

Northside Independent School District (San Antonio, TX)

GPA: 2.54

Rank: 3rd 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.

Northside'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: 2.54 (3rd place out of 50)

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

Northside lands a Flexible rating, the second-highest possible, for its 2.54 GPA, ranking third among the fifty districts studied—and second among the six Texas districts examined here. The district runs away with the top ranking in the Work Rules category, scoring three-quarters of a point higher than the second-best district, Austin. It also earns the third-highest score in the Personnel category. A disappointing D in the Compensation category, however, brings down its overall score substantially.

Compensation: D (19th 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 Northside bars schools from raising starting teacher salaries based on previous experience teaching in a private school or working in a subject-related field, but is silent on whether they may do so for college-teaching experience. It also bars schools from rewarding teachers on the basis of performance or for teaching in high-needs schools, earning the district two Fs. Board policy does grant schools

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

the right to reward teachers of shortage subjects, but because it only identifies opportunities for extra pay in two of the four subjects examined, it earns a B for that component.

Personnel Policies: B (88th percentile)

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

Northside earns the third-highest score among all districts in this category. Board policy is silent on whether school leaders may consider student performance, including test scores, when evaluating teachers, but the district reported to NCTQ that this is permitted, giving the district an A for that component. Board policy is silent on whether school leaders may retain an outstanding young teacher over one with greater seniority during layoffs, and receives a C for that component. On transfers, board policy is silent on 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. The district reported to NCTQ, however, that teachers do not in practice enjoy bumping rights. The available data did not address whether internal applicants must be given priority over new hires for vacant positions. Tenure rules in Northside, 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+ (First place)

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

Northside is the only district in this study whose board policies explicitly grant school leaders the right to determine whether teachers should be given salary credit and/or stipends for professional development activities outside the scheduled workday, and one of only two (the other being Fairfax County) whose policies grant school leaders the flexibility to set their own rules concerning the length of faculty meetings and whether to allot time at such meetings to union matters. The district also earns an A for giving principals the flexibility to craft their own policies with respect to teacher leave. Board policy is silent on whether school leaders may subcontract school operations to nonunion workers.

Conclusion

Northside is the third most principal-friendly environment in this study, a district where school leaders have substantial ability to assemble and lead strong teams. On the other hand, the fact that Northside ranks so highly among all districts in this study while bringing home a report card that features five component grades of C or lower shows just how unimpressive even “flexible” 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 Northside 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 bars this practice for some forms of experience and is silent on others.)
2. reward teachers on the basis of performance and for teaching in high-needs schools. (Board policy bars these practices.)
3. consider student performance, including test scores, when evaluating teachers. (Board policy is silent on this issue.)
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 is silent on two. NCTQ did not provide data for the third.)
6. 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.