
**RESOURCES AND WORKING CONDITIONS IN LOW-,
MEDIUM-, AND HIGH-RISK DISTRICTS**

Comparisons between low-, medium-, and high-risk districts along a variety of dimensions are presented in this appendix. Given that students in at-risk districts have much poorer educational outcomes than students in low-risk districts, it is important to examine whether the districts serving them differ in terms of available resources and working conditions as proxied by class size and number of aides.

REVENUE AND PER PUPIL SPENDING

The three types of districts vary considerably with respect to revenues and expenditures. As one would expect, high-risk districts with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students on average have much weaker tax bases than low-risk districts. Figure A.1 clearly shows this pattern in district per pupil taxable property values.¹

The weaker tax base for poorer districts translates into lower per pupil revenues from local sources, as seen in Figure A.2, which shows revenue from all sources: local, state, and federal. However, high- and medium-risk districts, on average, have slightly more total revenue per student when state and federal sources are included. High-risk districts get more federal funds because of programs aimed at special needs or low-income students, such as the National School

¹This is the district's total taxable property value, as determined by the Comptroller's Property Tax Division, divided by the total number of students in the district.

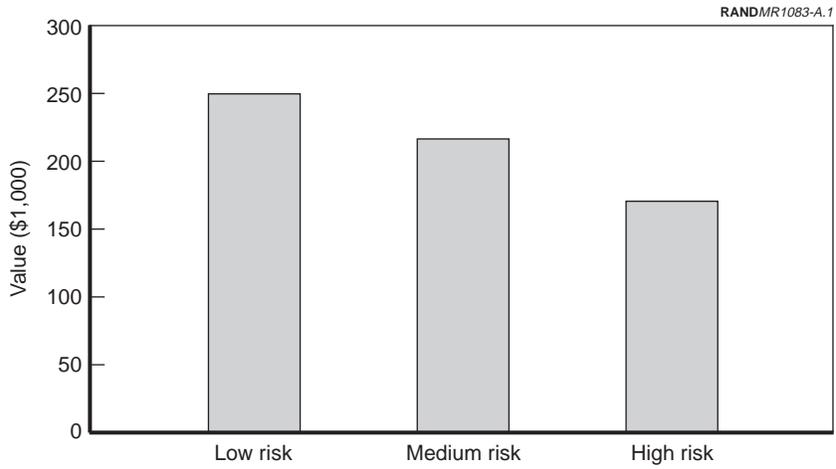


Figure A.1—Taxable Property Value per Pupil in Low-, Medium-, and High-Risk Districts, 1995-96

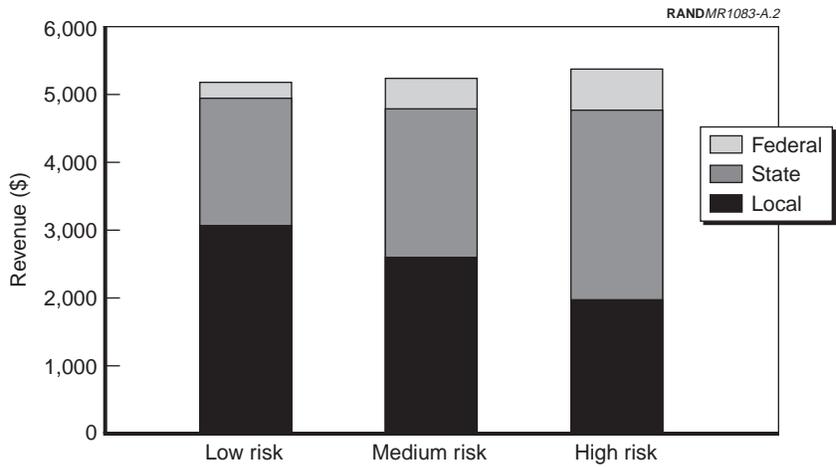


Figure A.2—Sources of Total Revenue per Pupil in Low-, Medium-, and High-Risk Districts, 1995-96

Lunch Program and Title 1 of the Improving America's Schools Act. In Texas, some state funds are also provided to districts for compensatory education programs based on enrollment of low-income students. The largest differences in district funding are related to the Foundation School Program—a system of formulas for distributing state funds that is aimed in part at equalizing funding across the districts in Texas. This finance system was developed in response to a series of legal challenges that began in 1984 with *Edgewood v. Kirby*.² The net result of this system is that districts least able to raise school funds locally are given sufficient state funding to bring them into approximate parity with more wealthy districts.

