

## **CITY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL BEST PRACTICE BRIEF**

This document is part of a series of best practice briefs that provide a close-up view of how innovative educational strategies are implemented at a highly successful urban charter high school.

## **Competency-Based Staff Promotion**

Catherine Awsumb Nelson, Ph.D. June, 2011



CITY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL BEST PRACTICE BRIEF

## Competency-Based Staff Promotion

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**What is  
competency-based  
staff promotion?**

*At City High, promotion and  
compensation for all staff are  
based on the demonstration of  
specific competencies and the  
fulfillment of an enlarged  
professional role.*

This document is part of a series  
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school.

Other briefs in the series,  
examining one-to-one computing  
and the looping of teacher-  
student teams from 9th to 12th  
grade are available at the  
school's website:  
**[www.cityhigh.org](http://www.cityhigh.org).**

# Competency-Based Staff Promotion

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## A note on data sources and methodology

This series of best practice briefs is produced by Catherine Awsumb Nelson, Ph.D., an independent evaluation consultant who has worked with City High on research, data, and evaluation issues since the school's founding. In addition to City High, Dr. Nelson's current and recent clients include the RAND Corporation, the Ball Foundation (Chicago), Pittsburgh Public School District, The California Endowment, The Heinz Endowments, Boundless Readers (Chicago), and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Her work focuses on helping educational institutions incorporate evaluation information into their decision making and organizational routines to foster data-based decisions about programs, resources, and performance.

At City High, Dr. Nelson worked collaboratively with the school leadership team to design an annual school report card that presents trend data on a range of school goals including academic achievement, post-high school transitions, and positive school culture. Some of the data from that report card (available on the school website [www.cityhigh.org](http://www.cityhigh.org)) come from annual surveys of students, parents, and staff that Dr. Nelson designs and administers. In addition to producing the annual report card, Dr. Nelson has worked with school leadership to investigate specific issues of interest including the transition from 9th to 10th grade and the factors that support successful student buy-in.

The topics for these best practice briefs were selected in consultation with the entire school staff to represent the consensus view on the school practices that are most innovative, effective and of potential interest to other educators. Some of the data in the briefs is drawn from the ongoing school evaluation, including survey data and a series of intensive student case studies in which twelve students in the school's first cohort were interviewed in depth three times in each of their four years at City High. Additional topic-specific interviews were conducted for each of the briefs, typically including two or more of the school's administrators, four or more faculty with specific experience/perspective on the topic at hand, and a sample of twelve or more students. All interviewees were promised anonymity.

All of the quotations (indicated by italics) in these documents are the actual words of City High students and staff. In the case of the vignettes presenting student and staff perspectives on the topic that lead each brief "What does it look like at City High?" the words of multiple interviewees have been melded together into a composite. All other quotations in the briefs are from individuals.

## What does it look like at City High?

*I came into City High with a few years experience at a more traditional school, so I was hired in at the "journeyman" level, rather than as an "apprentice." I quickly realized that things work a lot differently around here, but my teaching partner was a great mentor. I learned so much working in the same classroom every day, talking about what went well and what didn't. I watched a couple of other people go through the promotion process, and towards the end of my second year I started to feel like I was ready to try it. One thing I've noticed is the administrators here want you to come to that decision yourself, to be proactive about it.*

*The first step was to sit down with Richard Wertheimer (CEO and school co-founder) and go through the rubric. We worked through every competency on the rubric, talking about where I thought I was in terms of my performance and where he thought I was. It was a pretty brutally honest conversation. You have to be ready for that. We checked some right off—he told me it was just a matter of gathering the evidence and writing it up. We identified two areas where I really needed to focus and neither of them was a big surprise to me—classroom management and differentiated instruction. I got some very direct feedback and we really looked at the rubric and talked very concretely about what was proficient in those areas and what was not.*

