

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

The Honorable Jimmie Don Aycock, Chair

May 19, 2015

---

**KEY POINTS**

- SB 1241 offers autonomy without compromising our democratic traditions
- Only the laws that impede student progress are waived
- School autonomy is backed by local accountability and networks of schools supporting one another

---

Good afternoon, Chairman Aycock and members of the committee. My name is David Anthony, and I appear before you today in my capacity as CEO of Raise Your Hand Texas. I am testifying today **in favor of SB 1241**.

We support both the innovation zones that encourage campus-level collaborations and the district of innovation proposal that allows a supermajority of the school board to claim district-level exemption from most laws from which charters are exempt.

We hope you will also consider removing the requirements for commissioner approval for the creation of an innovation zone or a district of innovation. Texas has had nearly 20 years of experience with charter exemptions from the Education Code; school districts acting through their elected school boards should have the same opportunity to innovate.

Raise Your Hand Texas supports the current version of SB 1241 because it allows a local consensus on the extent of exemptions chosen, consistent with our democratic tradition of electing school trustees to make decisions as close as possible to the students and parents.

In SB1241:

- Only the restrictions locally determined to impede student progress are exempted, rather than having to adopt *all* charter exemptions indiscriminately; and
- The *governance* of the district is not upended in the name of "reform." The community will continue to elect and hold school boards and members accountable.

There is a tendency to think that a cure for every ill can be determined here in a Committee Room in Austin. That does not always happen. SB1241 frees elected school boards to experiment – one law at a time – not *en masse* – with the same freedoms we have made

available to open-enrollment charters for almost 20 years. If *autonomy* is helping charter students, why shouldn't an *elected school board* be able to help their students in the same way?

Raise Your Hand conducted a study of school autonomy reforms across the country to learn when school autonomy leads to better outcomes and when it doesn't. The evidence was overwhelming. Here's the formula: *Autonomy, Local Accountability, and Support Networks*.

SB1241 has those elements that have been proven to work:

*Innovation zones will provide* more responsibility for budgeting, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and scheduling to the school. That's the heart of it.

School leaders are held accountable by indicators that are established through a *planning process*. The Commissioner also has the authority to revoke a district of innovation for low performance.

Finally, school autonomy has to be supported. The district must build the capacity of educators to take on new roles and to use data strategically to plan, innovate, evaluate and adjust.

SB1241 encourages sharing resources and facilities, collaborating across multiple campuses and programs, and bringing to bear the resources of higher education institutions. It relies on community-based efforts to improve student outcomes, with *minimum state and local requirements*.

RYHT supports SB1241 because it provides school autonomy backed by state and local accountability and networks of schools supporting one another. It's good for Texas.

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