

How Did the Innovative School District Start?

North Carolina began using letter grades (based largely on student test scores) to schools in 2014. These student scores and school letter grades are used to determine which schools are low-performing. In the 2016 legislative session, lawmakers passed a new measure, [HB 1080](#), officially creating a state takeover district for the 2018-19 school year. Originally called the Achievement School District, it was renamed the [Innovative School District](#) by the legislature in the 2017 budget, perhaps to distance it from Tennessee's unraveling ASD program on which the plan was based.

Lt. Governor Dan Forest chaired the committee, whose members he appointed, that chose the district's superintendent, Dr. Eric Hall. The ISD superintendent is responsible for selecting the schools' operators for State Board of Education (SBE) approval. ISD operators may be for-profit companies and must have a proven record of turning around low-performing schools or a "substantial number of low-performing students" in NC, or a "a credible and specific plan for dramatically improving student achievement in a low-performing school" as well as either operating in the state or being a "contractual affiliate" of an NC charter operator. On September 7, 2017, the qualifying schools were identified based on the following criteria:

- Schools that were all or part of grade K-5 that earned an overall school performance score in the lowest five percent (5%) of all schools in the state in the prior school year and
- Did not exceed growth in at least one of the prior three school years and did not meet growth in at least one of the prior three school years and
- Did not adopt one of the established reform models in state statute in the immediate prior school year.

The complete list is [here](#). Two local school systems ([Durham and Johnson](#)) made public statements demanding that their schools be taken off the list.

Southside Ashpole Elementary School Selected for 2018-19 School Year

On November 2, 2017, the State Board of Education selected only one school for the Innovative School District for the 2018-19 school year. This school is located in Robeson County Public Schools District: **Southside Ashpole Elementary School**, Rowland, NC.

The local community in Robeson County was very upset about this decision and held many community meetings to [show their disagreement](#) with this school takeover. According to state statute, once selected for takeover, Robeson County School Board either could close the school or join the ISD. On January 9, 2018, the Public Schools of Robeson County School Board [approved the transfer](#) of Southside Ashpole Elementary in Rowland, NC into the [Innovative School District](#) beginning in the 2018-19 school year.

School Works a [third-party evaluation firm](#) contracted by the ISD, is tasked with evaluating any operator applications submitted and will report to ISD Superintendent on their findings. The application process for being an operator of an ISD school is [here](#). Applicants presented their proposed plans to improve student and school outcomes to the NCISD Superintendent. NCISD received applications from [The Romaine Group](#) and [Achievement for All Children](#). Public school advocates note neither entity has a strong, proven performance history. The Romaine Group, a for-

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profit Michigan based organization manages eight schools in Maryland and one in NC. The NC school, Capitol Encore Academy in Fayetteville, is a K-8 charter that earned a 'D' according to 2016-17 school report cards. Achievement for All Children is a new nonprofit, created by supporters of the school choice movement including a wealthy donor who helped support the bill that resulted in the creation of an Innovative School District. Many have [questioned applicants' ties to the controversial bill](#) and pointed out that they stand to benefit financially from being chosen as operators.

SchoolWorks evaluated the operator applications and found that at the time of assessment, neither entity met the requisites established by the ISD guidelines. According to a [press release](#) issued on February 1, 2018: "Based on the reports received from SchoolWorks, at this time neither entity met the high expectations imposed by the ISD. The ISD now plans to convene negotiations with both entities to gain additional insight on their respective capabilities and approaches to improving student achievement at Southside Ashpole." The ISD Superintendent asked for an additional 60 days to decide on an operator. Critics and supporters of the ISD model expressed concern over the small number of applicants.

Achievement for All Children chosen to operate newly formed Innovative School District

On May 3, 2018, North Carolina State Board of Education voted, with seven members in favor and four against, to approve Achievement for All Children Inc. (AAC) as the operator for the Innovative School District. This move comes amid concerns about AAC's lack of prior experience and apparent conflicts of interest. The newly formed non profit has strong ties to the choice movement in North Carolina and plans to partner with TeamCFA, a charter network that oversees 13 schools in NC with mixed results. Dr. Eric Hall will work with AAC to chose school leaders, hire staff and select a curriculum.

Resources

Matthew Ellinwood, "Oppose Achievement School Districts," NC Justice Center (2015):

<http://www.ncjustice.org/sites/default/files/Achievement%20School%20Districts%2009-22-15.pdf>

Billy Ball, "Controversial plan to allow for-profit charter school takeovers of low-performing NC schools re-emerges" (January 27, 2016): <http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2016/01/27/controversial-plan-to-allow-for-profit-charter-school-takeovers-of-low-performing-nc-schools-re-emerges/>

Amiti Sen, "State Takeovers of Low-Performing Schools: A Record of Academic Failure, Financial Mismanagement & Student Harm," Center for Popular Democracy (February 2016):

<http://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/National%20Takeover%20Ed%20Report.pdf>

Grace Tatter, "Tennessee's Turnaround District is Reaching the End of an Era," Chalkbeat (June 7, 2017): <http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/tn/2017/06/07/tennessees-turnaround-district-is-reaching-the-end-of-an-era/>

Kris Nordstrom, "New Report Underscores False Promise that NC's ASD Takeover Plan is Better Than Tennessee's," Progressive Pulse (July 12, 2016): <http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2016/07/12/new->



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[report-underscores-false-promise-that-north-carolinas-achievement-school-district-takeover-plan-is-better-than-tennessees/](#)

Group Tied to Rich Donor who Backed NC School Takeover law now wants to run those schools: <http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/op-ed/article179856741.html> (October 12, 2017)

State Board Selects Robeson County for ISD. <http://www.wral.com/state-board-selects-robeson-county-school-for-innovative-school-district/17085268/> (November 2, 2017)

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