

Cobb County Public Schools (Atlanta, GA)

GPA: 2.11

Rank: 10th place out of 50
(tied with Montgomery County)

*Documents Examined: Board policies (Collective bargaining is not practiced in Georgia)**

HIGHLY FLEXIBLE
FLEXIBLE
SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE
SOMEWHAT RESTRICTIVE
RESTRICTIVE
HIGHLY RESTRICTIVE

Introduction

This study of the nation's fifty largest school districts starts from a simple premise: district labor agreements should not make it difficult for schools to be nimble, smart, flexible, high-performing organizations.

In particular, the study focuses on provisions that may limit school leaders' ability to attract and retain excellent teachers, to identify and remove ineffective instructors, to use professional development as a tool of organizational improvement, and to manage school operations in a professional manner—i.e., to run the most effective school possible in terms of core instructional and educational activities, crucial areas where school leaders need enough authority to match their mounting accountability obligations and executive responsibilities in a results-based era.

The Grades

The scale on which districts were graded reflects the approach outlined above. Grades of A or B generally indicate provisions that confer on school leaders the latitude to man-

age their schools in a professional manner. A grade of C generally means the agreement (or, as in this case, district policy) is silent regarding the provision in question—i.e., it neither affirms nor denies a school leader's right to take a specific course of action. Grades of D and F generally indicate provisions that impede or explicitly bar school leaders from exercising discretion in a given area.

Cobb County's overall grade, therefore, reflects the degree to which district policies constrain school leaders' ability to make decisions on important management issues. It is in no way a holistic assessment of local education policy or school leadership, much less of school effectiveness.

Overall GPA: 2.11 (10th place out of 50—tied with Montgomery County)

Cobb County's GPA is the average of its scores in three areas: Compensation, Personnel Policies, and Work Rules.

Cobb County receives a Somewhat Flexible rating for its 2.11 GPA, ranking tenth among the fifty districts studied—and first among the four Georgia districts examined here. The district does not score especially well in any one category but earns a relatively high average score by avoiding major pitfalls in any one area.

Compensation: C- (43rd percentile)

The Compensation grade combines four components: Credit for Previous Experience, Performance Pay, Hardship Pay for High-Needs Schools, and Extra Pay for Shortage Subjects.

Board policy in Cobb County gives schools the flexibility to raise starting teacher salaries based on previous experience working in a subject-related profession, but is silent on whether they may do so based on experience teaching in a private school or college. It is also silent on whether schools may reward teachers on the basis of performance or for teaching in high-needs schools. Cobb County's board policies receives one F in this category for barring schools from rewarding teachers of shortage subjects.

Compensation	C-
1. Credit for Previous Experience	B+
2. Performance Pay	C
3. Hardship Pay for High-Needs Schools	C
4. Extra Pay for Shortage Subjects	F
Personnel Policies	C+
5. Tenure	N/A
6. Evaluation.	A
7. Layoffs	C
8. Transfers	D+
Work Rules	C
9. Professional Development	C
10. Subcontracting Operations†	C
11. Faculty Meetings	C
12. Teacher Leave	C

Personnel Policies: C + (71st percentile)

The Personnel Policies grade combines four components: Tenure, Evaluation, Layoffs, and Transfers.

Cobb County's teacher evaluation policies are stellar, allowing school leaders to consider student performance, including test scores, when evaluating teachers. Board policy is silent on whether school leaders must consider seniority when layoffs are necessary; whether internal applicants must be given priority over new hires for vacant positions; and whether transferring teachers may "bump" less senior teachers from their jobs. It does, however, require school leaders to select the most junior teacher in a certification area if transfers are necessary, dropping the district's grade for that indicator to a D+. Tenure rules in Cobb County, as in most places, are set by state law, not local decision; therefore, the district did not receive a grade for that component.

Work Rules: C (82nd percentile)

The Work Rules grade combines four components: Professional Development, Subcontracting Operations, Faculty Meetings, and Teacher Leave.

Cobb County board policy receives a C for every component in this category, due to its silence on whether teachers must be given salary credit and/or stipends for professional development activities outside the scheduled workday; whether school leaders may subcontract school operations to nonunion workers; whether the length of faculty meetings is capped; whether time at such meetings must be allotted to union matters; and whether school leaders must grant teachers leave for union activities.

Conclusion

Cobb County offers school leaders more flexibility than many districts in this study. Still, it is disheartening that Cobb ranks among the top ten districts in this study when it brings home a report card that features nine component grades of C or lower; it shows just how unimpressive even the top districts really are when it comes to empowering school leaders in key domains. To better equip its school leaders with the flexibility they need to manage their schools effectively, the Cobb County Board of Education should consider explicitly conferring on school leaders the right to:

1. raise the starting salaries of teachers with all forms of relevant prior experience. (Board policy allows this for some forms of experience and is silent on others.)
2. reward teachers on the basis of performance. (Board policy is silent on this issue.)
3. reward teachers in high-needs schools and teachers of shortage subjects. (Board policy is silent on the former and bars the latter.)
4. base decisions regarding teacher layoffs on individual merit and performance rather than seniority. (Board policy is silent on this issue.)
5. base decisions regarding teacher transfers on individual merit and performance rather than seniority. (Of the three indicators directly addressing teacher transfers, board policy requires school leaders to consider seniority on one and is silent on two.)
6. subcontract school operations. (Board policy is silent on this issue.)

* The data examined in this report come from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) database, "Teacher Roles, Rules and Rights." All data were culled from the NCTQ database in November 2007. In states that permit collective bargaining, NCTQ examined collective bargaining agreements, with the exception of Jordan School District in Utah, which does not have a bargaining agreement. In states where collective bargaining is either explicitly illegal or otherwise not practiced, as in Georgia, NCTQ examined school board policies. Where a provision in state law precludes the possibility of a collective bargaining agreement or school board policy addressing a certain component in our study, we excluded it from our analysis, marking the component "N/A." Find a more detailed explanation of this report's methodology starting on page 14.

† This indicator refers to the right of school leaders to outsource school operations to nonunion workers. NCTQ uses the term "subcontracting" in its database, which we retain here in the interest of consistency.