

North Carolina's Proposed Achievement School Districts

Achievement School Districts (**ASD**) comprise low-performing schools that are seized from local education administrators (LEAs) and taken over by the state, which appoints a superintendent to run the virtual district. The superintendent then selects a private entity like a charter school operator to run each school. The schools are not necessarily geographically close but all are deemed low-performing by the state.

North Carolina began issuing letter grades to schools in 2014. In 2015, the NC House included language [creating an ASD](#) in a legislative measure ([SB95](#)) that was left in the House Rules committee at the end of the 2015 session. The newly created [Select Committee on Achievement School Districts](#) met in January 2016 with more meetings planned to review the newest iteration of the [ASD proposal](#), which will likely be introduced as a new bill when the legislature convenes in late April 2016.

Under the proposal, the state would use school grades to determine eligibility for inclusion in a new **ASD** of five elementary schools from around the state, and a committee headed by the lieutenant governor would choose the district's superintendent. The superintendent would then select the schools' operators, which would operate them under five-year contracts.

Concerns about ASDs

ASDs are troubling because the state is proposing to take over five locally controlled public institutions and place them under the control of unknown private, possibly even for-profit, entities.

Although improving under-achieving elementary schools is a worthy and imperative goal, forcing a district to either give up or close such a school could have negative outcomes for students and the community. There are many reasons schools earn poor grades from the state, so using a one-size approach for five schools that could be failing for completely different reasons is not likely to help. Handing funding to a "district" with no publicly elected or accountable local officials does not guarantee improvement and neglects North Carolina's

constitutional promise that all students in these schools will have equal opportunity for a sound basic education.

Concerns about ASDs, which currently exist without particular success in Tennessee and New Orleans, are many:

- Charter school operators don't have experience taking over and running existing schools with geographic attendance zones since they typically start their own schools and select their own students.
- The success of charters themselves vary widely. This year, the state gave charters a higher percentage of A's and B's than public schools, but also a higher percentage of D's and F's.
- Many education experts believe that lower-performing schools are better served by keeping them in their local school systems and giving them more local flexibility and more resources for innovative education methods and family support services.
- Giving a private entity control of existing public schools, including the ability to fire staff, will introduce more uncertainty and less stability to our most vulnerable elementary schools.

Persistently failing schools must have remedies that positively affect student outcomes, and research has shown what it takes to successful in terms of at-risk students' achievement. Proven methods for helping struggling students include:

- Universal Pre-K;
- Access to health care (including vision and dental care) for at-risk students;
- Smaller classroom size and more one-on-one instruction;
- Experienced teachers trained in working with at-risk students especially in reading skills; and
- Access to strong instructional materials.

Child advocates, parents, and educators worry that children who already struggle academically could be at even greater risk of school failure in this drastic school takeover approach.

***For more information and resources, visit our website.
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