As we see from Figure A.3, instructional expenditures per pupil are higher in at-risk districts than in low-risk districts. This is largely due to the higher costs of educating special needs students and higher

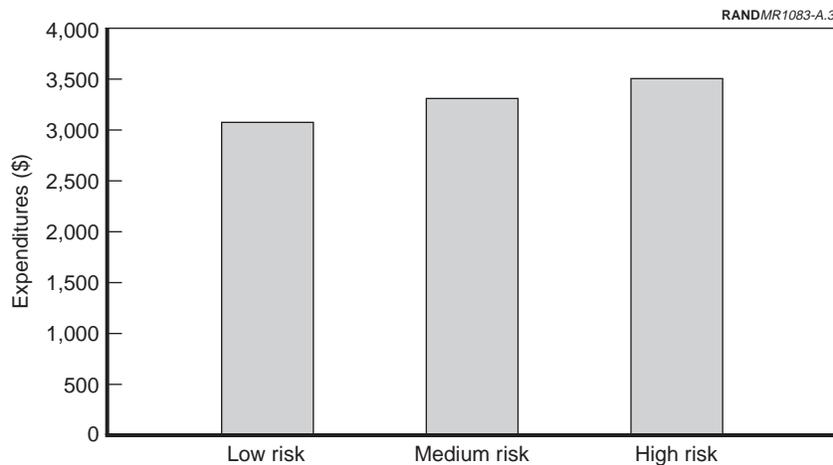


Figure A.3—Instructional Expenditures per Pupil in Low-, Medium-, and High-Risk Districts, 1995–96

²*Edgewood v. Kirby*, 94-0152, 1995, State Supreme Court of Texas. An explanation of the school finance system can be found in Texas Education Agency (1996a).

prices for inputs, including teachers.³ For example, as shown in Figure A.4, high-risk districts allocate 20 percent of their instructional expenditures for bilingual and compensatory programs, reflecting the needs of their largely low-income and Hispanic student body. Low-risk districts, on the other hand, spend only half of that for these programs.

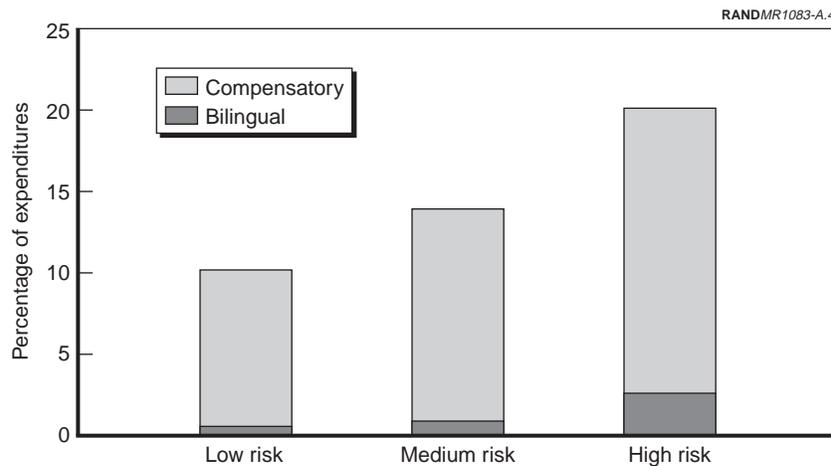


Figure A.4—Percentage of Instructional Expenditures on Bilingual and Compensatory Programs in Low-, Medium-, and High-Risk Districts, 1995–96

TEACHER SALARIES AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The primary focus of our study centers on teachers of at-risk students. We examine some characteristics of districts—such as pay and working conditions, as proxied by class size—to see whether and how they differ across the three risk categories.

Figure A.5 displays new teacher salaries in the three types of districts for selected years in constant 1996 dollars. At the beginning of our

³Good sources for comparisons of school district funding and costs are U.S. Department of Education (1998, 1995).

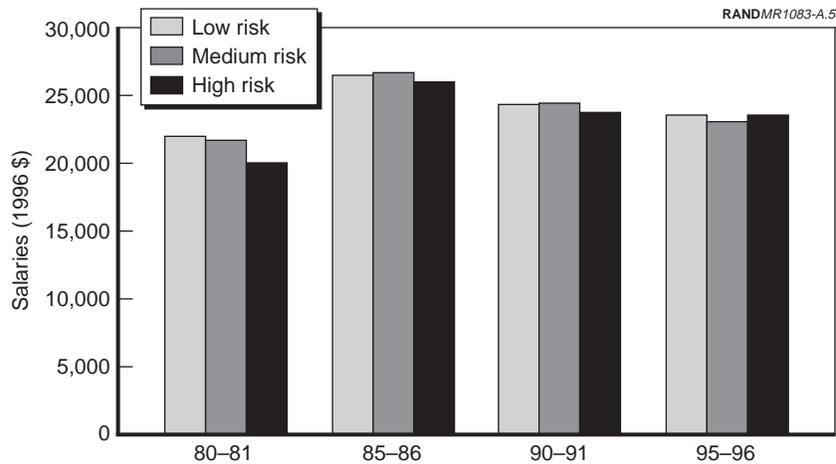


Figure A.5—New Teacher Salaries in Low-, Medium-, and High-Risk Districts, 1980-81 to 1995-96

study period, 1980-81, new teachers in high-risk districts were paid on average \$2,000, or 10 percent, less than teachers in other districts. By the mid-1980s, the base salary levels of all teachers had increased significantly and teachers in high-risk districts had achieved near parity with the others. The general salary increases of the early 1980s were part of a major statewide reform effort. Along with increased salary levels, class sizes were significantly reduced, particularly in early elementary grades. These policies were enacted along with other policies designed to raise the quality of the teaching force. All teachers and administrators were required to pass competency tests (Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers or TECAT) and new teachers were required to pass tests when entering, and again when completing teacher preparation programs (currently TASP (Texas Academic Skills Program), and ExCET (Examination for Certification of Educators in Texas)). Also, incentive pay supplements were instituted based on evaluations of performance and placement on a career ladder pay schedule. This policy was later discontinued, largely because of difficulties in measuring teacher performance.

