

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District (Houston, TX)

GPA: 1.99

Rank: 14th place out of 50

*Documents Examined: Board policies (Collective bargaining is illegal in Texas)**

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.

Cypress-Fairbanks'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: 1.99 (14th place out of 50)

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

Cypress-Fairbanks receives a Somewhat Restrictive rating for its 1.99 GPA, ranking fourteenth among the fifty districts studied—and fifth among the six Texas districts examined here. Not particularly strong in any one category, the district is a candidate for all-around improvement when it comes time for the Board of Education to update its policies.

Compensation: C (57th 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.

Cypress-Fairbanks board policy gives schools the flexibility to raise starting teacher salaries based on previous experience teaching in a private school, but is silent on whether they may do so based on experience teaching in college or working in a subject-related field. Board policy is also silent on whether schools can reward teachers on the basis of performance or for teaching in high-needs schools. It does permit school leaders to reward teachers of shortage subjects, but because it only identifies opportunities for extra pay in one of the four subjects examined, it receives a C+ for that component.

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

Personnel Policies: C (65th percentile)

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

Board policy in Cypress-Fairbanks allows schools to factor student performance, in general, into teacher evaluations, though it is silent on whether they can consider test scores in particular. Board policy is also silent on whether school leaders may retain an outstanding young teacher over one with greater seniority during layoffs; whether transferring teachers may “bump” less senior teachers from their jobs; and whether schools must select the most junior teacher in a certification area if transfers are necessary. Board policy requires that internal job applicants be given priority over new hires for vacant positions, which hurts the district’s grade. Tenure rules in Cypress-Fairbanks, 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: D+ (65th percentile)

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

Board policy in Cypress-Fairbanks garners Cs for most of the components in this category, primarily due to its silence in key areas. It is silent on 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. Board policy receives one F in this category, however, for mandating that teachers be given stipends for professional development activities outside the scheduled workday.

Conclusion

Apart from its teacher evaluation policies, board policy in Cypress-Fairbanks guarantees schools leaders little flexibility. Indeed, its middling scores in all three categories testify to the need for greater protection of managerial authority. To better equip its school leaders with the flexibility they need to manage their schools effectively, the Cypress-Fairbanks Board of Trustees 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 practice for some forms of experience but 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. (Board policy is silent on this issue.)
4. consider student test scores during teacher evaluations. (Board policy is silent on this issue.)
5. base decisions regarding teacher layoffs on individual merit and performance rather than seniority. (Board policy is silent on this issue.)
6. 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.)
7. subcontract (i.e., outsource) certain 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 illegal or otherwise not practiced, as in Texas, 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.