

# Fort Worth Independent School District (TX)

**GPA: 1.77**

**Rank: 26th place out of 50** (tied with Denver)

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

HIGHLY FLEXIBLE
FLEXIBLE
SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE
SOMEWHAT RESTRICTIVE
<b>RESTRICTIVE</b>
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.

Fort Worth'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: 1.77 (26th place out of 50—tied with Denver)

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

Fort Worth lands a Restrictive rating for its 1.77 GPA, ranking twenty-sixth among the fifty districts studied—and last among the six Texas districts examined here. Despite its middling overall score, the district does quite well in the Work Rules category, landing the third-highest score of all districts in the study.

## Compensation: D+ (33rd 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.

Fort Worth board policy allows schools to raise starting teacher salaries for previous experience teaching in a private school or college, but bars them from doing so for experience in a subject-related field. It bars schools from rewarding teachers on the basis of performance or for working in high-needs schools or shortage subjects. Fort Worth reported to NCTQ, however, that it does allow school leaders to reward teachers of three of the four shortage subjects examined in this study, giving it a B+ for that component.

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

### **Personnel Policies: D+ (41st percentile)**

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

Board policy in Fort Worth is silent on whether school leaders may consider student performance, including test scores, when evaluating teachers. The district reported to NCTQ, however, that in practice student performance cannot be considered for untenured teachers and can for tenured teachers, giving it a C+ for that component. Board policy is silent on whether school leaders may retain an outstanding young teacher over one with greater seniority during layoffs, receiving a C for that component. The district gets an F for the Transfers component; board policy requires schools to give internal applicants priority over new hires for vacant positions and to choose the most junior teacher in a certification area when transferring is necessary. It also allows transferring teachers to “bump” their less senior colleagues. Tenure rules in Fort Worth, 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 (88th percentile)**

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

Although board policy is silent on whether teachers must be given stipends for professional development activities outside the scheduled workday, the district reported to NCTQ that “teachers can get continuing professional education credits,” giving Fort Worth an F for that component. Board policy is silent on whether school leaders may subcontract school operations and whether faculty meetings are capped, though the district reported to NCTQ that meetings are in practice capped. Fort Worth board policy does grant school leaders the right to decide whether time at faculty meetings will be allotted to union matters and to set their own rules concerning teacher leave for union activities, boosting its grade.

### **Conclusion**

Although Fort Worth’s report card shows three grades higher than a C, district leaders should focus on the four Fs it also received. All told, Fort Worth’s highest category grade is a mediocre C in Work Rules, testifying to the need for greater protection of managerial prerogatives. To better equip its school leaders with the flexibility they need to manage their schools effectively, the Fort Worth 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 bars this for some forms of experience and allows it for others.)
2. reward teachers on the basis of performance. (Board policy bars this practice.)
3. reward teachers in high-needs schools and shortage subjects. (Board policy bars these practices.)
4. consider student performance, including test scores, when evaluating teachers. (Board policy currently 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. (Board policy requires school leaders to consider seniority on all three indicators directly addressing transfers.)
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.