

AFT-NH Testimony in Opposition to HB 1816



To Chairman Ladd and Members of the House Education Funding Committee,

My name is Debrah Howes, President of the American Federation of Teachers–New Hampshire. I’m here on behalf of our 3,500 members who work in preK–12 public education, public services, and higher education across the Granite State. We are New Hampshire taxpayers and voters, and many of us are parents or grandparents of public-school students.

We urge you to oppose **HB 1816**. The bill creates a state intervention framework that mirrors state takeover models tried in other states, approaches that do not improve academic outcomes, destabilize school communities, and undermine local democratic governance.

HB 1816 authorizes the Commissioner of Education, when the State Board declares a “financial emergency,” to develop and oversee a recovery plan, alter district operations, reallocate resources, renegotiate contracts, and oversee governance and administrative structures for up to one year. In practice, this is a state takeover mechanism, and decades of experience show similar state takeovers elsewhere [do not solve academic or fiscal problems](#) in public schools.

The research record is consistent. The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) finds takeovers [do not increase students’ academic achievement and destabilize school districts](#). A Brookings analysis concludes takeovers [do not improve student achievement in math or reading and disrupt student learning in reading early on](#). Research by Beth Schueler finds [no average academic gains and early harm to ELA](#) following takeovers. Centralized state control disrupts the learning environment and hinders student learning.

The bill would also destabilize the teacher and paraeducator workforce and the school experience for students. By permitting the state to alter operations, reallocate resources, and renegotiate agreements, **HB 1816** puts educators working conditions at risk. Research shows takeovers are associated with increased teacher and staff turnover, which undermines student

achievement and school climate; they also reduce family and community voice when elected boards are sidelined. New Hampshire already struggles to recruit and retain certified teachers and paraeducators; adding this level of uncertainty will make it harder to staff classrooms, not easier. All of this has a direct impact on students' learning.

Most importantly, **HB 1816** misdiagnoses the root cause of much of school districts' fiscal distress. For decades, New Hampshire has not met its constitutional duty to fund an adequate education. Our schools rely on local property taxes for more than 70% of their funding, while the state's share is less than 30%, the lowest percentage in the nation. That structure forces communities to shoulder vastly different burdens depending on the local property tax base and is the engine of many "financial emergencies."

The courts have been clear. In July 2025, the New Hampshire Supreme Court affirmed that the state is still failing to meet its constitutional obligation to fund a constitutionally adequate education for students in every district. Today, the state's contribution covers only about half of the minimum needed to staff, operate, and maintain schools and to uphold students' right to a free and appropriate public education.

Allowing the DOE to oversee district governance and administration for a year sidelines elected school boards, diminishing parent and community voices in decision-making. Research shows removing local governance [reduces family engagement and trust](#); nationally, takeovers have disproportionately stripped governance from communities already facing inequities. New Hampshire communities value their voice in their local schools; **HB 1816** weakens it.

We should choose solutions that work. [States that invest more equitably see better outcomes, particularly for low-income students](#). The State of New Hampshire finally meeting its constitutional obligation to fund public education would stabilize struggling districts far more effectively than a state takeover, and that investments would directly support student learning. Stable and truly adequate state funding would allow stable staffing, reasonable compensation, manageable workloads, and respect for collective bargaining, all items that improve student learning conditions and student outcomes. We all know that students thrive when parents, teachers, school staff, and local leaders all work together to reach the best decisions for

students and the community through local decision making.

HB 1816 would bring disruption without benefit. The constitutional, research-backed path is to meet the state's funding obligations, invest in educators and student supports, and strengthen local decision-making so communities can meet their children's needs.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote Inexpedient to Legislate on **HB 1816**.

Sincerely,

Debrah Howes

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President, AFT-New Hampshire