



## Keeping Teachers to Maintain Student Achievement in State Takeovers

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Since 1989, there have been **over 100 state takeovers of public-school systems**, a process in which state officials replace the locally elected school board with state appointed representatives to manage the school district. Since the Texas state takeover of the Houston Independent School District (HISD), the state-appointed Superintendent Mike Miles has implemented sweeping reforms that directly impact teachers, including a transition to **performance based pay increase, a new evaluation system, and a rigid implementation of district curriculum**. As a result, **an unprecedented number of veteran teachers** have left the school district. In the 2024-2025 school year alone, the district lost over 3,500 teachers. To fill these slots, the district has increased the number of uncertified and inexperienced teachers.

Data shows **mixed results** from the 13 state takeovers of school districts in Texas. While some takeovers reduced the number of failing schools, others ended with more failing schools than they started with, and alarmingly, some ended with the complete dissolution of the school district.

Research shows that teacher turnover **negatively impacts student success** for all students in a school. In other words, turnover doesn't just impact the classroom where a teacher exited but contributes to overall instability of the entire school. Understanding which factors contribute to failed reforms is important to avoid irreversible damage to school districts.

### Teacher Turnover Hurts Student Achievement

Given the negative impact of teacher turnover on student achievement in **other school districts**, it is important to evaluate how teacher turnover has impacted student achievement at HISD. We analyzed data on teacher departures from the district for the 2024-2025 school year combined with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) reported State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test scores for math, reading, and science for all K-8 schools across the district to look at the relationship between teacher turnover and student achievement. The data shows a clear pattern: the higher the percentage of teachers who have left the school, the lower the test scores. We found this pattern for every metric for the STAAR performance, including the percentage of students who are at 'approaches expectations,' 'meets expectations,' and 'masters expectations,' and across all three subjects.

The data shows that this difference is large: for every 10% of its teaching workforce that a HISD school loses on average, the percentage of students at 'meets expectations' drops by roughly 3 points across subjects. With the average campus at HISD losing one-third of its teachers, and some losing up to 85%, these declines are cause for serious concern.

The data also shows that the percentage of teachers leaving is negatively related to growth in STAAR test scores from year to year. We found that the higher the percentage of teachers who left HISD, the lower the change in scores from the 2023-2024 school year to the 2024-2025 school year across all subjects.

## Policy Recommendations

Teacher turnover contributes to instability in the classroom, and our data analysis shows that it also contributes to lower scores in standardized testing at HISD schools. Teachers who have left the district have cited **decreased autonomy, disagreements with new reforms, and a toxic workplace environment as their primary reasons for leaving**. To retain veteran teachers and reduce disruption for students, school districts like HISD that have experienced a state takeover must address teacher burnout to avoid further exodus of certified teaching staff.

School districts should:

- **Provide a better provision of teacher stipends.** In the 2025-2026 school year, HISD transitioned to a new teacher compensation system. Teacher of the year awards were dropped, and compensation is now linked to student performance. However, teacher pay linked to student performance on standardized tests is not ideal for teacher morale or student achievement. This is important given that research shows that programs that incorporate professional development and focus on more than just standardized test scores **have shown a greater impact**. There is also **not much evidence** that shows that performance pay makes teachers more effective. Districts can continue to remain competitive in pay offering additional pay through stipends pegged to other indicators. Providing better stipends to a wider range of educators such as team leads, coaches, mentors, and experienced or highly qualified teachers, would attract and retain a larger pool of skilled staff. Stipends should also have more attainable number of hours required to receive it.
- **Differentiate evaluation systems for specialized educators.** Under the reforms in HISD, all teachers have been evaluated under a similar system, and have had similar lesson plans and schedules regardless of their student population. Solutions to this might include removing the expectation of being at the same pace within the lesson cycle and pacing calendar as other teachers. They may also be evaluated for different types of outcomes as well. For example, this might include use of content language supports and scaffolds and cultural responsiveness for teachers of multi-lingual learners, or emotional responsiveness and differentiation instead of student mastery for special education teachers.
- **Offer an alternative academic calendar to limit teacher burnout.** Surrounding districts to HISD have opted for an alternative academic calendar with shorter summers, but more time off throughout the year. In other districts, teachers get a week off in October and February, resulting in a week off almost every month when taking holidays into account. Some have even switched to a four-day week. This can drive teachers to districts with more reasonable workloads.

The perceived success of the state takeover at HISD has led district leaders to minimize the negative impact of teacher retention. Reforms without certified and experienced teachers to help students navigate substantive changes to curriculum and policies may be undermining any possibility for improvement. School success should not only be based on test scores, but on educational growth, and teacher retention is an important component of that. Experienced, high-quality teachers are essential to student learning.