



# Highlighting the evidence behind strategic school actions and school improvement strategies

REL SOUTHWEST | Regional Educational Laboratory

Understanding the evidence behind whole-school interventions and school improvement strategies can help states develop effective policy and leverage resources to help turn around the lowest performing schools and help districts select evidence-based strategies aligned to school needs. This resource provides an overview of four **strategic school actions**, or whole-school interventions for improving student outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Through the [Southwest School Improvement Research Partnership](#), Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest works with the Texas Education Agency and other partners to support high-quality schools across Texas. To inform school improvement activities statewide, the partnership reviewed research evidence about the four strategic school actions shown in the graphic. The partnership also reviewed evidence about two particular school improvement strategies that align with support opportunities under the [Texas School Action Fund](#): high-dosage tutoring and expanded learning time.

Click on each school action or strategy in the graphic to learn more about the evidence.<sup>2</sup> The **“Learn More”** buttons will take you to REL Southwest’s video about that particular school improvement action or strategy.

Policymakers can use this information to support evidence-based decisionmaking. State and district leaders can use this information to help administrators, school improvement coaches, and other individuals supporting school improvement efforts better understand the evidence behind school improvement interventions and be more intentional about adopting strategies to support specific school needs.

## Strategic School Actions



### Create a new school

Creating a new school involves opening a new school that meets the needs of the community’s students.

*Evidence highlight:*

- ▶ A study found that newly opened small schools of choice in New York City had higher graduation rates among students of color than other schools in the district.<sup>3</sup>

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### Redesign a school

Redesigning a school involves working with an experienced yet innovative school leader to develop a new instructional model.

*Evidence highlight:*

- ▶ A study of restructured schools in Philadelphia found that schools that received substantial professional development and district supervision saw improved math scores for four years and improved reading scores for one year after restructuring.<sup>4</sup>

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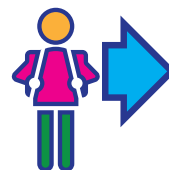
### Restart a school

Restarting a school involves hiring new leadership, faculty, and staff to turn around an existing school.

*Evidence highlight:*

- ▶ A study of schools receiving School Improvement Grants, including grants for restarting schools, found teachers reported improvements in professional development and leadership after three years.<sup>5</sup>

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### Reassign students

Reassigning students involves moving students from a closing school to a high-performing school and supporting students during the transition.

*Evidence highlight:*

- ▶ In one study, Chicago public elementary schools that implemented one of five school turnaround practices, including reassigning students to high-performing schools, saw increased math and reading gains among students during a two- to four-year period.<sup>6</sup>

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## Improvement Practices



### High-dosage tutoring

High-dosage tutoring means providing one-on-one or small-group support to students at least three times per week.

#### Evidence highlight:

- ▶ One study found that participants in the SAGA Tutorial Program, which includes individualized math instruction, had improved grades, test scores, and course completion rates after one year.<sup>7</sup>



### Expanded learning time

Expanded learning time means providing more instructional time for students than the traditional school day (for example, providing afterschool programming).

#### Evidence highlight:

- ▶ A review that analyzed data from multiple studies found that participating in afterschool programs may have several benefits, including improved grades, higher self-esteem, and reduced drug use.<sup>8</sup>

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## Related Resources

Want to learn more about school improvement strategies? Browse these resources from REL Southwest and the REL network:

- ▶ Learn more about REL Southwest's evidence scan and [six-part video series](#).
- ▶ REL Southwest is currently studying the outcomes for one of Texas Education Agency's strategic school actions (school restart). [Learn more](#) about this upcoming report.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Center for School Actions at the Texas Education Agency. (n.d.). *School actions overview*. <https://www.centerforschoolactions.org/actions>

<sup>2</sup> Conducting rigorous evaluation of school turnaround models is extremely difficult, therefore the language in this infographic discussing evidence of the effects of turnaround models does not attribute positive outcomes specifically to school improvement.

<sup>3</sup> Bloom, H., & Unterman, R. (2013). *Sustained progress: New findings about the effectiveness and operation of small public high schools of choice in New York City*. MDRC.

<sup>4</sup> Gill, B., Zimmer, R., Christman, J., & Blanc, S. (2007). *State takeover, school restructuring, private management, and student achievement in Philadelphia*. RAND Corporation.

<sup>5</sup> Le Floch, K. C., O'Day, J., Birman, B., Hurlburt, S., Nayfack, M., Halloran, C., Boyle, A., Brown, S., Mercado-Garcia, D., Goff, R., Rosenberg, L., & Hulsey, L. (2016). *Case studies of schools receiving School Improvement Grants. Final report*. (NCEE 2016-4002). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED565615.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> de la Torre, M., Allensworth, E., Jagesic, S., Sebastian, J., Salmonowicz, M., Meyers, C., & Gerdeman, R. D. (2013). *Turning around low-performing schools in Chicago*. University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School.

<sup>7</sup> Ander, R., Guyran, J., & Ludwig, J. (2016). *Improving academic outcomes for disadvantaged students: Scaling up individualized tutorials* (Policy Proposal 2016-02). Brookings Institution.

<sup>8</sup> Dulak, J. A., & Weissburg, R. P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills*. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.