As seen in Figure A.5, beginning teacher salaries have eroded somewhat since the mid-1980s, by about 11 percent. However, there is little difference in salaries offered beginning teachers among the three types of districts.

Class size is often mentioned as an important determinant of both teacher retention and academic achievement. Texas made reducing class size a key element of educational reform in the 1980s and spent significant resources to achieve this end. The statewide student/teacher ratio dropped from 21:1 in 1980–81 to 15.6 in 1995–96, a 25 percent reduction in average class size. Class size in the average high-risk district is smaller than that in low-risk districts, as shown in Figure A.6. This is largely due to the higher proportion of special needs students who are generally taught in smaller classes.

Figure A.7 shows the proportions of district personnel who are teachers and teachers' aides, who could be considered instructional staff.⁴ Although the three types of districts have about the same

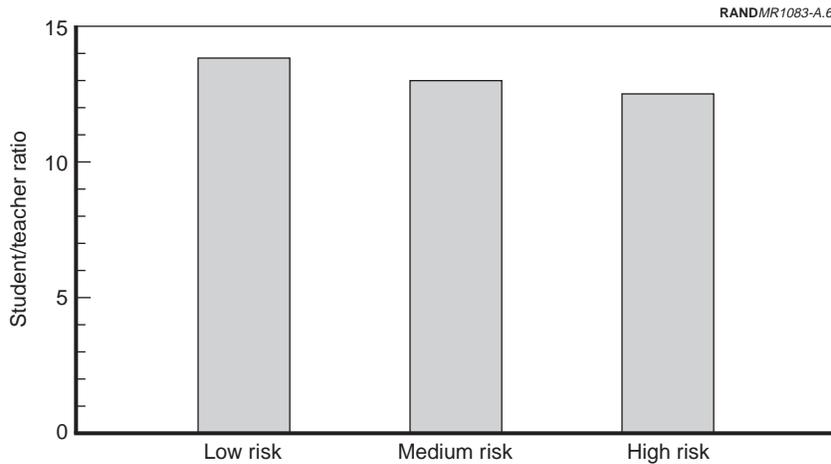


Figure A.6—Student/Teacher Ratios in Low-, Medium-, and High-Risk Districts, 1995–96

⁴Other types of personnel are district or school administrative, professional support, and auxiliary staff. The proportions of staff in these categories are roughly even in the three types of districts.

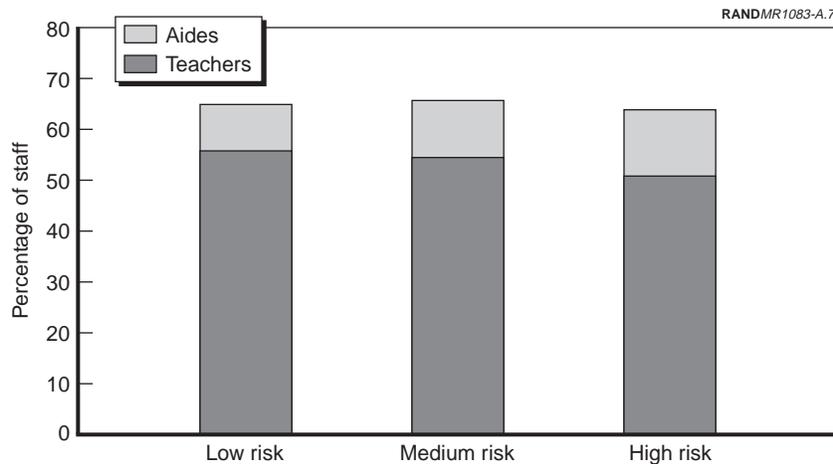


Figure A.7—Teachers and Aides as a Percentage of Total District Staff in Low-, Medium-, and High-Risk Districts, 1995-96

overall proportion of personnel working in classrooms, high-risk districts have more aides relative to teachers. There is at least one aide for every four teachers, whereas in low-risk districts there is less than one for every six teachers. Thus, somewhat surprisingly, in the average high-risk district, teachers have smaller classes and more aides. However, to conclude that this suggests that working conditions are somewhat better in high-risk districts would be both naïve and incorrect. We need to account for the very different student bodies served by the various districts; high- and medium-risk districts have much higher proportions of students needing remedial, special education, or bilingual classes. We also do not have a measure for school climate, school physical environment, and safety, all of which have a substantial effect on the ability to teach on the part of teachers and the ability to learn on the part of students.