



# Falk

## Laboratory School

### Director

The Fanny Edel Falk Laboratory School (Falk) invites nominations, applications, and inquiries for its next Director to lead the school beginning July 1, 2022. As a laboratory school, Falk is affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh School of Education and the Director will work closely with [Dean Valerie Kinloch](#) as well as Falk's faculty, staff, students and families.

### ABOUT THE FALK LABORATORY SCHOOL

Falk is a K-8 tuition-based campus laboratory school affiliated with the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Since 1931, Falk has been known for providing a learning environment that is grounded in community, diversity, progressive and experiential education, individualized instruction and a low student-teacher ratio of 9:1. Falk's commitment to progressive education principles, formalized in its [mission and philosophy](#), means that the school community has a child-centered approach to learning that focuses on the social, emotional and academic needs of each individual. It also means an emphasis on collaboration, intrinsic motivation, and active learning. Instruction revolves around an inquiry-based model that invites children to reflect upon and take ownership of their learning. In 2001, the faculty at Falk created a [supporting document](#) to complement the mission and philosophy that captures the essence of Falk and places the school in a more visionary context. This vision, which guides school decision-making and planning, seeks to answer the question, "What do we wish for our children?"

#### Academics

At Falk School, children are at the center of the curriculum: What they need, what they are curious about, who they are, and who they are becoming all go into how and why faculty develop the Falk program. In Falk classrooms, studios, and laboratories, learning occurs through inquiry, hands-on explorations of materials, social interactions, and play. At Falk, students learn to become active participants, problem solvers, and partners in their own education. Each new school year becomes an opportunity to build upon what has been previously learned in exchanges between students and students, students and teachers, and students within the greater Falk School community. Faculty view collaborative problem-solving as a critical life skill and feel that a growing sense of social responsibility and empathy for others is a non-negotiable attribute in a well-rounded and thoughtful person's life.

The academic program includes the [primary level](#) (grades K, 1, & 2), [intermediate level](#) (grades 3, 4, & 5), and [middle school](#) (grades 6, 7, & 8). Art, technology, Spanish, language arts, library studies, mathematics, music, physical education, science, social studies, yoga, and health and wellness are included in the curriculum in all grades. The Falk curriculum also includes powerful learning experiences known as

“signature experiences” such as the [Looping Model](#), [Environmental Week](#), and [WonderLab](#). Co-curricular activities offered at Falk include voice and instrument lessons; clubs such as chess, robotics, math, and creative writing; and [sports](#) such as basketball, cross-country, soccer and tennis.

### Community

Falk School is intensely committed to sustaining a sense of community that is welcoming and open, with students, parents and families, faculty, and staff who represent the rich diversity of the city, nation, and world. This commitment is an integral component of Falk as a school community. Parents are invited to participate in the life of the school through the [Falk Parent Organization](#) (FPO) and [alumni](#) are welcomed back with special events and occasional communications.

- Falk students come from many different neighborhoods in the Greater Pittsburgh Region, representing more than 35 zip code areas.
- More than 37% of Falk students identify themselves as Students of Color.
- Students new to the school in 2020-21 came from 20 different schools and pre-schools.
- School-wide, many different languages and dialects, in addition to English, are spoken by Falk students, faculty, and staff.

### Faculty

Falk faculty hold advanced degrees and certifications and actively participate in professional organizations at the local, national, and international levels. All Falk faculty hold affiliated appointments in the School of Education, and some also teach or co-teach university classes. In 2020-21:

- 100% hold advanced degrees (Masters and/or Doctorates)
- 90% hold public school teaching certification
- Average number of years teaching – 15 years
- Average tenure at Falk School – 10 years
- 75% female, 25% male

### Research

Conducting and participating in [educational research](#) is one of Falk’s core missions as a university-affiliated laboratory school. Falk collaborates with departments across the University of Pittsburgh as well as with other partner institutions of higher education. By participating in and/or sponsoring research projects, teachers at Falk School engage in regular examination and refinement of their pedagogies and instructional practices. Research helps Falk faculty to better understand how students learn and aids immensely in the faculty’s growth as educators. See examples of both [current and past research projects](#).

A variety of research perspectives and methods are woven into the learning engagements of Falk students and teachers, which allow them to gain exposure to a broad range of scholarly topics. In fact, students are guided to understand and use research to answer their own questions, beginning with observations and curiosities on the playground or classroom in the earliest years, and leading to formal research projects in science and language arts in middle school.

Another important way Falk fulfills its mission as a laboratory school is by providing clinical teaching experiences. Each year, Falk hosts approximately 20 interns and student teachers, many from Pitt’s

School of Education, who are supported to deepen their experiences in a quality educational environment where they are guided by experienced educators.

