

September 2012 Board Watch Report Card

Pittsburgh School Board Shows Progress in Conduct Maintains Overall B- on Board Watch "Report Card"

Highlights

The Pittsburgh School Board received an overall grade of B- on its September 2012 report card — the same overall grade the Board received on report cards issued in February and June. Other grades include:

- **Focus and Mission** – the grade increased since last June to a B-, which means that on average, volunteers reported that the Board spent some of its meeting time managing time effectively, focusing on ways to achieve the District's goals, and prioritizing student outcomes.
- **Transparency** – the grade remained 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 increased slightly to an A-, which means that on average, volunteers reported that few Board members used sarcastic, contemptuous or disrespectful verbal or nonverbal communication. Volunteers reported that most of the Board handled differences of opinion respectfully. It marks the first time the School Board has received an "A" grade in this category.
- **Role Clarity** – the grade increased slightly to a C, which means that on average, volunteers reported that the Board spent about half of its meeting time focused on monitoring the extent to which the District is making progress toward achieving its goals and using policy as a way to create solutions. It also means that on average, the Board spent slightly less than half of its meeting time focused on the details of agenda items (i.e., who participates, when items occur, what participants will do, etc.).
- **Competency** – the grade increased slightly to a B-, which means that on average, volunteers reported that about half the Board members were prepared for the meeting, appeared to use research, district data, existing policies and other facts to inform opinions, and effectively fulfilled their roles as policy makers.



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

Update on Progress Made Since the February Report Card

In April, the School Board began piloting a different meeting structure that reflected a recommendation made by A+ Schools in four previous reports: instead of reviewing each agenda item separately, Board members now use Agenda Review meetings to choose the specific topics to discuss during Legislative Sessions. All other topics are grouped together and voted on collectively by the School Board.

A+ Schools believes this decision speaks to the School Board's reaffirmation of its focus on student achievement, as the new meeting structure allows members to take more time for discussions about these issues. During the current reporting period, the grades in both Focus & Mission and Role Clarity increased slightly, with fewer volunteer comments related to the Board needing to manage time more effectively during meetings. These shifts might be related to the fact that the new meeting structure allows the School Board to use time more efficiently.

Recommendations - Make Meetings More Accessible

We believe the School Board has taken important steps toward strengthening its focus on student achievement and its role as a policymaking body during 2012, and we encourage the School Board to continue on this path.

Our current recommendations focus on the governance area of Transparency. During this reporting period, the School Board's grade increased slightly in all areas except for Transparency, where the Board's grade remained a B. The School Board previously had received a B+ on three consecutive report cards following the introduction of an updated reporting form (Version 2.0) in 2011. In this time of major school and staffing transitions, it is critical that the School Board continue to make meeting information available to the public.

We recommend that the School Board take the following action to make meetings more accessible to the general public:

- Hold all meetings in the larger Board Room. Currently, Education Committee and Agenda Review meetings are held in the smaller Board Committee Room, where fewer seats are available to the public.
- Record Education Committee meetings, either through video or audio, and make those recordings available to the public on the PPS website. Although documents from these meetings are posted online, the public would benefit from watching or listening as presenters explain that information.
- Ensure that meeting agendas are posted in advance (Legislative, Agenda Review, and Education Committee meetings).
- Post meeting minutes in a timely fashion. The date of the most recently posted Board meeting minutes is January 2012.

Since the launch of Board Watch in January 2009, A+ Schools has issued 13 report cards on Pittsburgh School Board governance practices based on observations of meetings by trained volunteers.

The September 2012 report card is the fifth report card to be issued using the new reporting form (Version 2.0) introduced by A+ Schools in 2011. Version 2.0 reflects higher expectations for the School Board's governance and allows for more specific feedback and recommendations from Board Watch volunteers.

Previous Report Card Scores based on Version 2.0 reporting form

	May 2011	Aug 2011	Feb 2012	June 2012
Focus and Mission	3.51 B-	2.98 C	3.69 B	3.20 C+
Transparency	4.12 B+	4.00 B+	4.01 B+	3.71 B
Conduct	4.19 B+	3.94 B+	4.10 B+	4.20 B+
Role Clarity	2.85 C	2.60 C-	2.81 C	2.61 C-
Competency	3.44 B-	3.33 B-	3.43 B-	3.23 C+
Overall	3.62 B-	3.37 B-	3.61 B-	3.39 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
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-
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-
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
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+
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-
Overall	3.32 C+	3.35 B-	3.62 B-	3.36 B-	3.44 B-	3.53 B-	3.53 B-	3.74 B