

The Going Gets Tough State Capacity To Support 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 those for turning around the lowest achieving schools. To what degree did state school turnaround leaders report their states could provide support for federal school turnaround principles? Has state capacity for support changed over time?

This study compares 2013 and 2014 survey data from school turnaround leaders in all 50 states.

Overall, results showed that:

- In 2014, less than 50 percent of the state responses showed full implementation of supports for turnaround; percentages ranged from 11 percent for “retaining only effective teachers” to 38 percent for “evaluating teachers based on student achievement.”
- In 2013, for all but one survey item, fewer than half of the states reported full implementation of supports. The only exception was “using data to inform continuous improvement” (60%).
- In both 2013 and 2014, the item that had the lowest percentage was “retaining only effective teachers” (19%).

What changed in the survey results from 2013 to 2014?

- Percentages of states reporting full implementation decreased for all but one survey item (i.e., “implementing teacher evaluation systems”) but the increase was not statistically significant.
 - Decreases for one item (i.e., “providing the principal with operational flexibility”) were statistically significant using the Benjamini-Hochberg correction ($p = .001$).
 - The largest percentage point decline was for “using data to inform instruction,” a difference that was statistically significant at $p = .011$ but was not significant using the Benjamini-Hochberg correction.
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Recommendations: Organizations such as federal agencies, nonprofits, and universities might focus on helping states support school turnaround. In addition, policymakers at the federal level might take current state capacity into account as they reformulate the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.



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