

Effects of a District-Managed Restart Strategy for Low-Performing Schools in Texas

The Texas Education Agency offers grants for districts to implement school turnaround strategies at low-performing schools.¹ Districts that receive these grants can implement a school turnaround strategy (referred to as a district-managed restart strategy) that includes replacing principals and teachers at schools that the district identifies as struggling and needing additional support.² From 2015/16 to 2018/19, 29 schools across four urban and suburban districts in Texas implemented a district-managed restart strategy in three cohorts: one district began in 2015/16, another in 2017/18, and two in 2018/19. This study used longitudinal administrative data and interviews with district and school leaders to examine implementation of the restart strategy and its effects on teacher and principal mobility, student achievement, and student attendance. State leaders can use the results of this study to make decisions about continuing to offer grants for districts to implement the district-managed restart strategy in their low-performing schools.

Key findings

- **Nearly 80 percent of the teachers at schools in the year before implementation of the restart strategy left before the beginning of the restart school year.** Among teachers employed at schools in the year before implementation, 51 percent relocated to a different school within the same district, 15 percent relocated to a different district, and 13 percent were not teaching in a Texas public school the following year.
- **Educators who arrived at restart schools were more likely to have more than three years of experience and to have an advanced degree than those who left or stayed.** Seventy percent of principals and teachers who arrived at restart schools had more than three years of professional experience, compared with 58 percent of principals and teachers who left and 52 percent of teachers who stayed.
- **Student achievement and attendance improved after schools implemented the restart strategy.** Restart schools had higher student reading and math achievement than matched comparison schools in the first two years of implementing the restart strategy. Restart schools also had higher student attendance in the first year of implementation but not in the second year.
- **Nearly all restart schools met accountability standards within the first three years of implementation.** After one year of implementation, 86 percent of restart schools in the 2015/16 cohort and 100 percent of schools in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 cohorts met state accountability standards. For the 2015/16 cohort, the only cohort for which data were available for three years after implementation, this improvement was sustained.
- **Interviews with district and school leaders suggested that recruiting high-performing teachers to relocate to restart schools was time consuming and that the grant-funded salary stipend might not have been a large enough incentive.** In some restart schools, teaching positions were unfilled at the beginning of the year as leaders searched for high-performing teachers.

1. Before 2018/19, low-performing schools were defined as those with an Improvement Required rating (see https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/A%20F%20Resources_final.pdf). The current definition is based on ratings in the Closing the Gap domain in the state accountability system (see <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/chapter-4-2021-closing-the-gaps-domain.pdf>).

2. See <https://www.centerforschoolactions.org/restart-struggling-school>.