

Inside a TEA Takeover

Notes from virtual panel with education advocates, in partnership with Austin Council of PTAs
Sept. 27, 2025, 10-11:30 a.m.

What can trigger a takeover?

- 1) Academic performance. If any one school gets five “F” ratings in a row, the commissioner can close the campus and appoint a new board of managers for the district, replacing the democratically elected board.
 - 2) Special education/non-compliance with IDEA
 - 3) Financial reasons
- In the past, commissioners did not take over districts very frequently, but now it is happening more. However, there appears to be bias and selectivity in which districts the state takes over, as the districts that have been taken over, such as Houston ISD, Edgewood ISD, and Beaumont ISD are disproportionately urban districts with higher poverty rates that serve mostly students of color.
 - There have been suburban school districts that have struggled that have not faced the same type of interventions by the state. Takeovers almost never happen in affluent or majority white districts.
 - The state is constitutionally required to provide and maintain a free and efficient system of public education. However, the state is putting all the accountability for fulfilling that duty on the principals, superintendents, school board, etc., who increasingly do not have control over the system. The state and TEA have not been held accountable for their failures.
 - It is the state’s responsibility to create a workforce of educators, but there is a shortage of the qualified teachers, SPED teachers, school counselors and educational psychologists that are needed to meet the diverse needs of their students.
 - TEA has a history of botched testing, missed scoring items, and mismanaged procurement of contractors. Also, in 2018 the U.S. Department of Education found that TEA had violated IDEA by putting an illegal limit on the number of students who could receive special education services.

What have been the effects of TEA takeovers in other districts?

Takeovers have been framed as a way to improve performance, but educators and parents have experienced something different.

- Beaumont ISD
 - The district was taken over from 2016-2020 for financial reasons because the CFO embezzled \$8 million.

- The board was replaced with people who had fiscal backgrounds and no interest or training in education.
- 100 teachers left the district for job security, and Beaumont ISD is still in a hole trying to find certified teachers to fill that gap.
- Current board president Thomas Sigee said that TEA left the district “in shambles” and fixed nothing. The district saw its number of failing schools increase from four to eight during the takeover.
- Houston ISD
 - The district was taken over in 2023 due to poor academic performance. The elected board of trustees was replaced with a board of managers, and TEA appointed a new superintendent, Mike Miles.
 - Immediately after the takeover there was a purge of the district central office and of certified teachers at the targeted campuses. Additionally, all the targeted campuses lost their libraries and janitorial staff was reduced.
 - Most significantly, wraparound services were gutted at all campuses and replaced with “sunrise centers” scattered around the district that are not able to meet as many students’ needs. Wraparound services are systems of support that help students get their basic physical and mental health needs met, including nutrition and housing.
 - The takeover has led to high employee turnover.
 - Since the takeover in June 2023, there have been at least 177 principal changes across 156 campuses.
 - Around 8,000 teachers have left the district. In the first two years of the takeover yearly teacher departures rose by 48% compared to the previous five years.
 - Student enrollment declined by about 4% in the first two years of the takeover, compared to 2% each year in the five years prior. The district projects a 6,500 student decline in 2025-26, or nearly 4%.
 - The standardized curriculum that has been implemented at many schools has been criticized for its scripted, timed lessons that focus only on test prep and give teachers less autonomy.
 - The takeover reforms have spread beyond the targeted schools. Durham Elementary went from a “B” to a “C” rating and had their curriculum replaced by the district curriculum. They lost their library, wraparound services, and after-school tutoring, and have seen high turnover: since August 2025, 8 out of 32 teachers have left or been reassigned, and 28 out of 510 students have left. Rev. Trey Comstock, who has children at Durham, said Superintendent Miles “was on campus for an hour, and by the end of the day two of the top-performing teachers were gone, reassigned.”
 - Overall, the HISD takeover was described as “catastrophic.” Panelists spoke of how the takeover has created chaos in schools and a culture marked by hostility, stress, and fear. Community trust has been eroded and family engagement has declined.

Have test scores improved under the TEA takeover in Houston?

Superintendent Miles has touted the improvements for Houston's failing schools as "historic." Since 2023, the number of D- and F-rated schools dropped from 121 to 18, and no campuses received an "F" in 2025. However, more than one in five campuses dropped by at least one letter grade in 2025.

Texas Monthly investigated these gains and reported that they may have more to do with holding students back at targeted schools and not offering more advanced math and science courses, even though some students are prepared for those classes. While this might boost scores and raise ratings, it is disproportionately harming students of color and affecting their college and career readiness.

Ruth Kravetz of Community Voices for Public Education echoed this finding. She said that Miles removed 70-85% of 9th-graders from biology and put them in remedial science so only honors students took biology, leading to a huge jump in scores, at the great expense of Black and brown students who are being denied access to AP courses. He also cancelled Algebra for 8th-graders at schools serving poor Black and brown students and put them in lower math course, and took 50 to 80% of high school juniors out of Algebra II and put them in remedial algebraic reasoning, which boosted middle school and high school ratings.

Miles recently received a bonus of \$173,660 based on his annual performance evaluation. The board also approved a salary increase of \$82,000, bringing his overall salary to \$462,000.

What can we do?

- Engage the media. In Houston, it has been key to engage the media and cultivate relationships with journalists who are keeping records and reporting on everything that's going on during the takeover. Parents, teachers, and students need to be empowered to speak to the media about what's happening at their schools.
- Engage with every elected official from the city council to the state legislature and encourage them to speak on this issue.
- Compliance and being quiet will not save you. Be persistent but polite and document everything you see.
- You don't need to spend 100 hours on this issue, but you can find a niche and focus on that.
- Make connections with schools across the city, find out what is happening there and what support people need in order to advocate for their schools. Miles has dismissed concerns by saying it's only affluent families that are complaining, and that other families are happy, but in truth other families may not have the time or resources to be able to speak up.