*From there I worked with Mario Zinga (school co-founder) on how to put the portfolio together. He was helpful in terms of making suggestions about what kind of evidence would demonstrate something. I also looked at the portfolios of a few people who had already made it through the process. That gave me ideas of the kinds of artifacts that would work for a specific competency, whether that be student work, a lesson plan, or materials from a special student activity I helped run. For a few of the competencies I requested a formal observation and feedback from Wertheimer. He is a busy guy and it wasn't always easy to get on his schedule, but those observations were central. I also continued to get a lot of feedback from my teaching partner. Having those standards on the rubric really allowed me to experiment more deliberately with my practice and then reflect and adjust. Needing to actually collect the evidence and write it up made me see some of the things I was doing differently. Every component of the rubric is just so detailed.*

*I'm an English teacher so writing the narrative wasn't that bad for me—I found the reflection useful. But I know some people have struggled with the amount of writing involved and the school is looking at alternate ways to present evidence, like recorded interviews. The size of it was daunting at times, but it forces you to really look at the kind of teacher you are. You have something to measure yourself against. I would say it also helped me understand the City High philosophy in depth. You have to think about not just your practice but how that fits within the specific design of this school. It actually made me think about my job more broadly—how the responsibility of a good teacher doesn't end at the classroom door.*



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## Competency-Based Staff Promotion

*If I were designing a school I would definitely use this kind of system. It promotes the idea of constant learning and improvement and it probably attracts people who are willing to go the extra mile. When the leadership team voted to promote me it was so validating. You know that really means something as a professional, that it is not just an automatic step but you have earned it.*

### How does City High do it?

City High's staff promotion rubric provides a well-articulated career path of what it means to develop as a professional educator from Apprentice to Journeyman to Expert to Master to Administrator. Moving between levels—and receiving the substantial salary

bumps—is based solely on demonstrated proficiency, not on time served, courses taken, or budget limitations.

The rubric spells out competency on 15 core teaching components, 2 additional expert teaching components, and 4 education leadership components. The rubric also includes the standards against which school administrators are evaluated by City High's board and which are being used for leadership succession planning. Each competency is broken down into a number of specific sub-skills, and performance on each of those is spelled out at four levels: Advanced, Proficient, Nearly Proficient, and Needs Significant Improvement. Specifically, the competencies and proficiency expectations for each level are:<sup>1</sup>

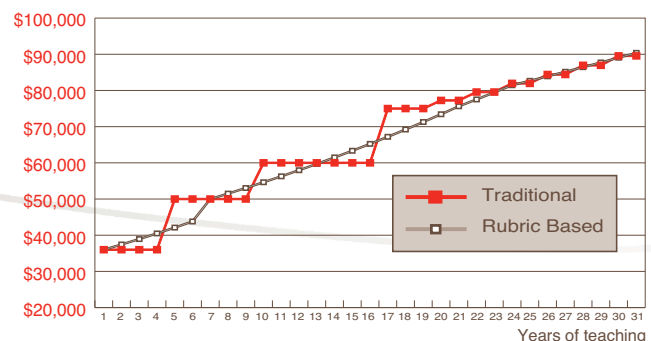
COMPONENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH			
<b>Apprentice Teachers:</b> Relatively new to teaching, working on proficiency #1-15.	<b>Teaching Components</b> 1. Lesson Planning 2. Unit Planning 3. Curriculum Implementation 4. Assessing Student Learning 5. Instructional Methodology 6. Classroom Management 7. Content Knowledge 8. Student Achievement 9. Collaboration 10. Special Education 11. Professional Development 12. Mentoring Students 13. Participation in School Culture 14. Technology 15. Communication with Parents	<b>Expert Teaching Components</b> 16. Child Development 17. Differentiated Instruction	<b>Expert Teachers:</b> Advanced on at least 6 teaching components (#1-12, 16, 17) and proficient on all other teaching components (#1-17).
		<b>Education Leadership Components</b> 18. Promotes School Philosophy and Objectives 19. Education Decision Making 20. Teaching as Craft 21. Coaching	<b>Master Teachers:</b> Advanced on at least 6 teaching (#1-12, 16, 17) components and proficient on all other teaching and leadership components (#1-21).
		<b>Administrative Leadership Components</b> 22. Student Success 23. Compliance 24. Programming 25. Financial Management 26. Personnel Management 27. Leadership 28. School Management 29. Strategic Planning	Components are used by the Board of Trustees to evaluate the CEO (#22-29).

