

Lessons Learned From a Statewide District-Managed Restart Strategy for Low-Performing Schools in Texas

The Texas Education Agency offers grants for districts, through the [Texas School Action Fund](#), to implement one of four school turnaround strategies at low-performing schools.¹ One of these four strategies districts can choose to implement is the district-managed restart strategy. In Texas, districts can implement the restart strategy as a holistic and comprehensive approach that includes five core components:²



▶ **Strategic staffing.** The district uses this approach to replace principals or replace principals and at least 50 percent of teachers and incentivize high-performing principals and teachers to transfer to low-performing schools.



▶ **Instructional excellence and capacity building for teachers and leaders.** Restart schools monitor student data continuously and maintain professional learning communities that routinely review student data.



▶ **Additional learning time.** Restart schools can either add more days to the school year or extend the school day with free afterschool enrichment activities.



▶ **Social and emotional learning supports.** Restart schools select a social and emotional learning program that focuses on improving school culture via student–adult relationship building, creating a safe learning environment and restorative discipline practices.



▶ **Strong partnerships with family and community organizations.** The district forms partnerships based on the specific needs of each school.

Between 2015/16 and 2018/19, 29 Texas schools across four districts implemented the district-managed restart strategy. The Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest's [School Improvement Research Partnership](#) with the Texas Education Agency conducted a study, [Effects of a District-Managed Restart Strategy for Low-Performing Schools in Texas](#), to better understand the implementation and effects of the district-managed restart strategy on principal and teacher mobility and student achievement and attendance.

Key findings for education leaders

School average achievement and attendance improved.

- In the first two years of the district-managed restart strategy, participating schools had higher average student reading and mathematics achievement when compared to schools with similar characteristics.
- Participating schools also had higher average student attendance when compared to schools with similar characteristics. The estimated increases in student attendance were equivalent to approximately 9 days of instruction per student in year 1 and 13 days of instruction per student in year 2. This increase was only significant in year 1; attendance rates in restart schools were not statistically different from comparison schools at the start of the second year of implementation.³

Nearly all restart schools met accountability standards within three years of implementation.

- After one year of implementation, 86 percent of schools in the 2015/16 cohort and 100 percent of schools in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 cohorts met state accountability standards.

Teachers who arrived at restart schools were more experienced.



35% of educators who arrived at restart schools had an **advanced degree** compared to **30% of educators** who left in the year before the restart year.

70% of educators who arrived at restart schools had **more than three years of professional experience** compared to **58% of educators** who left in the year before the restart year.

Principal and teacher mobility stabilized in the second year of implementing the restart strategy.

- After an initial spike in principal and teacher mobility prior to the start of the restart school year, principal and teacher mobility returned to levels that were consistent with mobility in Texas schools with similar characteristics.

Considerations for Education Leaders

Consider expanding the district-managed restart strategy.

Given that nearly all the restart schools met accountability standards and improved student achievement and attendance following implementation, change makers may consider expanding the district-managed restart strategy.

Consider strategies for increasing the supply of high-performing teachers in low-performing schools.

Recruiting and retaining teachers at restart schools was challenging. District and school leaders reported the \$10,000 annual grant-funded stipend was not enough for some teachers to incentivize the extra teaching time, frequent data meetings, professional learning community meetings, and relocation to a restart school.

Consider potential unintended effects of teacher mobility.

Future research is needed to understand the effect of the restart strategy on non-restart schools in the same district. The study did not investigate what happened at the schools that received the teachers who left a restart school prior to the implementation year or schools that lost teachers to a restarting school in the district.

Consider collecting data and conducting additional research on implementation of the five components of the restart strategy.

This restart strategy was a comprehensive and holistic turnaround approach with five core components. A more in-depth examination of implementation with additional years of data could provide useful “lessons learned” for districts that are considering implementing the strategy or that are in the early phases of its implementation.

Read our blog from Jolee Healey, deputy chief of priority schools and leadership development at Dallas Independent School District, where she shares her perspective and advice on implementing this school turnaround strategy.



Visit this [REL Southwest infographic](#) to learn about the evidence behind strategic school actions and school improvement strategies and [view our videos](#) on understanding and applying the evidence base for restarting a struggling school.

¹ Prior to 2018/19, low-performing schools were defined as those schools 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 Prior to 2018/19, low-performing schools were defined as those schools 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>).

³ Findings apply to the first two cohorts of restart schools because second-year data were not available for the third cohort.