

Monitor Effectiveness in Texas Public Schools

College Station, TX- A recent study in the Department of Political Science at Texas A&M University finds third party monitors assigned to underperforming school districts by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to have little to no effect on improving student performance. The study includes 169 Texas school districts that received a monitor between 1993 and 2010. School districts who have received monitors over the last five years have experienced a slight increase in state standardized test scores, but this gain dissipates over longer periods of time. Schools monitored between 1993 and 2005 do not appear to have any improvement in test scores.

Results from the study indicate no improvements were seen in four other performance indicators examined in the study: graduation rates, college-readiness, dropout rates, and attendance rates. While monitors may be learning how to prove a slight performance increase in the most salient performance indicator quickly, long term gains are seldom achieved through the costly monitoring program by low performing schools. Of the 169 districts (including charter schools) examined in this study, 28 (17%) have closed, and many have received multiple monitors but continue to see little improvement. “The current system may be related to the phenomenon of ‘too little, too late’,” said Amanda Rutherford, who led the study. “Monitor interviews indicated a need for earlier intervention and additional training, without which may deem a costly program inefficient.”

The study looks beyond whether improvements were made by districts that received a monitor to examine whether traits of individual monitors made a difference in turning around low performing schools. An analysis of monitors in schools shows that different monitor backgrounds often led to different changes for district performance. Monitors with experience as professional education consultants were most effective at increasing standardized test pass rates while monitors who previously acted as both a school principal and district superintendent were most successful at raising college-readiness. These findings have important implications for K-12 accountability systems in the state of Texas as school face lower budgets and continued pressure to meet performance standards. The study is forthcoming in the *American Review of Public Administration*.

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