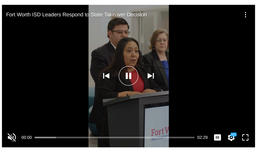
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No whining: With state takeover, let's finally fix Fort Worth schools | Opinion

By The Fort Worth Star-Telegram Editorial Board

Updated October 23, 2025 3:00 PM



Key Takeaways AI-generated summary reviewed by our newsroom.

Some people will bemoan and protest Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath's decision to replace the Fort Worth ISD board of trustees and implement state oversight of the long-struggling district.

Fine. We have some concerns, too. Take the weekend and get it out of your system. But the deed is done, and now, the priority for everyone must be to fix the systemic failures that have harmed entire generations of schoolchildren and build for a future where academic mastery is a reachable destination, not an imagined glimmer on the horizon.

It's time to get beyond politics and get to work. There should be no ideological or partisan split on what comes next. And most importantly, everyone — parents, teachers, administrators, the new state overlords and community leaders — needs to pick up an oar and start rowing in the same direction.

There is an appeal process for Morath's move, which the trustees will no doubt explore. But there doesn't seem to be much point. Morath does not act lightly and will not, in the span of a week, change his mind.

The quicker things move forward, the better. Morath will appoint a board of managers from the community, a conservator with sweeping powers and a superintendent. As we've said before, the best option would be to retain superintendent Karen Molinar. In a year, she's made significant changes that show signs of bearing fruit.

The progress is modest, especially against the backdrop of decades worth of failing at the fundamental job of teaching children basic material. Morath's decision was predicated on the consistent inadequacy of a campus that Fort Worth ISD has already closed. But he laid out a damning indictment of five straight years in which the state rated a majority of district schools as failing.

Under Molinar, there are fewer such campuses in the most recent ratings. And importantly, her entire career has been in Fort Worth, so she can also be a trusted bridge between the appointed board and executive and concerned or skeptical families and community leaders.

Whoever is appointed, everyone needs to keep an open mind. We need leaders of all kinds, from elected officials to clergy to corporate chiefs, to make a sustained commitment so that this opportunity does not slip by. We need more parents to follow their peers who have boldly stepped up to engage in schools and demand better.

And most of all, we need serious people to step up as potential board members who can guide the district through a difficult transition and, ultimately, a return to local control built on a foundation of sound management, honest and effective communication, and vigilance about the right priorities.

Why the state takeover of Fort Worth ISD matters so much

After all, let's remember why this matters. And let's not pull any punches.

Fort Worth ISD has let large portions of entire generations of children pass through its doors without mastering the basic skills required for further education, economic vitality and civic involvement. And the vast majority of those children are Black and Hispanic, many from communities with significant challenges. Morath noted that Fort Worth lags the Dallas and Houston districts badly in keeping economically disadvantaged students on grade level.

Their ability to continue learning and advancing is diminished. Economic opportunity is harder to come by. It's immoral to leave them so far behind. The failures of those who have been in charge hurt the most innocent among us.

Morath's move is a chance for real change. But we'll need brutal honesty about how failures mounted for decades. Why weren't alarm bells sounded when, year after year, elementary students did not adequately master reading? Why was a decade of declining enrollment, the clear sign of parents choosing any option they could outside of FWISD, met with a shrug?

Why did it take Mayor Mattie Parker rallying a coalition of civic, business and philanthropic leaders to demand change? Why have voters been so apathetic that fewer than 1 in 10 cast a ballot for a school board member — leaving those who do vote to choose trustees who would not or could not turn the tide?

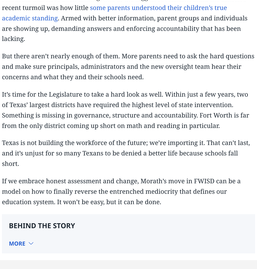
Everyone has a part in this, so everyone has to participate in fixing it.

Why Morath should keep Fort Worth Superintendent Karen Molinar

As TEA control unfolds, we'll hear a lot about the Houston school district. The state's largest ISD has been under state oversight for more than two years. It has not been without controversy. The academic progress under Morath's chosen superintendent, Mike Miles, has been real, reflected in test scores and fewer poorly rated campuses.

But it's come at a cost. Many community leaders don't trust Miles, and educators have expressed concern about many of his initiatives. Fort Worth can hardly afford to lose good teachers, so their perspective must be valued.

Miles arrived as an outsider. Molinar has worked to build trust and understands the history that hangs over efforts to change. So, while it's tempting to say that Morath should make a clean sweep, keeping the superintendent is the best option.



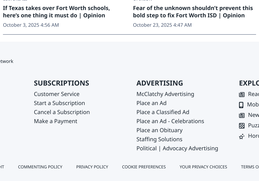
Fort Worth Independent School District Superintendent Karen Calvert Molinar listens to a discussion while State Education Commissioner Mike Morath visits William James Middle School on Thursday, Aug. 28, 2025. Amanda McCoy

Fort Worth must have a more effective school board

But a new dynamic for the school board is a must.

For too long, those small slivers of the electorate that have backed trustees choose candidates who protect the fiefdoms of their individual districts without enough consideration of the whole organization. They've indulged pet interests and tolerated political distractions rather than demanding a hard focus on academic achievement.

Now, we need strong leaders with experience turning around organizations. They must represent the community and be responsive to parents, staff and teachers. It's a complex set of skills, and leaders throughout Fort Worth need to help Morath and his team identify those best qualified for leadership in a new era.



State Education Commissioner Mike Morath, right, talks with State Board of Education Member Brandon Hall while touring William James Middle School on Thursday, Aug. 28, 2025, in Fort Worth. Amanda McCoy
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It's also going to take some tough love. Many parents have answered the call for more engagement with the district. They've won important victories, prying loose more information about the state of learning and demanding transparency and resources that have been lacking. One of the biggest revelations amid the district's recent turmoil was how little some parents understood their children's true academic standing. Armed with better information, parent groups and individuals are showing up, demanding answers and enforcing accountability that has been lacking.

But there aren't nearly enough of them. More parents need to ask the hard questions and make sure principals, administrators and the new oversight team hear their concerns and what they and their schools need.

It's time for the Legislature to take a hard look as well. Within just a few years, two of Texas' largest districts have required the highest level of state intervention. Something is missing in governance, structure and accountability. Fort Worth is far from the only district coming up short on math and reading in particular.

Texas is not building the workforce of the future; we're importing it. That can't last, and it's unjust for so many Texans to be denied a better life because schools fall short.

If we embrace honest assessment and change, Morath's move in FWISD can be a model on how to finally reverse the entrenched mediocrity that defines our education system. It won't be easy, but it can be done.

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