To understand how the system works, it helps to compare it to more common approaches to compensation and career advancement in education. By far the most common practice is to base compensation on a ladder of salary steps which increases compensation incrementally for every year a teacher stays in the system and additional professional education they accrue. City High believes—and research has demonstrated—that experience and credits are poor proxies for the quality of a teacher's performance in the classroom. As co-founder Zinga explains, *"In the traditional system, the pay scale is on auto-pilot and evaluation and compensation are on parallel tracks that never meet. One is about money and one is about quality. At City High, getting more money depends on demonstrating quality."*

The chart to the right shows a hypothetical example of how the trajectory of a teacher's pay at City High might compare to compensation in the traditional system over the course of the career.

As indicated by the chart, City High makes sure that starting salaries are competitive with surrounding districts. But from there the paths diverge. While the traditional system promises a slow, steady climb,

COMPENSATION OVER CAREER: TRADITIONAL SALARY SCALE VS. RUBRIC-BASED PROMOTION



<sup>1</sup>The full rubric document is also available on the website: <http://www.cityhigh.org/2010rubric>

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the pay of City High teachers may stay flat for a number of years, before making a large bump with promotion. At City High, staff give up predictable annual increases for large, performance-related increases and the possibility of larger salaries than in traditional systems if they reach the higher steps. This compensation scheme was an integral part of the original school design, a way to create incentives among all staff for professionalism, lifelong learning, and ownership of school goals.

Some public school districts are now challenging the traditional system with experiments in “performance pay,” generally pegged to increases in test scores. Co-founder Richard Wertheimer emphasizes, however, that the City High approach is very different: *“We believe that just looking at test scores warps the incentives and tends to narrow the curriculum. It abdicates the responsibility of the profession to define what good teaching looks like—we believe you should be promoted for being proficient at your craft, period.”* Focusing on the craft of teaching creates positive incentives to articulate, hone, and discuss what quality teaching means.

**Although the promotion process is highly individualized—Wertheimer compares it to differentiated instruction for students—the basic steps are as follows:**

### 1 Teacher initiation:

Although administration will often “nudge” a teacher to enter the process they believe it is vital for teachers to own the decision to attempt promotion. As one teacher remarks, *“It shifts the onus onto the educator to be ambitious, to be in charge of their own growth. This is the only school I’ve ever seen where teachers are begging administrators to please come observe them.”*

### 2. Initial rubric review:

Candidate and school leadership talk through the rubric together, discussing strengths and weaknesses and areas of particular focus for the process.

### 3. Administrator sign off:

School leadership indicates they believe the candidate is ready: *“We don’t let someone start the process if they are not going to make it. If there are serious issues, we work on those before we sign off. There are no cases where a teacher has formally applied for promotion and not gotten it, although the length of time it takes can vary a lot.”*

### 4. Development planning:

Candidate works with an administrator to review what evidence they already have that could meet the rubric standards and strategize about how to demonstrate others.

### 5. Evidence gathering:

Candidate assembles evidence that meets the proficiency standard for each competency. Evidence can include written reflections, data analysis, student work, lesson plans, videos, and records of observations. Candidates must also include at least two “case studies” of how their work with an individual student has demonstrated targeted competencies and advanced

that student’s learning. Master teachers and other colleagues often provide crucial support here, through informal observations and review of artifacts and reflections.

### 6. Observations and Feedback:

On areas of particular focus, candidates usually request formal observations from administrators. This is often an iterative process including detailed feedback and support for lesson planning. The result is a detailed write-up for inclusion in the portfolio. In addition to targeted observations requested by the candidate, every member of the leadership team (Master Teachers and administrators) observes the candidate teaching at least once to gather data and assess proficiency.

### 7. Narrative writing:

The personal narrative—intended to tie all the components together in a story of how the individual has evolved professionally—is always the last piece to be put in place.

