

The Takeovers Continue: What Is the Endgame?

An Editorial Opinion by A. Patrick Huff, Ph.D.

December 16, 2025

In the December 11, 2025 issue of the *Texan* on-line magazine, we learn that Connally, Beaumont, and Lakeworth ISD's have been taken over by the TEA under Commissioner Mike Morath's direction. This comes on the heels of Ft. Worth ISD (October of 2025) falling to takeover, and earlier Houston ISD (2023). Additional Texas school districts are now in the crosshairs of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Commissioner Mike Morath. Austin ISD and San Antonio ISD have joined a growing list of districts viewed as "primed" for potential state takeover if their yearly testing outcomes and "turnaround plans" don't produce student outcomes that meet the standards set by the TEA. These actions are routinely justified as necessary interventions to address failing schools. In reality, it is the result of a policy framework in which failure is not an accident, but by design.

As I argue in my book, *The Takeover of Public Education in America: The Agenda to Control Information and Knowledge Through the Accountability System*, <https://www.aphuff.com/> (Authorhouse 2015), today's school closures and state takeovers are the direct descendants of policies set in motion under George W. Bush's administration and the drafting of the No Child Left Behind federal policy (2002). Central to that law was the creation of a failure mechanism known as **Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)**. AYP did not merely identify struggling schools; it virtually guaranteed that schools in low-income communities would be labeled as failures. By imposing uniform benchmarks while ignoring poverty, underfunding, language barriers, and student mobility, AYP ensured that schools serving the most vulnerable populations would inevitably fall short—no matter how dedicated their educators were, or how much progress students made, eventually the school would fail.

The research from the No Child Left Behind era confirmed what educators and communities experienced on the ground: schools were not failing children; the accountability system was failing schools. Instead of correcting systemic inequities, the policy response was punishment—escalating sanctions that led to closure, restructuring, or ultimately takeover by the state.

While No Child Left Behind later evolved into the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Texas doubled down on the same high stakes testing and the punitive accountability model that had been No Child Left Behind. ESSA allowed the states to set up their own Accountability System (if the US Department of Education approved) and the Texas Legislature's version was House Bill 1842 (2015). The Texas Legislature has preserved a system that continues to discriminate against schools in high-poverty neighborhoods. Under current law, it takes only **one school within an entire district**—often a school overwhelmed by restrictive mandates and inadequate resources—to trigger state intervention. This legal framework functions as a form of **lawfare**, providing the state with a pretext to seize control of locally governed public schools through the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The TEA is essentially waging war against local school districts to privatize the entire system, all under the pretense of trying to save low performing schools these schools. These schools can't overcome the enormous issues present by being in neighborhoods of poverty.

When that happens, democratically elected school boards are dissolved and replaced with a **Board of Managers** appointed by the state. Communities lose their voice, even as they continue to pay local taxes that fund the system. This is not reform. It is the erosion of democratic governance—**taxation without representation** imposed on neighborhoods least able to resist.

These takeovers accelerate the privatization agenda. Once a district is destabilized, charter operators, testing corporations, education technology vendors and management organizations move in, often shielded from public accountability. Public education is transformed from a shared civic responsibility into a marketplace, of vendors seeking to profit off the backs of student testing outcomes.

This moment demands more than concern or isolated resistance. It demands **unity**. If Texas school districts continue to face these takeovers individually, they will fall individually. Every ISD—regardless of size, location, or current accountability rating—must recognize that this system threatens them all. The same accountability framework being used today against districts in high-poverty communities can, and will, be used tomorrow against other ISDs located in middle class neighborhoods or even affluent neighborhoods. Evidence of this can be viewed by what happened during the No Child Left Behind years. AYP drove schools to failure by increasing the percentage required of subgroups of students to pass the yearly assessment. When the percentage rose to unreachable numbers, as it did in 2011 (80% in reading/language arts and 75% in math) and 2012 (87% reading/language arts and 83% in math) the schools could not overcome the difficult challenges inherent from being in neighborhoods of poverty. Keep in mind these were not percentages each individual student needed to make to pass the assessment, they were the percentages needed for the subgroup (each ethnicity, economically disadvantaged, special education, English Learner) to make collectively. If one subgroup failed to reach the required percentage for that particular year, the entire school failed. You may ask, why were the percentages going up each year from the passing of No Child Left Behind in 2002? It was written into the law that ALL students would be proficient on the assessment by 2014. All means 100% in each subgroup. Again, you might ask yourself, “that is ludicrous, no school or school district can accomplish such a feat.” That’s very true, but every public school district and state education agency took a knee and did what had to be done to keep from failing to meet accountability standards and eventually losing their school or their entire district to the state.

What came next exposed the entire agenda if you had eyes to see it. President Obama extended a quid pro quo to the states. There were 10 items that were waived but the most important item was the 100% mandate on a school’s testing outcomes. To receive the “Waiver” each state had to write a **Waiver Application** that spelled out each state’s plan for accountability. The quid pro quo was to make Common Core their standards for curriculum. If you like, you can read more about this in my book linked above in this article. The reason for going into this detail is to drive home the point that public education is on an agenda; an agenda to privatize. State education agencies, including the TEA, will do what needs to be done to accomplish this **endgame**.

School districts, educators, parents, and local officials must unite to push back against the TEA and the Legislature and demand the dismantling of the **Accountability System** that is driving this agenda. Until the system itself is challenged, no district is safe. If this trajectory is allowed to continue unchecked, takeovers will multiply, local governance will disappear, and the very

existence of Texas public education as a democratic institution will be placed in jeopardy. To date there have been 15 ISDs overtaken by the TEA. While this may not seem like much when you consider the 1200 plus ISDs in the state, if the school district's elected school boards and superintendents fail to recognize the overall objective, and collectively pushback against the TEA, privatization of the entire system will be the ultimate result. The people will lose their voice in how their children are educated and billions of dollars are made by the vendors who profit off the backs of the children caught up in this insidious agenda.

The choice is clear: collective action now—or the slow, systematic dismantling of public schools, district by district.

Dr. Patrick Huff. is a retired educator of thirty-four years, with experience as a middle school and high school principal. His public education experience was obtained in Aldine ISD, Conroe ISD, and Klein ISD. After retiring from public education, Dr. Huff taught as an adjunct professor in the graduate school at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, TX.

He has a B.S. from Texas Christian University, an M.Ed. from Sam Houston State University, and a Ph.D. from Prairie View A&M University.

His awareness and insight into the domination of testing in today's public schools and the unrealistic mandates of No Child Left Behind law, led him to write *The Takeover of the Public School System in America: The Agenda to Control Information and Knowledge Through the Accountability System*, 2015.

He currently lives with his wife, Connie, in Tomball, TX. and can be reached at:
aphuff51@gmail.com



