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OPPOSE ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS: Reject Unproven Intervention for Underserved Schools

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Far from what the name implies, Achievement School Districts would harm schools, hamper teachers' ability to educate and undermine North Carolina's constitutional obligation to students.

The North Carolina House is considering replacing Senate Bill 95 with a Proposed Committee Substitute that creates an "Achievement School District (ASD)" comprised of five schools chosen from the bottom 25% of schools across the state. These schools would either be closed entirely or turned over to charter school operators. North Carolina must live up to the unfulfilled constitutional promise that students in these schools will have an opportunity to obtain a sound basic education. The creation of an ASD would further harm these schools and hamper this ability because:

- **ASDs increase staff turnover**, which exacerbates the difficulty low-performing schools and districts already have retaining staff.
 - Low-performing schools in North Carolina are making significant progress, according to a recent study. A study presented to the State Board of Education on the existing program designed to improve low-performing schools known as "Turning Around North Carolina's Lowest-Achieving Schools" (TALAS) found that:
 - TALAS made significant investments in professional development, comprehensive needs assessments, school improvement planning, and instructional and leadership coaching in low-performing schools. These investments have paid off in improved outcomes for students.
 - The primary threat to this progress is the high level of staff turnover that occurs in these schools and the increased level of spending on professional development that is required for new staff members each year. ASDs would make the turnover problem in low-performing schools even worse.
- **ASDs have not improved student performance** in other states using this prescriptive approach.
 - In Tennessee, the longest-running achievement school district program, reading scores in the first year of operation and have failed to return to pre-takeover levels. The majority of these schools remain in the bottom 5 percent. Tennessee's program was implemented in 2012.

- **Charter school operators do not have experience running this type of school.** Charter operators are generally prepared to operate schools that open from scratch with students selected through an application process rather than take over existing schools that serve all students in a given attendance zone.
 - As the head of Tennessee’s Achievement School District stated in his resignation letter this year, “Let’s just be real: achieving results in neighborhood schools is harder than in a choice environment.”

Any effort to improve low performing schools requires interventions tailored to the unique needs of each low performing school that build on the foundation North Carolina has created through TALAS. Real help will include a variety of options that have been shown to improve student outcomes such as:

1. **Increased access to North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten and other early childhood services**
2. **Smaller class sizes and improved teacher to student classroom ratios to facilitate one-on-one, pullout, and small group instruction**
3. **Highly qualified teachers and instructional support personnel in each classroom**
4. **Professional development targeted to improving outcomes for at-risk students**
5. **Teacher mentoring and coaching**
6. **Up-to-date textbooks, instructional materials, technology, and broadband access**

Low performing schools need greater staff stability and options for teacher and classroom supports that are closely associated with improved student outcomes if they are to provide all students with the opportunity to learn that the constitution guarantees.

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