### 8. Vote by school Leadership Team:

Candidates submit their portfolio and the application for promotion is reviewed and voted on by the entire leadership team (four administrators and five master teachers).

## What are the non-negotiables?

*For each of the best practices to be explored in this series of briefs, there are some fundamental assumptions that cannot be compromised if the practice is going to be effective. After eight years of experience, the research and analysis conducted for this brief suggests that the non-negotiables for making competency-based compensation and promotion work are:*

❖ **School-wide performance culture:** The school must have a “culture of performance” in which a large majority of staff believe that there is such a thing as better and worse teaching, that it can be broken down and measured objectively and that it deserves to be rewarded. Co-founder Zinga cautions not to underestimate the extent to which this is a “radical change” for anyone who has worked in a more traditional school.

❖ **Clear standards:** The rubric or other evaluation tool must lay out (according to Wertheimer) *“very specifically what we mean by good teaching—it has to get out of the heads of the school leaders and onto the paper where everyone can see it.”*

❖ **Transparency:** The system must be administered with consistency and objectivity and based in data that are visible and justifiable to all.

❖ **Learning culture:** Every adult in the building must be treated as—and behave like—a lifelong learner. This means that professionals have the responsibility to continue growing and that school leaders have the responsibility to help develop them.

❖ **Habit of reflection:** Metacognition and reflective practice are

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the norm. Adults in the building are in the habit of talking about why they do what they do, how well it is working, and how it could be improved.

- ❖ **Public practice:** Teaching practice is public so that staff can learn from each other. Open doors are the norm. Different teachers develop a reputation for being good at specific things, and are open to letting their peers watch them do it. Since many of City High's classes are team taught, teachers here are comfortable teaching with other adults in the room.
- ❖ **Contributing beyond the classroom:** Staff believe that good teachers have a role beyond the classroom—as team members, advisors, and mentors—and are willing to be held accountable for that broader contribution to student and school success.

### Why does City High do it? Why might other schools want to?

Competency-based compensation was built into City High's original design to create expectations and incentives for continuous improvement and broad ownership of the school's mission. In addition to that overarching goal, evaluation research conducted throughout the school's existence suggests that a competency-based approach to compensation and promotion has yielded the following benefits for City High:

#### Encouraging teachers to make a long-term commitment to the school (and weeding out those who don't want to).

Teachers who choose to go through the promotion process know it will require a good deal of time and intellectual work. Thus the decision to enter the promotion process indicates an investment of the teacher in the mission of the school, and a reciprocal investment by the school in the development of the teacher. The reflection required by the process brings teachers to a deeper understanding of and commitment to the school's specific mission and model. As one teacher recalled, *"I initially boycotted the whole promotion process. It just didn't seem worth it. But when I finally decided to go for it, it was a real wake up call for me. I learned so much about the school and saw that there was so much I do here that I couldn't do anywhere else."* Conversely, teachers who feel that the promotion process is *"too much work"* are unlikely to remain at the school in the long term.

#### Keeping the focus on growth and development.

One of the challenges of teaching as a profession is that the responsibilities of a classroom teacher are substantially similar in Year 1 and they are in Year 30. By articulating what they collectively believe are advanced teaching competencies and extended levels of development in even "the basics" of teaching, City High has created a pathway and expectation for continuous learning. For every domain, the definition of advanced competency emphasizes teachers taking a creative, proactive, and/or leadership role, going beyond the basics of good practice. Teachers comment that the promotion process *"forces teachers to keep growing and getting better—you can't just maintain"* or that it *"keeps you working, keeps you honest—you*

*can't just coast."* A teacher with several years of experience in a traditional public school reflected that *"I saw too many tired teachers there. It was almost like they were bored. No one is ever bored here."*

#### Creating an ongoing dialogue between administrators and teachers about what "quality teaching" looks like.

A teacher explains: *"If you are asking for that feedback, you are ready to hear where you are. It changes the dynamic of the relationship from defensiveness to how do I use this person as a resource to help me get better."* City High has found that structures like the promotion process that foster explicit conversations about what good teaching looks like IN THIS SCHOOL raise the overall level of professional practice.

