

**Testimony of Dr. David Anthony
CEO, Raise Your Hand Texas
Before the Senate Committee on Education**

The Honorable Larry Taylor, Chair

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KEY POINTS

- **Chronically low-performing schools represent a tiny fraction of campuses in Texas. Recent TEA data show only 7 campuses remained low-performing beyond 3 years. This is a targeted problem that requires a targeted solution.**
- **Empower the Commissioner rather than creating a costly and duplicative parallel bureaucracy. The question is whether we will build the capacity of the State of Texas to address chronically low-performing campuses or simply outsource this function with the attendant issues of contract oversight and management.**
- **Prioritize the campuses with the longest records of academically unacceptable performance, and limit the number of campuses under Commissioner supervision at any one time to allow for focused intervention and return to local control.**
- **Do not undermine the charter authorizing and oversight process established under SB 2 by creating a backdoor charter authorizing process under a state takeover district. To the extent that charter management organizations are used in turnaround, they should hold a valid Texas charter obtained through the normal process and demonstrate experience in school turnaround.**
- **Fix the problem by requiring a final resolution of the performance issues.**

Good afternoon, Chairman Taylor and members of the committee. My name is David Anthony, and I serve as the CEO of Raise Your Hand Texas. I appear before you today to testify **against** SB 895 and **on** SB 669.

I would like to thank the committee for devoting significant time and attention to the problem of chronically low-performing schools in Texas. Where we differ with some of the proposals before you today is not on the need for action, but on the scope of the problem and the appropriate policy response.

Let's be clear about the scope of the problem. For 2014 TEA identified **436** campuses as low performing for the first time, and **225** as second-year low performing. For three-year campuses, that number drops to **65**. You know how many remain low performing for four

years or more? **7!** Seven campuses. Now that's too many, but for all but **7** of the State's **8,555** campuses, the Commissioner already turns around low-performing schools in no more than 3 years. That's a failure rate of **0.08%**. In passing a bill for so few cases, let's not undermine a system that works for the vast majority. But we do agree the Commissioner should have the option to remove a campus when necessary.

Raise Your Hand Texas supports more aggressive intervention by the Commissioner where other turnaround efforts have failed, but not short-circuiting a process that is proving successful for all but a few campuses.

While we can and should learn from the experience of other states, there are significant differences in context between Texas and places like New Orleans and Tennessee on which state takeover district models such as the "Opportunity School District" are based. These differences render wholesale importation of other states' models into Texas inadvisable.

Some of these differences include:

- They are much **smaller jurisdictions**, both geographically and in terms of the total number of campuses;
- Low-performing schools were **overwhelmingly concentrated in a single urban area**—New Orleans and Memphis. Texas has far fewer chronically low-performing campuses spread over a much larger geography in which campuses could be hundreds of miles apart; and
- They had sizable infusions of **federal dollars** through ARRA and Race to the Top that Texas lacks.

In devising a solution that is appropriate for Texas, Raise Your Hand Texas would urge the committee to take into account the following key considerations:

Do not create a costly outsourced bureaucracy. One of the key questions is whether Texas is going to develop the capacity as a state to turnaround low-performing schools itself, or is simply going to outsource this function to a third party via contract. Interventions to address chronically low-performing schools should be options available to the Commissioner to address chronically low-performing campuses in a targeted and effective manner, not a costly separate bureaucracy operated under contract. Additionally, the leading examples of the OSD model of intervention were supported by significant infusions of federal funds that Texas lacks raising real questions of fiscal responsibility and sustainability.

Prioritize the campuses with the longest records of low performance. The Commissioner should be required to focus on the longest low-performing campuses first, and the number of campuses under the Commissioner's supervision at any given time should be strictly limited in order to allow for focused intervention and the return of these campuses to local control. The focus of turnaround efforts should be on the students in the attendance zone for these campuses, and redefining campuses to

exclude particular grades or students should not be allowed.

Do not undermine Texas' charter authorizing process. To the extent that the Commissioner makes use of high-quality charter operators to turnaround a chronically low-performing campus, the charter operator should not be allowed to circumvent the Texas charter authorizing process. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers has praised the charter authorizing and oversight process adopted last session under SB 2. No additional charter authorizing process is necessary. Districts should also be allowed to operate a campus as a local charter as an alternative sanction.

Fix the problem. There must be a point at which continued low performance ends, either through closure of the campus or a broader intervention at the district level, including appointment of a board of managers. Like the SB2 charter closures, a final resolution should be statutorily required. The goal should be to provide policy incentives for school boards to avoid long-term low performance, not state operation of neighborhood schools.

Conclusion

As a state, our goal should be to do whatever is necessary to resolve low-performing campuses, not to create a costly, parallel bureaucracy that has to be funded in perpetuity. Based on the considerations outlined above, Raise Your Hand Texas would like to work with you, Chairman Taylor, and members of this committee to craft a comprehensive solution that strengthens and complements the many tools the Commissioner already possesses.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.