



# **NCLB's Ultimate Restructuring Alternatives: Do they Improve the Quality of Education?**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## *Executive Summary*

Across the nation, the final stage of school restructuring is being reached by an inexorably increasing number of schools. Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, if a school does not make its adequate yearly progress targets after four previous years of being “in need of improvement,” it must implement a fundamental restructuring plan. The restructuring options are as follows: (1) turn the school operations over to the state, (2) turn the operations over to a private company, (3) reopen as a charter school, or (4) reconstitute the school by replacing some or all of the teachers, staff and administrators. There is a fifth alternative of applying “any other” fundamental school restructuring, an option now receiving new attention.

It is essential that we know how these restructuring options work in practice—particularly as the law is now due for reauthorization. This brief reviews the independent research on the ultimate sanctions and provides recommendations designed to enhance school improvement.

Overall, there is little or no evidence to suggest that any of these options delivers the promised improvements in academic achievement. In light of this review of what is known, it is recommended that policymakers:

- Refrain from relying on restructuring sanctions (takeovers, private management, charters, and reconstitutions) to effect school improvement. They have produced negative by-products without yielding systemic positive effects.
- Refrain from supporting the expansion of charter schools. Evidence indicates that, on average, they do not improve test scores or spawn the promised innovative practices. Furthermore, they may increase socioeconomic or ethnic segregation.
- Support research on the effectiveness of alternative improvement strategies that are seen by some as “best practices” but have not to date been supported by careful study. These include school planning, turn-around specialists, data analysis, and instructional coaches.
- Ensure that mandated requirements for technical assistance are met so that states and districts have the capacity to implement, support and sustain improvements.
- Support strategies that have been empirically demonstrated to yield significant school improvement. These include early education, longer school years and days, small school communities, intense personal intervention, strong counseling, and social support systems.