



## Legislative Testimony

## Assembly Bill 448: Achievement School District

March 27, 2015

### Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Education

*Prepared Statement of the Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities*

#### Introduction

In February 2015, the Guinn Center (in collaboration with Nevada Succeeds) published a report titled, *Examining Nevada's Education Priorities: Which Initiatives are Worth the Investment?*, in which we examined the Achievement School District proposal and its potential impact on student outcomes. Based on our findings, we offer the following for consideration.

#### Mixed Results and Limited Data in Other States

- Louisiana Recovery School District (RSD)
  - The RSD is a statewide school district run by the Louisiana Department of Education that intervenes in the management of chronically low-performing schools. The Recovery School District has 80 schools, including direct-run schools and charter schools.
  - The body of research documenting overall impact is fairly limited.<sup>1</sup>
  - Many of the schools within the RSD are performing better than they were prior to Hurricane Katrina.<sup>2</sup>
  - The RSD is correlated with a trajectory of outcomes trending in right the direction but significant gains are limited.
- Tennessee Achievement School District (ASD)
  - The ASD was established in 2010 to turn around the bottom five percent of schools in Tennessee. The authorizing legislation allows the State Commissioner of Education to remove persistently low-performing schools from their home districts and manage them directly or authorize charter schools to serve ASD students. Schools began operating in 2012 and there are currently 11 charter operators in the ASD.
  - While there are positive trends in Tennessee, there is not yet enough data suggesting significant and sustained student achievement.<sup>3</sup>
  - Schools inside the ASD are improving, but not as fast as expected.<sup>4</sup>
  - The Shelby County School District in Memphis Tennessee has a turnaround zone called the I-Zone. Schools in this zone have improved faster than schools in the ASD.<sup>5</sup>
- Michigan Education Achievement Authority (EAA)
  - The EAA was created to turn around the academic performance of students in Michigan's bottom five percent of schools. The EAA has 15 schools, including direct-run schools and charter schools.

<sup>1</sup> J. Williams. October 10, 2014. "Tulane's Cowen Institute retracts New Orleans School Report, apologizes." New Orleans Times-Picayune. [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/10/tulanes\\_cowen\\_institute\\_retracts\\_new\\_orleans\\_schools\\_report\\_apologizes.html](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/10/tulanes_cowen_institute_retracts_new_orleans_schools_report_apologizes.html), Transforming Public Education in New Orleans, The Cowen Institute:

<http://www.coweninstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/History-of-the-RSD-Report-2011.pdf>, and Educate Now. By the Numbers: High School Performance 2005 vs. 2014 <http://educatenow.net/2015/02/09/by-the-numbers-high-school-performance-2005-vs-2014/>

<sup>2</sup> D. Harris & M. Larsen. January 2015. Parents, Schools, and Choices: It's Complicated. Tulane University. [http://tulane.edu/news/newwave/011615\\_study\\_on\\_nola\\_school\\_choice.cfm](http://tulane.edu/news/newwave/011615_study_on_nola_school_choice.cfm).

<sup>3</sup> Howard E. August 2014. "Just the Facts: A Longitudinal Analysis of ASD Schools Before and After Takeover" Bluff City Ed. 20 <http://www.bluffcityed.com/2014/08/just-the-facts-a-longitudinal-analysis-of-asd-schools-before-and-after-takeover/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid



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- The EAA model has not resulted in improved student outcomes as measured by test scores.<sup>6</sup>
- Reasons include poor management, schools overrun by vendors, and inexperienced teachers.

### Other Models to Improve Schools

- Create an Improvement Zone: School districts across the nation create a zone within a school district. Examples in Nevada include the Clark County School District Turnaround Zone (14 schools) and the Washoe County School District Acceleration Zone (13 schools). The impact on student achievement has been mixed. While some schools in these zones have experienced gains, seven of these schools have been identified on the State Department of Education's list of 78 underperforming schools.
- Allow State Takeover: About half of the states in the U.S. allow for a state's Department of Education to take over local schools. The results from across the country have been mixed. Student achievement increased slightly from interventions in Oakland, California and Rochester, New York, but similar programs in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Bridgeport, Connecticut, and Camden, New Jersey were less successful. In Nevada, school districts can only be taken over for financial mismanagement, not poor academic performance. To date, only White Pine County School District has been taken over for financial mismanagement (2000-2005).

### Recommendations

1. NDE should craft a detailed Achievement School District implementation plan that addresses challenges encountered by other states that have launched this model.
2. NDE must work closely with the charter incubator to develop new schools through both the incubation and recruitment of top Charter Management Organizations (CMOs).

### Benchmarks

1. All ASD Schools should be 4 or 5 stars (NSPF system) in the 3-5 years after entering the zone
2. Reduction in the achievement gap between ASD schools and more affluent peer institutions
3. Recruitment of top-quality CMOs to run these schools
4. Increase in the percentage of students and teachers retained in the ASD schools

**See full report:** Examining Nevada's Education Priorities: Which Initiatives are Worth the Investment?  
<http://guinncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Guinn-Center-Nevada-Succeeds-Education-Priorities-FINAL.pdf>

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<sup>6</sup> C. Guyette. September 24, 2014. "The EAA Exposed: An Investigative Report." Detroit Metro Times.  
<http://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/the-aaa-exposed-an-investigative-report/Content?oid=2249513>.