

Houston school closings disproportionately displaced poor and black students

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The Houston Independent School District's school closures between 2003 and 2010 disproportionately displaced poor and black students, according to a new research brief from Rice University's Houston Education Research Consortium.

The researchers found that 91 percent of students in schools that were closed were economically disadvantaged (meaning they qualified for free or reduced meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program), compared with 80 percent in HISD as a whole; and 43 percent of students affected by those [school](#) closures were black, even though only 27 percent of HISD's students were black.

Lead author Kori Stroub, a researcher for HERC, and co-author Meredith Richards, an assistant professor in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at Southern Methodist University, also examined whether students from the closed schools transferred to high-performing schools (those in the top third of HISD schools based on Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or TAKS, test scores) or low-performing schools (those in the bottom third of HISD schools based on TAKS scores).

Fifty-two percent of displaced students transferred to schools in the bottom third of the district in math achievement and 43 percent of displaced students transferred to schools in the bottom third of HISD in reading achievement. Only 21 percent of displaced students transferred to high-performing schools in terms of math achievement and 18 percent

transferred to schools with high reading achievement. In addition, high-achieving students (those in the top third of HISD students) were 1.6 times more likely to transfer to high-performing schools than low-achieving students (those in the bottom third of HISD students). However, low- and high-achieving students were about equally likely to transfer to low-performing schools (55 percent and 49 percent, respectively).

Breaking things down by race, the researchers found that 51 percent of displaced white students transferred to schools that ranked in the top third of schools in terms of achievement and only 28 percent of black students and 20 percent of Hispanic students transferred to high-achieving campuses. By comparison, 26 percent of displaced white students, 42 percent of displaced black students and 53 percent of displaced Hispanic students transferred to low-achieving schools.

"It is particularly troubling that not only are economically disadvantaged and [black students](#) more likely to experience closures, but they are the least likely to subsequently transfer to the types of high-performing schools that are critical to their future academic success," Richards said.

The researchers also focused on the impact of [school closures](#) on student achievement over time, as measured by the math and reading TAKS scores of the displaced students and the type of school to which they transferred. The results include:

Overall:

- During their first year at a new school, displaced students got 1.3 more questions correct on their math TAKS compared with nondisplaced students. There was no significant change in their reading TAKS results.
- In the years following closure, displaced students had slower

academic progress than their nondisplaced peers. By their fourth year at a new school, displaced students got 0.3 fewer questions correct on their math TAKS and one fewer question correct on their reading TAKS compared with nondisplaced students.

Students that transferred to low-performing schools:

- During their first year at a new school, there was no effect on the math TAKS scores of displaced students, but the same students got two fewer questions correct on their reading TAKS compared with nondisplaced students.
- In the years following closure, displaced students who transferred to low-performing schools had slower academic achievement than their nondisplaced peers. By their fourth year at a new school, displaced students got 4.1 fewer questions correct on their math TAKS and 3.6 fewer questions correct on their reading TAKS than nondisplaced students.

Students that transferred to high-performing schools:

- During their first year at a new school, displaced students got 3.1 more questions correct on their math TAKS and 1.9 more questions correct on their reading TAKS than nondisplaced students.
- In the years following closure, displaced students who transferred to high-performing schools had slower growth in academic achievement than their nondisplaced peers. By their fourth year at a new school, the initial bump in achievement after closure had narrowed to 2.2 questions on the math TAKS and 1.3 questions on the reading TAKS.

Stroub said that the findings have important implications for closure policies in HISD.

"To help minimize the negative effects of closures, the district must be judicious in closing only the lowest-performing schools," Stroub and Richards said. "In addition, students must be offered high-performing transfer options to the extent feasible. We recommend that displaced students are reassigned to schools that are significantly higher-performing than the schools from which they came. We also suggest that displaced students be given preferential admissions or reserved slots in several high-performing campuses across the district."

Stroub said this was especially important because low-performing schools tend to cluster geographically.

"The bulk of displaced students may not live near a meaningfully higher-performing school to which they can be re-zoned." Stroub said.

"However, HISD can leverage its well-developed choice programs to provide displaced [students](#) increased access to higher-performing schools."

More information: The paper is available online:
kinder.rice.edu/uploadedFiles/...STROUB_CLOSURES.pdf

Provided by Rice University

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