

PRESS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KEEPING PUBLIC EDUCATION A SUCCESS

I struck up a conversation with a graduating senior. “What do you want in life?” I asked. “To be successful,” he replied. To which I asked the question: “What is success?” “I don’t know,” he said as he walked away. We all want to be successful. But how can you be successful if you cannot even define it?

The World Economic Forum estimates 65 percent of children today will end up in careers that don’t even exist yet and for which schools are not preparing them. Let that sink in for a minute: the vast majority of children in school will end up in careers that do not even exist today.

One of the organizations I like to keep up with is [The Future Project](#). They argue that “the future is not fixed—and that people, working together, can shape it for the better.” I share their optimism. I think the same is true of the teaching profession: people working together, can shape it for the better.

Too often I see the education community put up walls. Walls between school systems and communities. Walls between school administration and teachers. Walls between teachers and other teachers. Walls between teachers and students. It is time to tear the walls down. It is time that we create the change that our schools, teachers, and students need. I recommend three steps for policymakers to consider at the state level that can create success for our schools in the future:

1. **Embrace Innovation.** Governor Bill Lee said: “In order to improve, you have to be willing to innovate and challenge the status quo. That’s true whether it is in business or education.” This means at the state level the focus must be on providing the flexibility and freedom for educators and education leaders at all levels to try new things that will help improve student achievement and success. Our goal as a state should be to give every child the opportunity to receive a high-quality education, in order to build a skilled workforce for the 21st Century global economy.
2. **Update the Funding Formula.** At the state level, the Basic Education Program (BEP), is how Tennessee funds our K-12 public schools. The BEP provides over \$4.7 billion of state funding for education. We must update our K12 funding formula to reflect changing 21st century needs. It is time for the state to push for a new funding plan and formula that reflects our modern educational mission, priorities, and strategies. Yes, there are lawsuits under the current system, and it will be a challenge to make everyone happy, but it is past time to address the funding issue. We must also make sure dollars that are earmarked for salary increases end up in the pockets of teachers, and that all state mandates are fully funded.
3. **End Social Promotion.** We must ensure that all students will be able to read proficiently by the end of the third-grade. Children who do not read on grade level are more likely to drop out, use drugs or end up in prison. Research shows that reading abilities in the third- grade act as a tell-tale barometer for later school success. We cannot keep sending Tennessee students onto the next grade if they lack basic reading skills. Social promotion does more harm than good. We can no longer ignore the issue of social promotion. We must eliminate the practice of advancing students because of their age rather than their knowledge. The decision to have a student to repeat a grade should not be made lightly or without considering a student’s unique situation. The evidence for focused retention strategies points toward real benefits for those students who arrive at school lacking some of the building blocks of literacy. These students need some extra time to catch up. We cannot give up on teaching our children how to read. The best solution, of course, is to remediate struggling readers during the school year, to get them the extra help they need to stay on track. However,

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SUMMARY

Steps for policymakers to consider at the state level that can create success for our schools in the future.

we cannot simply to continue to move these students through the system. Social promotion hurts our kids, kills our workforce, and fills up our prisons.

We can change the path we are on, and give every child a better chance of success—even if they don't know what it looks like at this point in their life. Success is not left to chance, it's a matter of choice. We have tough choices to make in public education, and that will include changes. We must make the choices that benefit our state, our communities, our schools, our educators and especially our children.

We must make sure public education is viewed as a significant part of the choice that parents will make for their children moving forward. The best and brightest students in our communities should know that our public education system will work for them. The underserved and poor in our communities should know that our public education system can work for them. Every parent in our communities should know that they have a role in making sure our public education system works for their children. Part of our role has to be keeping K12 education at the forefront of every discussion in public policy across Tennessee. That is the success we should seek.

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