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To North Dakota House Education Committee:

I am writing this letter as testimony on the issues and impacts that would come about from the implementation Senate Bill 2254, of the 68th Legislative Assembly of North Dakota. While well intentioned, the potential drawbacks to the actions that could be taken under this Bill, seem to far outweigh the intended aim of improving student achievement at low-performing schools.

There are many questions that are being left unanswered as this Bill becomes more of a talking point in various circles. First and foremost, what will this look like, as the Bill is written there is too much potential for loss of local control. What information are the schools operating without, what is going to be done that these schools are not already doing? It has been said that the schools are not following their plans, but whose plans are not being followed? Schools have plans in place, plans that need to be approved by state entities. Because the local schools are best at building and maintaining the relationships with their local communities that are central to success of the educational process. If there is a guaranteed formula for success, why is it not being shared with all schools? Trainings have been provided, where outlines have been provided, but is still up to the individual schools to work out the details on those. What will happen to these schools should this level of intervention prove to be a failure? What happens when control passes back to the local school board? As it sits now, there is accountability for schools and within schools, where will the accountability be directed if, with this intervention, schools continue to be chronically low-performing?

A major aspect that is being omitted, is the research focusing on state takeovers of schools, that have taken place in other states. There is an abundance of research from other states that have tried this venture in some form or another. That research would point to the overwhelming failures that other states have endured due to the lack of success. In this research, I found 34 other states have tried this, or some form of it, and 34 states have shown no significant improvement in the achievement scores of the students of struggling schools/districts. Other states with bigger budgets and more staff could not find a universal way to improve low-performing schools. On its own, State takeover of schools will do nothing to improve student achievement scores. Which brings us back to the point of what will be done that these schools are not already trying to do? State takeover has a negative impact on schools, in that it causes major disruption within the communities that these schools serve, to the point that schools are so destabilized, closure becomes almost inevitable. It results in an increase in teacher and staff turnover within the school. Staff turnover has its own problems that are extremely difficult to overcome and take time to do so. There is an exclusion of parent and community input to the educational process of these schools. Local control and local input into the education process

becomes largely ignored. How will that impact the overall school culture within these struggling districts. The impact on the day to day routines of the students tends to become heavily impacted.

There is also the factor that in education, there is a somewhat severe shortage of classroom teachers across the state. If Bills like this begin getting passed and become law, it will further deter people from the education profession. These struggling schools already have factors that impact their ability to attract qualified applicants for teaching positions and if the state is going to further point the finger at the teachers of these schools and say they are at the mercy of the state for their jobs, how will these schools ever be able to bring in teachers to fill positions again?

Lastly, I speak from my experience working a school, that is like a select group of the other CSI schools, schools with high Native American student enrollment. There is an ongoing effort that schools are working on rebuilding trust between Native American communities and the educational system. Schools that serve these communities are working to re-establish relationships that have been damaged consistently throughout history. State takeover would set these efforts back decades, and would drive students of these communities deeper into the “Not Proficient” category of our State Assessment testing.

This is a short-term solution for a long-term problem, where the potential negative consequences greatly outweigh the potential positive ones.

Sincerely,



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