

Wake County Schools (Raleigh, NC)

GPA: 1.98

Rank: 15th place out of 50

*Documents Examined: Board policies (Collective bargaining is not practiced in North Carolina)**

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.

Wake 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: 1.98 (15th place out of 50)

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

Wake County receives a disappointing Somewhat Restrictive rating for its 1.98 GPA, ranking fifteenth among the fifty districts studied—and last among the three North Carolina districts examined here. The district is among the “quietest” in this study; of the eleven indicators on which the district was graded, Wake County received nine Cs, all reflecting that board policy is silent on the issues in question.

Compensation: D+ (29th 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 Wake County is silent on whether schools may raise starting teacher salaries for previous experience teaching in a private school or college, or working in a subject-related profession. It is also silent on whether schools may reward teachers on the basis of performance or for teaching in high-needs schools. Board policy does, however, bar schools from paying teachers extra for teaching shortage subjects, earning the district an F for that component.

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

Personnel Policies: C+ (71st percentile)

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

Wake County board policy is silent on whether school leaders may factor student performance, including standardized test results, into teacher evaluations; whether, during layoffs, school leaders may retain an outstanding young teacher over one with greater seniority; whether schools must give internal job applicants priority over new hires for vacant positions; whether transferring teachers may “bump” less senior teachers from their jobs; and whether school leaders should select the most the most junior teacher in a certification area when transfers are necessary. The district reported to NCTQ, however, that in practice internal applicants are not given priority and senior teachers do not have bumping rights, raising Wake County’s grade for that component to a B+. Tenure rules in Wake 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: C (82nd percentile)

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

Wake County receives a C for every component in this category, due to its silence 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; 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.

Conclusion

Judging by the prevalence of Cs on its report card, all of which reflect responses of “not stated,” it appears that the Wake County Board of Education prefers silence in key areas where school leaders demand flexibility. While such reticence is clearly preferable to putting up roadblocks to effective leadership, the board could still go much further in securing for school leaders with the flexibility they need to manage their schools effectively. The Board of Education should therefore 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. (Board policy is silent on this issue.)
3. reward teachers in high-needs schools and teachers of shortage subjects. (Board policy is silent on the former and bars the latter.)
4. consider student performance, including test scores, when evaluating teachers. (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. (Board policy is silent on all three 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 North Carolina, 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.