

# School Governance



## SEF Position

SEF supports limiting control of public education to the level of government closest and most responsive to the taxpayers and parents of the children being educated.

## Background

While state educational agencies frequently intervene in and occasionally assume control of the operations of underperforming districts and schools, little evidence exists showing that such practices improve academic outcomes. According to the Center for Popular Democracy's *State Takeovers of Low-Performing Schools: A Record of Academic Failure, Financial Mismanagement and Student Harm* report, children have failed to see improvement and, in some cases, have seen setbacks as a result of state takeovers. Yet throughout the southern region, there has been a proliferation of state takeovers without affirming evidence that states have the capacity or effectiveness to dramatically improve chronically low-performing schools.



Since 2012, [Tennessee](#) has operated an Achievement School District (ASD), which is a state-wide district for schools that have been identified in the bottom 5% for student performance, authorizing Charter Management Organizations to manage the district's identified schools. In 2016, [Mississippi](#) advanced legislation to create a turnaround district similar to Tennessee's ASD. Over a 14-month span from 2017 – 2018, the [South Carolina](#) state superintendent unilaterally decided to take over and erase local control in more school districts in South Carolina than in the prior 20 years combined. Nearly half of all the states in the country have provisions that allow for a state takeover. However, most states cannot make a research-based claim that state takeovers of school districts yield improved academic results. Eliminating local control also politically disenfranchises communities,

particularly Black communities, by shifting power from elected school board members to state officials who do not have an intimate knowledge of the community.<sup>1</sup>

## *Benefits of Localized School Governance*

- Instructional and curricular quality in schools will be higher, as the oversight and implementation of both will be carried out by stakeholders familiar with the community.
- School boards' retention of school governance will increase representation for communities of color and low-income communities, as members of both communities will possess electoral power for local educational policymakers.
- Greater autonomy for district leadership to define schools' trajectories will foster higher levels of trust between school and district leadership, resulting in more responsible decision-making and improved student outcomes.



<sup>1</sup> Pierce, R. (2018, November 20). Pierce: Local Control of Schools Is Historically and Politically Important in Black Communities. State Takeovers Disempower Them. The74. Retrieved from <https://www.the74million.org/article/pierce-local-control-of-schools-is-historically-and-politically-important-in-black-communities-state-takeovers-disempower-them/>

## *SEF Recommendations*

- States should support evidence-based school and district improvement strategies such as conducting an equity audit and needs assessment for chronically underperforming schools; implementing personalized learning; improving teacher and leader preparation, development, support and effectiveness; and investing in non-academic services that increase academic achievement for student subgroups.
- States should intervene in the management of local school districts only in the event a district does not meet its financial or student services obligations.
- States should ensure evidence-based school improvement structures are in place, including the design and implementation of a school performance plan of action to help districts return to independent control. Components of the plan should establish clear goals and benchmarks to measure progress and include a timeline for improvements; stabilize school leadership; and provide evidence-based professional development to all district employees, especially those who serve a high percentage of students of color or low-income students.