## ABOUT THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Consistently [ranked among the Top 40 graduate schools of education](#) by *U.S. News & World Report*, the [Pitt School of Education](#) offers world-class education programs that ignite learning for all. The Pitt School of Education consistently produces innovative research and houses some of the best faculty in the field. With over 50 graduate and undergraduate degree programs in education, the School is focused on advancing education through:

- Improving the experiences for students in public schools
- Exploring synergies between public policy and classroom practice
- Understanding the factors and strategies that lead to success in the classroom
- Developing obesity prevention and intervention programs.

The Pitt School of Education is committed to [advancing equity and justice](#) in society through education. Faculty and staff members are dedicated change agents who are driven to make a difference in society's schools, education systems, and communities.

[Dr. Valerie Kinloch](#) leads the Pitt School of Education as the Renée and Richard Goldman Dean and Professor with a passion for education, learning, equity, and engagement. Kinloch has dedicated herself to strengthening the school's commitments to public education, equity and justice, diversity and inclusion, and community engagement, while also enhancing school culture and broadening alumni participation. A highly respected educator and scholar, Kinloch's areas of research focus on the literacies, languages, cultures, and community engagements of youth and adults, both inside and outside of schools. Kinloch's academic endeavors have received support from the U.S. Department of Education, National Council of Teachers of English, Corporation for National and Community Service, the Fulbright-Hays Program, and Spencer Foundation, among other notable organizations.

The Director works closely with Dr. Kinloch and sits on her executive leadership team. Like all Falk teachers, the Director holds an affiliated faculty position within the School of Education.

## HISTORY AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Fanny Edel Falk Elementary School was born of two wishes: Leon Falk, Jr., and Marjorie Falk Levy wished to establish a school that promoted progressive methods of teaching children that could be observed and studied by those who wished to pursue teaching as a vocation; and the University of Pittsburgh wished to establish and maintain an elementary demonstration school that was progressive and experimental, and that would become an integral part of the educational mission. In 1931, this wish was actualized and it [has continued to the present time.](#)

Falk was established as a new kind of school for Pittsburgh. The classes would be small and teaching would be adjusted to the individual needs of each child. New methods and materials would be tested and the results of these experimental forms of learning would be shared with other schools. In the best tradition of John Dewey's School, it would be a laboratory for teaching that would be directly connected

to the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Established under a charter agreement between the University and the Falk family in 1930, Falk is designated by its charter as a progressive experimental school for demonstration purposes.

In its recent history, during the summer of 2007, Falk broke ground on a significant expansion of facilities, allowing the school, then at 365 students, to increase in size to 400+ students. Multiple options for art, music, and physical education, along with providing additional classrooms and handicap accessibility to the entire school were incorporated into the new green design. During this period, faculty members eagerly introduced new initiatives that have become featured programs of the school. These include, notably among others, the [Falk Woods](#) program, the [Yoga/Mindfulness](#) program and the [Artists-in-Residence](#) program.

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

[Diversity, equity and inclusion](#) are core tenets of Falk's progressive educational mission. The Falk community values diversity that includes, but is not limited only to, racial and ethnic identities, the many languages we speak, the countries we come from, our gender identities, our sexual identities, our religions, the traditions we observe, the structures of our families, the financial resources of our families, the way we learn, and our individual and collective needs. Falk embraces its community's many distinctive heritages, values, and beliefs.

Since its inception, Falk has been a model of collaboration rather than competition. Children work daily in pairs or groups at all grades and in all content areas. By working together, children come to understand the strengths that each individual brings to a task. Children are heterogeneously grouped so that various abilities, learning styles, and perspectives are always present. Families are encouraged to share customs and traditions with the entire community so children gain growing understandings of the differences and commonalities among us. Content is chosen to reflect the contributions of marginalized groups in all areas of study.

Falk's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work is led by a full-time Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Coordinator, as well as a working group comprising parents, faculty, and staff. This group provides avenues to uphold the school's diversity, equity and inclusion mission and also helps facilitate Falk's efforts to bring those values into the community.

## FALK'S CAMPUS AND LIVING IN PITTSBURGH

With panoramic views overlooking the neighborhoods of Oakland, Shadyside, East Liberty, Squirrel Hill, and the campuses of the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon, Falk School is located on the University of Pittsburgh's upper campus and across from the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System in Oakland.

Upon entering Falk School, one immediately notices the natural lighting and spectacular views. Open spaces were designed at each level to provide accessible project areas. Ample space exists to display children's work. The school's facilities include two visual arts studios, multiple performing arts spaces, a

technology lab, a middle school science lab, a nature trail with outdoor instructional areas, a gymnasium, several outdoor recreational areas, and a library with more than 16,000 volumes and online resources.

