employee with a "veteran" employee of Graland, who is committed to supporting a good transition.
 - First-year observations by supervisor and curriculum/instruction team.
 - Second-year instructional coaching by curriculum/instruction team.
- **Events** for new faculty and staff members throughout the year ensure connections are made and questions are answered.
- **Ongoing professional development and training** for teachers support the school's vision to keep Graland at the forefront of education.
- Graland looks to hire **teachers who are inspired to be on the cutting edge of education** and who bring new ideas and methods into the classroom that transform learning.
- A **summer grant program** that compensates teachers to collaborate and innovate together all in an effort to create new, dynamic and effective programming for students.
- A **Professional Growth Partner (PGP)** program during which every faculty and staff member has a trained coach (another Graland colleague), who helps facilitate their professional journey through 4-6 non-evaluative sessions using active listening, attentive mirroring and effective questioning.

Graland supports faculty in their pursuit of opportunities to grow professionally, by training in their subject matter and beyond. Graland's approach to a culture of growth ensures teachers are stimulated, students are engaged and the program is relevant. The professional development program receives support from an endowment specifically earmarked for this purpose, securing the school's long-term commitment to excellence in advanced teaching methods, technology, diversity and inclusivity, how children learn and other topics.

Transitioning Systems

Josh Cobb, head of school shared how the school transitioned from a historical compensation system to a new one based on faculty excellence and growth. Graland developed benchmarks for the new system, incorporating qualitative criteria to define faculty excellence. They drew on resources like [Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching](#).

The process of transitioning faculty from the old to the new system was challenging, as it required evaluating 83 faculty members, considering both their self-assessment and the leadership team's assessment. The goal was to be fair and

gracious to teachers, acknowledging their contributions to the school and honoring their individual growth journeys.

As a starting point Cobb organized a faculty compensation task force of 12 members. The group consisted of teachers and administrators with diverse backgrounds, ranging from those who were new to Graland and had experienced different compensation systems recently as well as people who had been at Graland for nearly 20 years and had only experienced the existing salary structure. The task force included teachers with children, those without children, and single educators, as well as teachers who worked with all age groups within the school community.

Developing a Banded Model

Charged with creating a system that aligned with the school's vision of faculty excellence, the task force began by reviewing the current system, which was a step and lane pay scale. They realized early on that the current model's inflexibility made it difficult to inspire the attributes of excellent teaching that were essential to Graland's mission of fostering intellectual excellence and strong character. They looked for alternatives that would help propel faculty to further growth and excellence, and learned more about the banded models from the Westtown School (PA), Colorado Academy (CO), and The Haverford School (PA).

The task force appreciated how these models outlined specific characteristics of excellence that captured faculty members' daily contributions in and beyond the classroom. Though the models still relied on experience and education, they went beyond these criteria to traits of classroom mastery and instructional leadership. The banded models also created a clear trajectory of professional growth from "Starting," "Beginning" or "General," to more advanced stages, "Master Teacher" and "Faculty Leader." The banded systems provided more flexibility as each stage had a salary range, not just one set level.

But they wondered whether these models would incentivize an overly competitive individual to try to climb from one band to another without engaging in the collaborative work that is necessary for a positive faculty culture. With all this in mind the group distilled three priorities for the new model:

1. Create a more flexible system that reflects the school's educational values.
2. Inspire teachers to do their best in the classroom.
3. Recognize faculty innovation, collaboration and growth.

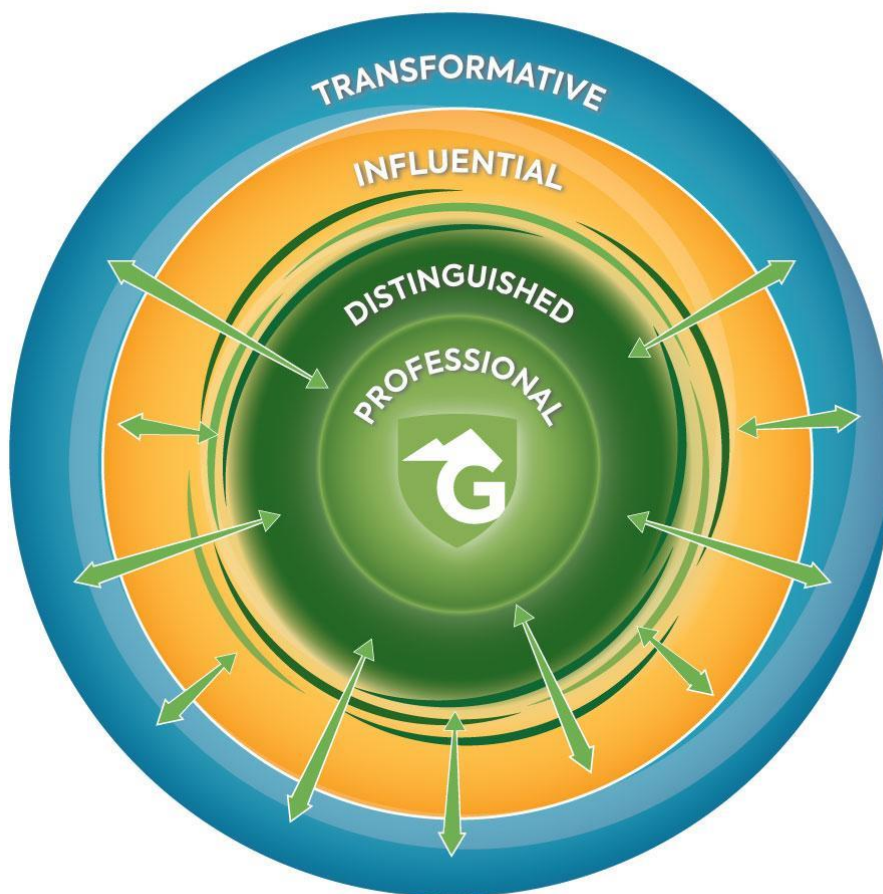
The task force had to figure out how to move away from a system of rigid linear ascent. A preschool teacher in the group suggested a spherical design that rippled out from the "core" value of mastery in the classroom. This design accomplishes the three objectives outlined above, and the visual reminds all of the collective effort of the faculty community (see visual next page).

