

Testimony from AFT-NH opposing SB 580

From Debrah Howes, President AFT-NH

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To Chairman Ladd and members of the House Education Finance Committee

My name is Debrah Howes, President of the American Federation of Teachers-NH. We represent 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 **SB 580**. At first glance the bill looks like a simple cooperative purchasing proposal, but the text also authorizes the State Board of Education to place schools or SAUs into receivership in certain circumstances. That is a profound change in governance that would have real and negative consequences for students in our public schools.

The first and most serious problem for students is that receivership is, in practice, a state takeover of local schools. When the state removes or overrides elected local governance, students experience disruption in their learning environment, in the leadership, priorities, and school routines.

- National research shows [state takeovers do not improve academic outcomes on average and can be disruptive to reading achievement](#) in the early years, which means students lose instructional ground precisely when they need stability.
- The most comprehensive cross state analysis likewise finds no average academic benefit from takeovers and [documents early-stage harms to English language arts, which directly affects students' day to day classroom success.](#)

SB 580 would open the door to that same pattern in New Hampshire by giving the State Board receivership authority, *even as the bill provides little detail about the conditions that would trigger it*. For students, that combination of expanded state power and vague standards is a recipe for uncertainty, disruptions in their learning environments, and lost learning time.

The second problem is that the bill centralizes purchasing for major student facing services like transportation,

food service, curriculum materials, textbooks, heating fuel and other high cost items. In theory a cooperative might save money on some items, but in practice a one size fits all state contract can upend the services students rely on every day while not meeting local needs. A statewide vendor change can lengthen already long rural bus rides, replace familiar school meals with less responsive service, or impose new curriculum materials that leave gaps in instruction and therefore student learning because it does not align with the previously used curriculum. Those are not abstract risks; they follow the bill's design to solicit regional or statewide contracts for the biggest categories of school spending. Students need reliability and predictability in their school routine so they can focus on learning. **SB 580** shifts these choices away from local knowledge toward large, pooled procurements that may not fit local needs, and any misfit lands on students first.

The third problem is that **SB 580** introduces significant ambiguity and therefore instability into school operations. The bill asserts that receivership would be used only in limited circumstances but does not define the metrics, the process, or the safeguards for students if the state intervenes. Without clear triggers, timelines, or required improvement, students could see sudden changes to school schedules, extracurriculars, specialized programs, or support services with little warning. Research on school climate and student engagement underscores that steady, supportive conditions are linked to better academic and social outcomes for students. [Policies that destabilize governance and operations work in the opposite direction](#), making it harder for students to feel connected and to focus on learning.

There is another reality students face when governance is shifted away from the community. Takeovers elsewhere have been associated with higher teacher and staff turnover, which directly affects students through a revolving door of adults in their classrooms and support roles. [Students learn best when their learning environment includes experienced, highly skilled teachers and staff](#). When turnover rises, instructional continuity and classroom climate suffer, and students pay the price. **SB 580** increases the likelihood of these dynamics by enabling receivership without clearly specifying how the state would protect the continuity of teaching and learning during an intervention.

Supporters argue that cooperative purchasing will lower costs and that indirectly benefits students. Every district already has incentives to pursue savings where it makes sense, and many already collaborate regionally where it truly helps students. What **SB 580** adds is not just a cooperative option but a new layer of state managed procurement plus a receivership tool that can override local decisions. The risk to students is that decisions about buses, meals, textbooks, and even school schedules are pulled farther from the realities of their communities, while the threat of state control hangs over the schools they attend.

Students in New Hampshire deserve stability, consistent relationships with teachers and school staff, and decisions that are rooted in the needs of their families and their communities. **SB 580** moves in the opposite direction by combining centralized purchasing with new receivership authority that research in other states has not shown to raise achievement and that often disrupts learning.

For these reasons, on behalf our members and the students in our public schools, I urge you to find **SB 580** Inexpedient to Legislate.

Sincerely,

Debrah Howes

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debrah Howes".

President, AFT-New Hampshire