ISSUES&ANSWERS REL 2012–No. 123

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Regional Educational Laboratory

Changes in student populations and teacher workforce in low-performing Chicago schools targeted for reform

Summary

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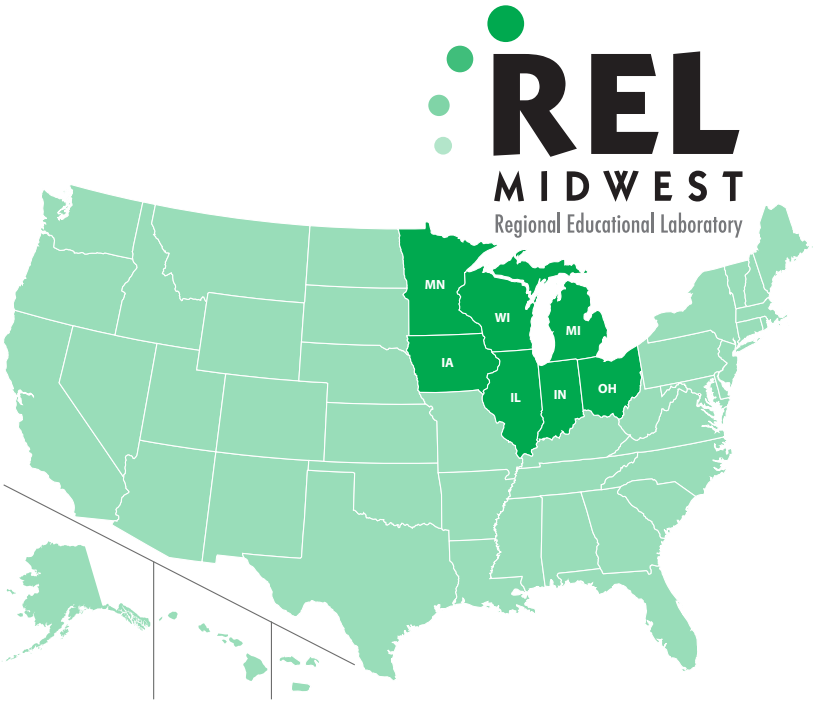

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Summary

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Changes in student populations and teacher workforce in low-performing Chicago schools targeted for reform

This report examines changes in student populations and teacher workforce in 31 Chicago public schools selected for district-led turnaround reforms that were intended to dramatically improve performance in chronically low-performing schools. Changes in student population and teacher workforce are measured using data for the year before the intervention and the year after.

"Turning around" chronically low-performing schools is of increasing interest to educators and policymakers, as highlighted by the U.S. Department of Education's (2010) recent call to rapidly improve the nation's 5,000 lowest performing schools. Yet there is little rigorous research on changes in student populations and teacher workforce in schools undergoing interventions to improve low-performing schools. To fill this gap, this study examines turnaround intervention models intended to rapidly improve student performance in chronically low-performing schools in the Chicago Public Schools district. It analyzes the changes in student populations and teacher workforce in 31 public schools in Chicago selected for district-led reform interventions for chronically low-performing schools over 1997–2010.

This study focused on five district-level models designed to dramatically improve school performance in a short time:

- Reconstitution (seven high schools).
- School closure and restart (six elementary schools and two high schools).
- School Turnaround Specialist Program (STSP; four elementary schools).
- Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL; seven elementary schools and one high school).
- Office of School Improvement[1] (OSI; two elementary schools and two high schools).

All five models relied on changing the school leadership; this was the only lever of change under the STSP model. The other four models relied on changing both the staffing and the leadership. School closure and restart was the most drastic model. In this model, students were moved to other schools, new governance was in place when schools reopened, and student enrollment changed from assignment by neighborhood residence to an application and lottery system. In most cases, these schools reopened a few grades at a time and added a grade each year until the full grade structure was in place.

Two research questions guided the study:

- Did the characteristics of students change in the intervention schools?
- Did the characteristics of teachers change in the intervention schools?

For the first research question, descriptive analyses compared students in the school the

fall before the intervention with students in the same grades in the fall after the intervention began. For the second, descriptive analyses compared the teacher workforce in these schools for the same periods. These descriptive analyses show school-by-school changes in students and teachers organized around the intervention models. The analyses are based on the entire population of students and teachers at each school and are not statistical estimates.

Comparing student enrollment the fall before the intervention and the fall after the intervention shows that:

- Twenty-three of 31 schools served fewer students by grade after the intervention, with five schools serving at least a quarter fewer students. Four of the schools with the largest declines in enrollment were part of the closure and restart model.

- Except for schools in the closure and restart model, schools reenrolled 55–89 percent of students eligible to reenroll. The rates were similar to reenrollment rates in the years before intervention.

- Schools in the closure and restart model reenrolled 0–47 percent of students eligible to reenroll. Schools in this model were closed for one or two years before opening again, did not serve all the same grade levels when they reopened, and held citywide enrollment lotteries, which made it difficult for students to reenroll.

- The composition of the student body—in race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and special education status—in intervention schools was largely similar before and after the interventions in all models except for the closure and restart model. In that model, schools after intervention served a larger percentage of economically advantaged students and of students with higher prior achievement levels, and smaller percentages of special education students and of students residing in the neighborhood near the school.

Comparing the teacher workforce the year before the intervention and the year after the intervention shows that:

- The extent of teacher rehiring varied with the intervention model. Schools in the reconstitution model rehired 42–66 percent of teachers, and schools in the STSP model retained 44–80 percent. Schools in the closure and restart, AUSL, and OSI models rehired just 0–24 percent of teachers.

- In all intervention models, the teacher workforce was more likely to be White, younger, and less experienced and more likely to have provisional certification after intervention than before it.

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Note

1. Formerly Office of School Turnaround.

Reference

U.S. Department of Education. (2010). *Achieving dramatic school improvement: an exploratory study.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved April 28, 2011, from www.wested.org/online_pubs/dramatic-improvement-report.pdf.