To ensure that the new model was consistent in concept and implementation, the task force crafted a rubric defining each sphere with criteria that reflected school values. They also aligned the spheres with their faculty growth model, which entails observations, coaching and evaluations. In addition to the onboarding process

mentioned above, division heads support every new faculty member with goal-setting meetings as well as midyear and end-of-year reviews. These goals now address criteria in the spheres, even if the faculty member is not considering a sphere transition. After their first two years at Graland, faculty members are asked to consider a sphere transition from Professional to Distinguished. That full-year assessment usually comes by a teacher's fifth year at Graland. After that fifth year, we rely primarily on the PGP program to facilitate intrinsically motivated professional growth.

Graland Teaching Spheres

In 2019–2020, Graland launched their new faculty compensation model that comprises four spheres. This is the model and language they use:



Professional: All faculty members Graland hires are professionals who meet our high standards and create a classroom environment of respect and rapport, establish a culture of growth, provide a purposeful atmosphere for learning and exhibit professionalism. These faculty apply a range of strategies to enhance student learning.

Distinguished: Showing the skills of the Professional, these faculty members take their mastery in the classroom to the next level with additional years of experience, more seasoned expertise, and the skillful engagement of a range of learners.

Influential: Expanding beyond their classrooms, Influential educators contribute to colleagues' growth through effective collaboration. They continually seek to promote student learning through innovation, putting new ideas into action.

Transformative: The final sphere is reserved for those exceptional teachers who have truly influenced and sustained positive change at Graland. They implement new ideas and advance effective educational practices through schoolwide leadership.

Teachers consistently receive support from their supervisor and from the curriculum and instruction team. Those entering a yearlong sphere transition receive consistent feedback from their division head, a colleague of their choice, and a colleague of their division head's choice, culminating in a portfolio and presentation that demonstrates their growth to the instructional leaders of the school.

Implementing the New System

The majority of faculty were excited about the change and provided the necessary input to finalize the rubric and the overall structure. Graland's new system also influenced recruitment and retention by providing a clear professional trajectory for teachers and emphasizing growth over compensation. The school shared success stories with the external community, helping them understand the system's benefits. However, transitioning from one system to another required careful considerations, especially regarding morale and financial support for faculty:

- **Limiting Sphere Transition Applications:** At the beginning of the transition, Graland School limited the number of people eligible to apply for the Sphere Transition. Leaders decided that those in their first or second year at Graland couldn't apply yet, as they wanted them to spend more time settling into their roles before pursuing the transition.
- **Initial Challenges:** Some individuals who were eager to apply for the Sphere Transition had to wait, causing frustration and potential demotivation. This highlights the importance of clear communication and managing expectations during the initial phase of any significant change in the organization.
- **Impact of COVID-19:** The COVID-19 pandemic affected the transition process, leading to a decrease in the number of participants due to the additional burden and uncertainty that teachers faced during the pandemic.
- **Sphere Transition Timing:** Graland School doesn't have a strict timeframe for Sphere Transitions, except for encouraging all teachers to achieve the "Distinguished" status in their first five years.

- **Compensation and Sustaining the System:** Graland School initiated the new system with a tuition increase and raised \$10 million in an endowment to support the program. The endowment allows for continued support and helps maintain faculty compensation. While some schools may not have access to such significant funding, Cobb suggests that schools consider whether their compensation system matches their values for faculty excellence and explore creative solutions to ensure that alignment. Sharing the effort to create mission alignment with compensation can impactfully engage the community in supporting faculty excellence.
- **Sphere Compensation System for Staff:** School leaders are still in the process of creating a growth trajectory for staff. This step will help staff feel included in the sphere conversation, empowered to grow and valued for what they contribute. Cobb looks forward to including all educators, faculty and staff in this type of system.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Cobb was clear that while no compensation system is perfect, it's highly beneficial for many schools to move away from outdated models like the step system. By experimenting, innovating and learning from one another, schools can develop more effective and motivating compensation structures that align with their values and goals.
- **Change Management and Implementation:** During the pandemic or any challenging period, implementing a new compensation system might appear daunting. It is vital to provide clear roadmaps and support for faculty during the transition process. Once the initial challenges are overcome, the system tends to become more accepted and effective over time.