#### Encouraging teachers to be more reflective about their practice:

Zinga notes *"The competencies don't specify one model of good teaching. Teachers going through the promotion process have to advocate for how their style and their methods meet those rubric goals."* The process pushes teachers to examine the why and how of their daily pedagogical choices against both broad standards for effective practice and the specific goals that this school has for students. A teacher recalled that putting together the promotion portfolio encouraged *"a cycle of experimenting with my practice, reflecting on it, and adjusting what I was doing."* Ideally, this cycle becomes an ingrained habit. Also, City High has found that individuals who habitually reflect on their own practice are a key ingredient in professional learning communities. As one recently promoted teacher put it, *"(the promotion process) forces staff to learn from each other. When you are stuck about how to get to the next level with a practice, you get into other classrooms and see how other teachers handle it. It keeps the doors open and the conversations happening."*

#### Fostering teacher professionalism:

All the benefits and rationales for performance-based teacher promotion unpacked above really boil down to an ethic of professionalism. Wertheimer sums it up as the difference between *"a job—which is what you do to feed your family, where you get paid for fulfilling a requirement, and a profession, where you have a responsibility to make everything better, to be creative, be a facilitator, be a problem-solver."*

### How does City High make it work?

Each of these best practice briefs provides practical advice about implementing the strategy. A few of the things City High has found that smoothed the way with competency-based promotion include:

**Build the infrastructure:** The cornerstone of the whole process is the rubric, which reflects a detailed, operational definition of what City High means by quality teaching. The content of the rubric is highly specific to this school's vision and model. City High's experience suggests that schools should not attempt to short cut

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the process by adopting or adapting a generic tool. Investing the time to develop and refine a school-specific set of competencies invests the whole process with greater legitimacy and developmental effectiveness.

**But make it a living document:** The enormous initial time invested in developing the rubric does not make it immutable. Wertheimer estimates that the City High promotion rubric is now in its 8th iteration. To maintain legitimacy, the core documents of the process must reflect the evolution of the school's vision of instructional quality. For example, City High discovered that their initial draft paid insufficient attention to instructional modifications needed to make their highly heterogeneous full-inclusion environment work. This led the school to add a specific domain for "Differentiated Instruction" as one of the competencies an expert teacher should display. On a smaller scale, City High continues to make improvements to the rubric based on lessons learned through its use.

**Resist platitudes:** Over time City High leadership has worked to squeeze out of the rubric any language too vague to be clearly observable in practice. Because this is a high stakes process, credibility hangs on objectivity. To that end, leaders have pushed themselves to draft language that will allow those who observe in classrooms and review portfolios to, as Wertheimer emphasizes, *"focus on data, on what we see, not our opinions."*

**Ensure that administrators are teachers of teachers:** The value of a competency-based promotion system lies not just in the incentives provided but in the substance of the development and support teachers receive in order to climb the ladder. Having administrators who are skilled at classroom observation and the provision of formative feedback is crucial. And just as the school is structured to support students in taking ownership of their learning, City High takes a similarly constructivist approach to teacher development. Wertheimer notes that in his observations, *"I never say, 'you should do this.' I try to describe objectively where they are and then the ideal state and let them figure out how to bridge the gap. I focus on describing what I saw in their classroom and asking them to analyze how that compares to what is on the rubric."* The technical skill of teacher observation is rooted in cultural norms: Wertheimer believes that *"You have to have a critical mass of teachers who want and believe they can get better and move up. They have to see administration as fair and wanting their success. I don't see teachers as whiny or lazy. Inherently I believe teachers want to get better and will given the right support."*

**Ensure sufficient time for observations:** Although the professional portfolio has multiple components, classroom observations by school leaders are obviously a critical element. As a teacher in the midst of the process notes, *"It is a struggle to get an administrator in here but once they are here they are an incredible resource. They really break down what happened and what I could do differently. That was where the real learning came for me."* School leaders admit that too often the availability of administrators to do requested observations is the "rate limiting factor" which can slow down the process and lead to frustration

and anxiety among teachers. As Zinga says, *"it takes a huge refocusing of administrative time and role."* City High is continuing to experiment with administrative structures that will protect sufficient time for leaders to devote to observations. The school is now funding a classroom coach (a Master Teacher) who spends his day observing and providing support to teaching staff.

