



Protecting Texas Students from Flawed State Takeover Policies

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When the Texas Education Agency (TEA) took over the Houston Independent School District (HISD) in 2023, it marked the largest state takeover in Texas history. As a result, the TEA Commissioner Mike Morath appointed a board of trustees and a new superintendent, Mike Miles. While Superintendent Mike Miles has claimed success based on overall test score improvements, a detailed analysis of school-by-school data reveals troubling disparities that undermine these claims.

A state takeover of a locally controlled public school system can occur when the school system is showing consistently poor levels of academic performance. Previous research by the [Brookings Institute](#) and others indicate that they do not always improve student academic performance. In Houston's case, the narrative of success requires closer examination.

Outcomes of the HISD Takeover

Under Miles' leadership HISD has seen some gains in standardized test scores. Miles has been praised by many as 'turning things around' for the district and recently defended his \$126,000 annual bonus as "well deserved" due to the successes in student achievement in the first year of the state takeover. Miles pointed to his comprehensive reform, New Education System, that focused on a major overhaul to school programming. While the reforms include components that have been welcomed such as higher teacher pay, the program has also faced intense public scrutiny for its micro-managing of teachers' schedules, overreliance on short, timed lessons, and rushed implementation of a new math curriculum called Eureka Math.

An analysis of the data shows that Miles' evaluation of his success may be overlooking important negative trends. For example, school by [school data on STAAR scores](#) for K-8 students for 2021-2024 shows that historically higher performing schools saw substantial declines in their math scores and these declines were greater for economically disadvantaged students across the district.

Who are Comprehensive Reforms Hurting at HISD?

It can be difficult to capture whether a reform is successful if we use a limited scope to evaluate educational outcomes. Miles' recent positive evaluation by the state appointed board of managers highlighted the improved measures of student achievement that were attributed to his new system. While there was an increase in the overall percentage of students who "met expectations" at the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end of course exams, most schools across the district continue to report that most of their students are not meeting expectations in math both before and during the Miles administration.

The **data we analyzed** shows that historically higher performing schools were also more likely to see a **decrease** in the percentage of their students who are at “meets expectations” for their STAAR math performance. In some cases, these declines were **very large**. Alarming, the higher the school performed in 2023, the steeper the decline in their 2024 scores.

One of the goals of the Miles administration is equity in educational performance across schools. This is not what occurred in the 2024 STAAR math results. The numbers show that economically disadvantaged students are **struggling more** in 2024, especially in historically higher performing schools, deepening the class educational divide within these schools.

Policy Recommendations

Given the significant shift from local governance to state control in the Houston Independent School District (HISD), it is important to have a comprehensive assessment of substantial changes to educational policies and curriculum. While the Miles administration has praised the improved scores in the district, a closer look at school-by-school data of HISD suggests that the presentation of those results may conceal disparities in other areas.

More time is needed to confirm if the whole scale reforms initiated during the state takeover of HISD are successful in improving student achievement. Before using HISD as a model for future takeovers, state and district education leaders need to:

- **Strengthen accountability by reporting school-level data.** More thorough and transparent assessments **of school-by-school data in different subject areas** are needed to evaluate educational outcomes. It's essential to examine achievement gaps across multiple measures to ensure that no group of students is unfairly affected by the changes introduced during the takeover. The Texas Education Agency and district leaders should be required to examine test score data for each school, broken down by race, income level, and English learner status.
- **Tailor reforms based on school-specific needs.** Comprehensive reforms that use a “one size fits all” approach may be harming higher performing schools. **Evaluating what works for some schools and doesn't work for others** is important to ensure that we don't continue to see the decline in test scores for certain subject areas that we are seeing in higher performing schools.
- **Better understand what is driving changes we observe.** We need to be cautious about accepting all aspects of comprehensive reform as successful if we cannot attribute them to performance. Ensure that any reported improvements under state-appointed leadership are supported by evidence linking them to specific interventions, rather than broader trends.
- **Involve families and educators in decision-making.** Create regular opportunities for teachers, parents, and students to give input on major policy decisions and reforms. This helps build trust and ensures that those closest to the classroom have a voice in shaping the future of their schools.

Before we point to the ‘success’ of the state takeover of HISD as an example for others to follow, more data is needed to confirm if there is in fact resounding success or stalled progress.