



HB 3270 Could Compromise Community Input and Engagement in School District Accountability

IDRA Testimony on House Bill 3270, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Senate Education Committee, March 30, 2021

Dear Chairman Dutton and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, and I serve as the Deputy Director of Policy at IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association). We are an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We are on HB 3270.

House Bill 3270 broadens the commissioner of education's authority to initiate investigations and impose sanctions on school districts without the opportunity for communities to appeal any judicial or other decision. This could undermine community input, engagement and oversight of local schools.

State agencies typically levy accountability sanctions against public school districts for declining academic achievement and fiscal mismanagement. Yet, studies show **that state takeovers do not lead to increased academic achievement** and even further destabilize the school district (Wong & Shen, 2005; Zimmer, et al., 2017; Morel, 2018). This turmoil can **result in greater teacher and staff turnover** in the district and create barriers to community engagement in district decision-making (Greenblatt, 2018).

Moreover, state-issued accountability sanctions to remove the local boards of school districts tend to exacerbate racial segregation and are overly used against school boards governed by a majority of trustees of color (Barnum, 2018; Morel, 2018). About 85% of state takeovers across the country affect majority Black and majority Latino school districts (Morel, 2018).

School districts should be held accountable by their communities and the state education agency to effectively and responsibly serve their students. However, school districts with struggling campuses should be able to engage in community-based turnaround efforts. Additionally, school districts should be able to maintain options for legal recourse and judicial appeals if their communities feel they have been unduly sanctioned.

Recommendations

- Promote community input and engagement by removing the final and unappealable decision authority in Section 5 of HB 3270; and
- Adopt community-based turnaround efforts – instead of state takeovers or private partnerships – that support holistic, wraparound services to support schools that face multiple challenges.

Public schools must remain accountable to the public, not a single official. Community input and engagement in school progress, improvement efforts and the accountability system should be upheld as a cornerstone of public schools.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

Resources

- Barnum, M. (2018). When states take over school districts, they say it's about academics. This political scientist says it's about race and power, Chalkbeat. <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2018/06/12/state-takeovers-book/>
- Greenblatt, A. (2018). The Problem with School Takeovers, *Governing*. <https://www.governing.com/topics/education/gov-school-takeovers-newark-new-jersey.html>
- Morel, D. (2018). *Takeover: Race, Education and American Democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, T., Latham Sikes, C. (May 2020). State Takeovers of School Districts Don't Work, *IDRA Newsletter*. <https://idra.news/May20b>
- Wong, K., & Shen, F.X. (2005). "When Mayors Lead Urban Schools: Assessing the Effects of Takeover." In W. Howell (Ed.) *Besieged*. The Brookings Institution.
- Zimmer, R., Henry, G.T., & Kho, A. (2017). The Effects of School Turnaround in Tennessee's Achievement School District and Innovation Zones, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(4), 670-696.

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