

# Houston Independent School District (TX)

**GPA: 2.06**

**Rank: 12th place out of 50**

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

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

Houston'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: 2.06 (12th place out of 50)

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

Houston lands a Somewhat Flexible rating for its 2.06 GPA, ranking twelfth among the fifty districts studied—and fourth among the six Texas districts examined here. It does especially well in the Work Rules category, earning the second-highest score of all districts. Its dismal Compensation grade, however, substantially brings down its overall score.

## Compensation: D (14th 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.

Houston board policy is silent on whether schools may raise starting teacher salaries based on previous experience teaching in a private school or college, or working in a subject-related field. It is also silent on whether teachers can earn extra pay on the basis of performance. (Houston's well-known merit pay program was not considered part of board policy in the NCTQ database. See footnote.) The district gets two Fs, since board policy bars schools from rewarding teachers in high-needs schools and in shortage subjects.

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

## Personnel Policies: C+ (71st percentile)

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

Board policy in Houston allows school leaders to consider student performance, in general, when evaluating teachers, though it is silent on whether they can consider test scores in particular. (Again, due to NCTQ coding this analysis does not consider Houston's merit pay program. See footnote.) Board policy is also silent on whether school leaders may retain an outstanding young teacher over one with greater seniority during layoffs; whether internal applicants must be given priority over new hires for vacant positions; whether transferring teachers may "bump" less senior teachers from their jobs; and whether schools must choose the most junior teacher in a certification area if transfers are necessary. Tenure rules in Houston, 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: B- (94th percentile)

The Work Rules grade combines four components:

Professional Development, Subcontracting Operations, Faculty Meetings, and Teacher Leave.

Houston earns the second-highest score among all districts in this category. Board policy is silent 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; and whether the length of faculty meetings is capped. Board policy gets high marks for granting school leaders the flexibility to decide whether to devote time at faculty meetings to union matters, and whether to grant teachers leave for union activities.

## Conclusion

Houston is a district where school leaders have a fair amount of flexibility to manage effectively in some areas but not as much in others. Its teacher compensation provisions are especially constraining. To better equip its school leaders with the flexibility they need to manage their schools effectively, the Houston 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 is silent on this issue.)
2. reward teachers on the basis of performance. (Technically, board policy is silent on this issue—see footnote.)
3. reward teachers in high-needs schools and teachers of shortage subjects. (Board policy bars both practices.)
4. consider student test scores during teacher evaluations. (Technically, board policy is silent on this issue—see footnote.)
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 is silent on all three of the indicators directly addressing teacher 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.

† The Houston Board of Education has, in fact, adopted a widely-publicized performance pay program. However, because the program, according to official board language, "does not establish, modify, or delete board policy," NCTQ did not include it in its database. In the interest of maintaining a clear, consistent, and reliable standard for the data analyzed in this report, we have adhered to NCTQ's coding. Find a more detailed explanation of this approach 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.