

The Problem of Human Capital State Implementation of Federal School Turnaround Principles

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In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education offered states waivers to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). These waivers gave flexibility for some of the law's more problematic requirements in return for assisting districts in implementing key principles, including principles for turning around the lowest achieving schools. Which school turnaround principles could states implement supports for quickly and which were challenging? Did implementation differ based on whether a state's waiver was approved by the time of the survey (January 11, 2013)? In other words, could difficulties implementing supports for some principles be a barrier to receiving a waiver?

In this study's 2013 survey of school-turnaround leaders in all 50 states, supports for the school turnaround principle "Using data to inform instruction ..." were implemented fully by the most respondents (60%). Fewer participants (less than 33%) reported their state had fully implemented supports for principles focusing on evaluating and replacing staff:

- Reviewing the quality of principals (32% fully implemented)
- Reviewing the quality of all staff (22% fully implemented)
- Retaining only the staff determined to be effective (19% fully implemented)
- Preventing ineffective teachers from transferring (9% fully implemented)

Factor analysis resulted in three dimensions, which we called "staffing," "climate," and "instructional day." Significantly fewer states without successful waiver applications had implemented assistance for the dimension we called "staffing."

Our analysis of the data using *t*-test and Benjamini-Hochberg corrections to account for multiple comparisons showed similar results. Only three items showed statistically significant differences after the correction: reviewing the quality of all staff, retaining only staff determined to be effective, and preventing ineffective teachers from transferring to other schools. All of these items were in the dimension "staffing."

Recommendations: Organizations such as federal agencies, nonprofits, and universities might focus on helping states and districts with these staffing issues. In addition, policymakers at the federal level might rethink these requirements, perhaps balancing evaluation and reassignment with developing and recruiting excellent teachers before reassignment is necessary. Other remedies will likely emerge from additional research on staffing issues and human capital in schools.



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