

## August 2011 Board Watch Report Card

### Pittsburgh School Board Maintains a B- on Latest Board Watch “Report Card”

Since the launch of Board Watch in January 2009, A+ Schools has issued 10 report cards on Pittsburgh School Board governance practices based on observations of meetings by trained volunteers. The August 2011 report card is the second to be issued using a new reporting form (Version 2.0) introduced by A+ Schools last spring. The new form reflects higher expectations for the School Board’s governance and allows for more specific feedback and recommendations from Board Watch volunteers.

#### Highlights

- The overall grade is a B-, which the Board also received for the previous reporting period.
- **Focus and Mission** – the grade is a C, which means that on average, volunteers reported that the Board spent about half of the meeting managing time effectively, focusing on ways to achieve the district’s goals, and prioritizing student outcomes.
- **Transparency** – the grade is a B+, which means that on average, volunteers agreed that they felt welcome at the meeting, and understood the information presented and the rationale behind the Board’s actions.
- **Conduct** – the grade is a B+, which means that on average, volunteers reported that only some of the Board members used sarcastic or disrespectful verbal or nonverbal communication. They reported that most of the Board handled differences of opinion respectfully.
- **Role Clarity** – the grade is a C-, which means that on average, volunteers reported that the Board spent slightly less than half of their meeting time focused on how the district is making progress toward achieving its goals and using policy to create solutions to their concerns. Instead, volunteers said the Board spent slightly more than half of their meeting time focused on the details of agenda items (i.e., who participates, when items occur, what the participants will do, etc.).
- **Competency** – the grade is a B-, which means that on average, volunteers reported that a majority of Board members were prepared for the meeting, and appeared to use research, district data, existing policies and other facts to inform their opinions.

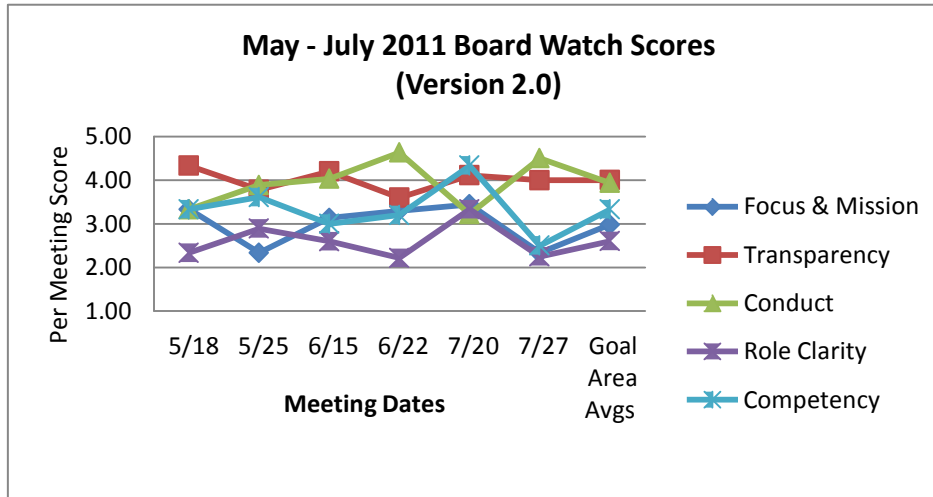


**August 2011 Report Card\* Issued to  
Pittsburgh Public Schools  
Board of Directors**

Focus and Mission	2.98	C
Transparency	4.00	B+
Conduct	3.94	B+
Role Clarity	2.60	C-
Competency	3.33	B-
Overall	3.37	B-

\* Based on revised reporting form (Version 2.0).  
All grades were calculated from the responses of  
informed citizens serving as independent observers  
and evaluators of school board governance.





Minimum Score	Grade
5.00	A+
→ 4.67	A
→ 4.33	A-
→ 4.00	B+
→ 3.67	B
→ 3.33	B-
→ 3.00	C+
→ 2.67	C
→ 2.33	C-
→ 2.00	D+
→ 1.67	D
→ 1.33	D-
→ 1.00	F

### Previous Report Card Scores based on Version 2.0 reporting form

	May 2011
Focus and Mission	3.51 B-
Transparency	4.12 B+
Conduct	4.19 B+
Role Clarity	2.85 C
Competency	3.44 B-
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.62 B-</b>

### Previous Report Card Scores based on Version 1.0 reporting form

	March 2009	June 2009	Nov 2009	Feb 2010	May 2010	Aug 2010	Nov 2010	Feb 2011	May 2011
Focus and Mission	3.28 C+	3.24 C+	3.59 B-	2.95 C	3.29 C+	3.33 B-	3.49 B-	3.63 B-	3.51 B-
Transparency	3.51 B-	4.02 B+	4.29 B+	4.14 B+	4.05 B+	4.20 B+	4.32 B+	4.47 A-	4.12 B+
Conduct	3.43 B-	3.25 C+	3.74 B	3.39 B-	3.49 B-	3.67 B	3.69 B	3.95 B	4.19 B+
Role Clarity	3.10 C+	2.98 C	3.10 C+	3.00 C+	3.05 C+	2.83 C	2.99 C	3.07 C+	2.85 C
Competency	3.28 C+	3.27 C+	3.39 B-	3.34 B-	3.31 C+	3.59 B-	3.66 B-	3.58 B-	3.44 B-
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.32 C+</b>	<b>3.35 B-</b>	<b>3.62 B-</b>	<b>3.36 B-</b>	<b>3.44 B-</b>	<b>3.53 B-</b>	<b>3.53 B-</b>	<b>3.74 B</b>	<b>3.62 B-</b>

### **Recognizing progress**

The Board has consistently received its lowest scores in the area of Role Clarity, but a workshop held over the summer to review current policies indicates that the Board is making efforts to better understand their role as policy makers. A+ Schools believes the Board should conduct ongoing professional development to learn new ways of governing as policy makers.

### **Recommendation: FOCUS AND MISSION**

The Board should concentrate efforts on improving Focus and Mission, which has been a challenge over time, particularly during discussions regarding effective time management and prioritizing student achievement.

**Main recommendation** *Implement the widely used best practice of the consent agenda as a way to minimize time and attention on administrative tasks and create more time and attention for setting and monitoring policies that create a high performing school system where all students achieve at high levels.*

By making this change, the Board could govern more effectively in the areas of Focus and Mission and Role Clarity. It would also address feedback from Board Watch volunteers over the last several reporting periods that the Board should:

- focus less on details;
- increase awareness of attempts to micromanage and avoid doing so;
- relate agenda items more to policy;
- manage time more effectively;
- limit the amount of time given to a discussion when it becomes heated;
- focus discussions on student achievement rather than community reaction;
- minimize the last-minute receipt of agenda-related information so that Board Members have ample time to review items before meetings and spend less time asking clarifying questions during meetings