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NC POLICY WATCH | Stories & voices that **matter.**

Faced with charter takeover, local district mulls closing school

By Billy Ball

Faced with accepting charter takeover or closing a struggling elementary, leaders in at least one eastern North Carolina town say they may pick closure over the state's controversial Innovative School District.

"That's not ideal," says Sen. Angela Bryant, a three-term Democrat who represents Rocky Mount in the N.C. General Assembly. "But we are not interested in the innovation zone."

Rocky Mount's Williford Elementary is one of six schools included on a short-list for the Innovative School District (ISD), which could allow a for-profit, charter management organizations to ink five-year contracts with the state in hopes of turning around test scores at selected low-performing schools.

Charter operators would control day-to-day operations and staffing at the schools, with annual checkups on academic progress. Over the next two years, North Carolina leaders are expected to choose five schools for the new program, with the first two selected by the State Board of Education in December.

Under state law, schools chosen can accept the takeover or close. In that scenario, students and staff would be reassigned in the district, but would not face takeover by a private, charter organization.

Bryant says closure is an increasingly favored option among many residents, but for now, she says top priority for residents in Rocky Mount is convincing state leaders to exclude them altogether.

"There doesn't seem to be much in here about education," adds Bryant. "It seems more about charter management companies putting money into lawmakers. And they're going to come in here and do better with the same (state funding)? I don't see it."

Schools eligible for the state-run district, most situated in high-poverty neighborhoods, reported performance scores in the bottom five percent statewide and hadn't met or exceeded growth goals in at least one of the prior three school years. [*Read more*...]

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