

# Polk County School District (Bartow, FL)

**GPA: 1.73**

**Rank: 29th place out of 50**  
(tied with Virginia Beach)

*Document Examined: Collective bargaining agreement,  
2005 – 2007\**

HIGHLY FLEXIBLE
FLEXIBLE
SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE
<b>SOMEWHAT RESTRICTIVE</b>
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 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. Polk 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: 1.73 (29th place out of 50— tied with Virginia Beach)

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

Polk County receives a disappointing Somewhat Restrictive rating for its 1.73 GPA, ranking twenty-ninth among the fifty districts studied—and sixth among the nine Florida districts examined here. Although the district receives two Bs in the Compensation category, the rest of its grades are Cs and Fs, indicating plenty of room for improvement across the board.

<b>Compensation</b> . . . . .	<b>C</b>
1. Credit for Previous Experience . . . . .	B
2. Performance Pay . . . . .	B+
3. Hardship Pay for High-Needs Schools . . . . .	C
4. Extra Pay for Shortage Subjects . . . . .	F
<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>D +</b>
9. Professional Development . . . . .	F
10. Subcontracting Operations† . . . . .	C
11. Faculty Meetings . . . . .	C
12. Teacher Leave . . . . .	C

## Compensation: C (52nd 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

Polk County's bargaining agreement allows schools to raise starting teacher salaries based on previous experience teaching in a private school or working in a subject-related profession, but is silent on whether they may do so for college-teaching experience. The contract allows schools to reward teachers on the basis of performance, is silent on whether they may reward teachers in high-needs schools, and bars them from rewarding teachers of shortage subjects.

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

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

Polk County's bargaining agreement is silent on whether school leaders may factor student performance, including test scores, into teacher evaluations; whether, during layoffs, school leaders may retain an outstanding young teacher over one with greater seniority; and whether transferring teachers may "bump" less senior teachers from their jobs. The contract does, however, require school leaders to transfer the most junior teacher in a certification area if transfers are necessary. It also requires internal job applicants to be given priority over new hires for vacant positions, giving Polk County an F for the Transfers component. Tenure rules in Polk 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: D+ (65th percentile)

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

Polk County's contract receives an F for requiring schools to give teachers salary credit for professional development activities outside the scheduled workday. The district's agreement is silent on whether school leaders may subcontract school operations to nonunion workers and whether they must grant teachers leave to attend union activities. The contract grants school leaders the flexibility to set the length of faculty meetings, but it also requires time at faculty meetings to be allotted to union matters, dropping it to a C for that component.

### Conclusion

Polk County provides limited flexibility for its school leaders in a few areas, and very little in others. Apart from two Bs in the Compensation category, there is substantial room for improvement across the board. To better equip its school leaders with the flexibility they need to manage their schools effectively, the Polk County School Board should negotiate aggressively to make contract changes that explicitly confer on school leaders the right to:

1. raise the starting salaries of teachers with all forms of relevant prior experience. (The bargaining agreement allows this for some forms but is silent on others.)
2. reward teachers in high-needs schools. (The bargaining agreement is silent on this issue.)
3. reward teachers of shortage subjects. (The bargaining agreement bars this practice.)
4. consider student performance, including test scores, when evaluating teachers. (The bargaining agreement is silent on this issue.)
5. base decisions regarding teacher layoffs on individual merit and performance rather than seniority. (The bargaining agreement 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, the bargaining agreement requires school leaders to consider seniority on two and is silent on one.)
7. subcontract (i.e., outsource) certain school operations. (The bargaining agreement is silent on this issue.)

#### In addition, the board should amend provisions that:

8. mandate that teachers be given salary credit for professional development activities outside the scheduled workday.
9. require time at faculty meetings to be allotted to union matters.

\* 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, 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.