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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Panel statement re: LRSD

Arkansas is failing our students in need. The State Board of Education will consider a proposal on Thursday, supported by Gov. Asa Hutchinson, to maintain state control of some Little Rock schools and end recognition of the Little Rock Education Association.

There are a lot of reasons why this proposal is misguided, but even putting aside its dangerous racial segregation consequences, it will continue to fail the very students it claims to care about. It also sets a dangerous precedent that threatens other schools across the state.

The state of Arkansas took control of Little Rock schools five years ago to “help the children” and today we have more of our students and schools in distress. Five years of state control has resulted in the closure of neighborhood schools. It has resulted in the siphoning of resources from schools with the highest needs and the dramatic expansion charter schools. After five years, the State Board of Education STILL has not produced a detailed plan on how to improve academic opportunities for ALL students.

In fact, there is no instance of ADE taking over a school district in academic distress and making it better. There is no evidence that turning a district over to a charter school company or attacking teachers will improve outcomes either.

We should not give the Governor and the State Department of Education more time to continue doing what does not work. We can not let them blame and attack our teachers and community for bad outcomes they created by failing to invest in our students.

The good news is that it's clear how to improve struggling schools in Little Rock and across the state. The data is overwhelming and undeniable. Study after study of successful education systems find the same things help children and their communities:

- Dramatically improve access to high-quality early childhood education. We've taken small steps in Little Rock, but have much more to do.
- Expand quality afterschool and summer programs. Arkansas' own state analysis is that afterschool and summer programs are very effective at improving educational outcomes, but they have never invested in it.
- Invest in developing and retaining high-quality, culturally competent teachers. Teachers in Little Rock have seen pay freezes, jobs eliminated, and their fundamental rights to fair treatment attacked. This is not how you build a strong education system.
- Support kids in poverty by addressing hunger, housing instability, medical needs and other issues undermining our students.
- Desegregate our schools. Segregating students by race, ability, and income is not only morally reprehensible, but it's also proven to reduce outcomes for ALL students.
- Engage families meaningfully. We are not doing enough to engage low-income families in our schools and meet their needs. LRSD advisory boards have been dissolved when they made recommendations not in line with ADE ideology. Little Rock families should be listened to and respected.
- Community schools, where families and educators collaborate to meet the needs of their students, are a proven way to boost educational outcomes. We should create community schools instead of closing neighborhood schools.

We know those strategies will help ALL kids succeed. But our schools continue to struggle because the State refuses to make the investments our students need to thrive.

Gov. Hutchinson and the State Board of Education say they want to maintain state control of Little Rock's struggling schools, further segregate the school district, and decertify the Little Rock Education Association bargaining agreement to help improve education for Little Rock students. But the facts do not support them.

We can't let them use distractions and diversion to keep us from demanding what our kids need. If they win and continue to short-change students in Little Rock, they will use the same strategy across the rest of Arkansas.

There is no evidence that ADE is improving our school district. It's time for our leaders to invest in proven solutions for ALL students, instead of offering us more of the same. It's time for us to have a locally controlled, unified school district again so we can build the school system our children deserve. And it's time for the state to invest in what is proven to help kids rather than ideological and divisive distractions.

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