[Pittsburgh](#), recently ranked by CNBC as the “#1 City to Relocate to in America” and the “Most Livable City in America” by *Forbes* magazine, is a city of more than 90 unique neighborhoods, each with distinctive character and charm. The city is also full of natural beauty and opportunities for outdoor recreation, with 15,000 acres of public parks and green spaces in the city’s urban core and more than 13 state parks in the surrounding region. A thriving arts scene, robust nonprofit and philanthropic community, and burgeoning expertise in fields like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, energy, life science and health, manufacturing and robotics add to the dynamic feel of the city. Pittsburgh’s low cost of living (the median price for a single-family home is 40 percent less than the national average) gives residents the opportunity to fully take advantage of all that the city has to offer.

## THE ROLE OF DIRECTOR

The Director will report to [Dr. Valerie Kinloch](#), Dean of the University of Pittsburgh School of Education, and work in partnership with Falk’s School Board, which Dr. Kinloch chairs. The Director manages approximately 65 employees and a budget of just over \$7 million, which includes operational costs such as capital expenses (furniture, supplies, technology, learning materials) and human resources (salaries, benefits, travel, professional development). Falk, per its charter with the University, does not directly pay for utilities, groundskeeping, snow removal, custodial services, or routine physical plant maintenance. The Director leads a team of the following direct reports:

- Assistant Director for the Elementary Grades
- Assistant Director for the Middle School Grades
- Coordinator of Equity, Inclusion, and Justice
- Director of Admissions
- Manager of Administrative Operations
- School Counselor
- Communications Director (who shares a dotted line report to the Manager of Administrative Operations)
- Accountant (who shares a dotted line report to the Manager of Administrative Operations)
- Manager of Constituent Relations (who shares a dotted line report to the Director of Development and Alumni Relations in the School of Education)

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The next Director will lead Falk forward by sustaining its progressive vision and unique role as a laboratory school. Partnering with Dean Kinloch and her executive leadership team and building upon the strong work of the previous Director, the next Director will focus on the following opportunities:

### Leading with strategic vision

- Modernize Falk’s operational, administrative, and financial systems and bring the community together around an aspirational strategic planning process;

- Consider Falk’s growth, including physical spaces, total enrollment, and the possible expansion to high school;
- Further bolster the school’s reputation and recognize its unique strengths, communicating the value of Falk and a Falk education to University and community stakeholders;

#### Fostering academic excellence

- Recruit, support, and retain a talented faculty committed to progressive education and nurture an atmosphere supportive of professional growth within a diverse and vibrant community;
- Promote innovation, creativity, and best pedagogical practices in academics and co-curricular programming;

#### Strengthening the Falk community

- Recognize Falk’s unique organizational culture and build upon these foundational strengths;
- Prioritize communication and collaboration among all Falk community members;
- Cultivate a diverse, inclusive, and supportive school community with an intentional commitment to equity and justice;
- Strengthen Falk’s ability to recruit diverse faculty and staff members as well as a diverse student body;

#### Ensuring Falk’s financial future

- Develop and sustain relationships with individual donors and institutional funding sources;
- Carefully consider the balance between controlling rising tuition costs with continued program investment; and,
- Engage in strategic financial management, especially as it relates to the relationship with the University.

## DESIRED QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The strongest candidate will be an educator with a deep commitment to the experimental nature of laboratory schools as well as an in-depth understanding of the important relationship between a laboratory school and a university. An ethics of care for students, families, faculty, and staff, as well as a collaborative approach to leadership and a commitment to academic excellence, freedom of inquiry, equity and justice will all be important qualities for the next Director to possess. A terminal degree, or significant progress towards one, is strongly preferred, as the Director, like all Falk faculty, will have an affiliated appointment as a faculty member in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In addition, the ideal candidate will possess:

- Significant experience in a progressive school environment;
- An empathetic, joyful, and nurturing approach to education and child development;
- A willingness to engage the Falk community and learn what makes the school unique in both the Pittsburgh independent school market as well as nationally;
- A vision for the future of progressive education;
- An understanding of the key issues in independent schools in the post-COVID landscape;
- Financial acumen, including experience with budget management;
- Strong listening skills with a creative and collaborative problem-solving style;

- The drive to be an enthusiastic and effective fundraiser;
- A demonstrated track record of advancing equity and justice in school communities; and
- A strong commitment to mentoring and supporting faculty and staff.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

The search committee for the Falk director will begin accepting nominations and reviewing applications immediately. Requested application materials include a letter of interest and curriculum vitae. Applications will be welcomed until a new director is selected. For best consideration, all candidates should submit materials to the following address: [FalkDirector@storbecksearch.com](mailto:FalkDirector@storbecksearch.com).

For more information about Falk Laboratory School, please visit <https://falkschool.pitt.edu/>.

Falk is being assisted in this search by [Storbeck Search](#). For additional information, please contact:



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