**Broaden the pool of expertise in observation:** As a parallel strategy to the one above, the school is currently seeking to define and increase the role of Master Teachers in the promotion process. Teachers who have been through the process argue that the Master Teacher role is different from that of the administrators but equally crucial: *"They do a lot of pop in observations, giving you informal feedback. It is important that they are NOT the principal. They end up providing a lot of the evidence; administrators take their views very seriously."*

**Promote (the right) people:** One of the quickest ways to build faculty buy-in to performance-based promotion is for them to see peers making it through the process. This demonstrates that mere mortals CAN make it through, and that the process is not in fact designed to avoid giving anyone a raise. Equally important, however, is making sure that those early successes are teachers widely respected by their peers as effective. This insulates the system for accusations of favoritism, always an issue with any evaluation or promotion system involving subjective judgment.

## How does City High know it is working?

*Each of the best practice briefs in this series provides suggestions about how schools implementing the practice can monitor its effectiveness.*

❖ **Promotions are happening:** School leadership keeps an eye on the number of teachers moving up each rung of the ladder to ensure that the system is functioning and not seen by teachers as an unattainable goal. When they see a lack of activity at a particular level or among a specific group of teachers, they may more actively encourage teachers to apply or consider modifications to the system.

❖ **Teachers are learning from the process:** In post promotion debriefs, teachers describe specific learning from the process that has improved their teaching. The goal is for the process to have intrinsic value as a learning experience, not to be simply hoops to jump through for a salary increase. As a teacher who has now moved up two steps on the ladder commented, *"I have come away both times with a sense that I have learned something that has enhanced my practice."*

❖ **No one wants to go back:** Over time, the expressed desire among faculty for a traditional salary step compensation system has declined. (In the 2010 faculty survey, 5% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they would rather have a salary scale based on years of experience.) Although there are certainly still



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issues to be resolved, the fundamental premise of pay for professional competence is a settled matter in the school.

- ❖ **Rubric language enters the vernacular:** As more and more teachers go through the process and become deeply familiar with the content of the rubric standards, those ways of talking about practice should permeate everyday functioning of the school.

### Tradeoffs and challenges (and how City High addresses them)

To give readers of these briefs the benefit of City High's experience, this section attempts to capture some of the pitfalls the school has encountered in implementing competency-based staff promotion and the strategies they have used to work through them.

**Questions about objectivity of the process:** This is certainly the biggest upfront objection to be anticipated to such a fundamental challenge to cultural norms about how teachers are paid. To some extent this is simply something that has to be worked through by demonstrating over time, as Wertheimer says, that the system can be *"carried out with consistency, integrity, and predictability of results."* Writing the rubric performance standards in terms of clearly observable behaviors is an important backstop for complaints and challenges: *"We just go back to the paper—there it is."* Additionally, as an experienced teacher points out, *"the traditional system isn't really objective either. It is biased in terms of years in the district. I'd rather be part of a system biased towards quality."*

**Undervaluing the modest:** Some teachers have complained that the portfolio approach is biased against those who *"don't like to toot their own horn."* Like learners in the classroom, City High has found that different teachers need different levels of explicit encouragement and support to initiate and sustain themselves through the process. Ultimately, however, school leaders want them to want it for themselves.

**Favoring the "liberal arts types":** The initial vision of City High's portfolio was heavy on writing, including numerous reflection and case study pieces. Realizing that due to disciplinary background and/or disposition this amount of writing comes much more naturally to some teachers than others, school leadership is opening up the kinds of evidence that can be presented. For example, one recent candidate submitted audio recordings of extensive interviews about classroom practice in lieu of written reflection.

**Limited administrative capacity:** Lack of administrator availability to do observations remains the school's biggest implementation challenge. While attempting to increase the role of senior teachers in the process (which school leaders believe has benefits on all sides), City High is still considering reconfiguring school administration to create a position focused exclusively on personnel development. Creating a teaching coach position this year increased the number of observations to a significant degree.

### Lessons learned

City High's system of competency-based staff promotion has evolved over time to reflect the following lessons learned which may be of use to other schools considering adopting this approach. These are adaptations the school has made along the way which other schools may be able to take advantage of upfront:

**Keep the distance between steps manageable:** City High's initial promotion system included just three tiers: apprentice, journeyman, and master. School leaders soon realized, however, that the distance between the expectations for journeyman and master was too great. Teachers who were demonstrating significant growth were not being recognized and growing frustrated. The addition of the "expert" level preserved the high standards of "master teacher" while providing a clear progression towards that highest level.

**Provide an option for teachers not interested in leadership roles:** The expert teacher level also reflected another important lesson: some great teachers simply aren't interested in a broad leadership role. The promotion standards had always defined master teacher as encompassing some ownership over schoolwide issues. Adding in the expert step recognized teachers who were very strong in the classroom but less interested in playing a role in governance and policy.

**Keep salaries competitive:** Although City High set the initial salary levels to be competitive in the regional teacher labor market, the large jumps between them meant that some teachers' compensation fell behind that of public school peers even if they were making good progress towards promotion. To address this, the school periodically benchmarks and recalibrates the salary levels to reflect cost of living increases received in traditional systems.

**Make the process more transparent:** School leadership focused from the beginning on making the professional competencies they were after as explicit and specific as possible. What they realized several years in was that many staff remained unclear about the process for demonstrating them. How does a teacher get started with promotion? Who needs to sign off on what? In terms of portfolio pieces, how much is enough? Over time, leadership has worked to make the steps in the process less mysterious to staff. For example, formal timelines for turnaround and response were added to the rubric document.

**Include the whole staff:** The most recent change to the City High promotion system is the inclusion of non-teaching staff (i.e. office staff, social workers, nurse.) Leadership realized that the process of defining the core competencies for your job, reflecting on your own strengths and weaknesses, and seeing a trajectory for growth was valuable for all employees. Making the system more inclusive also recognizes the contribution that all staff make to fulfilling the school's mission with students.

## What other City High best practices does it connect to?

*Ideally, no “best practice” stands alone but is an integral part of a coherent educational approach. See future best practice briefs in this series for information on how competency-based promotion at City High connects to other featured best practices including:*

**Mantras—Making the culture concrete:** City High’s “mantras” are the values they attempt to live by: being a safe and caring environment, making connections to the real world, taking responsibility for learning, collaboration around common goals, continuous challenge and growth, and forming personal connections. School leaders think it is crucial to build those values into the structure of the school in highly visible and concrete ways, providing experiences that allow students and staff to live the values. Performance based promotion is one of the most visible manifestations of that.

**Building faculty ownership:** In particular, competency-based promotion is a central mechanism for building faculty responsibility for their own learning and ownership for the school’s mission. The performance levels of the various competencies are an attempt to scaffold staff in taking a broader role in student and school success. Going through the promotion process is a powerful reciprocal investment in shared goals.

## Transfer questions

*Issues other educators may want to reflect on in considering adopting or adapting this practice in their schools...*

**To what extent does your school have a “culture of performance,” meaning staff believe there is such a thing as better and worse teaching, that it can be demonstrated objectively, and they are willing to be held accountable for it?**

### **What does expert teaching look like at your school?**

What are the particular competencies your teachers need to demonstrate to serve your student population and achieve your mission? Has that vision been made explicit? How deeply and widely is it shared?

### **What does teacher professionalism mean to your staff?**

What existing structures in the school can you build on to develop the habits of reflection and metacognition among staff?

### **If staff are paid by a traditional salary scale now, how will you make the transitions?**

Will current staff be grandfathered in?





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