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PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AN APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

I Some in our country are simply not satisfied with one act of destruction, they strive to destroy whatever, and whenever, the opportunity presents itself. It is a political game of chicken we are playing, and many believe parts of society are headed toward destruction.

We must pay close attention to the upcoming education funding debate in Tennessee leading up to the upcoming legislative session. We must spend funding more efficiently and modernize the system. We must also remind ourselves that the quality of public education improves the personal growth and social development of children and makes a community a more attractive place to live. Tennessee's economy and future are dependent on educating our children effectively. If we harm our schools irreparably, we hurt our future.

Mark Zuckerberg is famous for telling his Facebook development team, "Move fast and break things." Phil Lewis in Forbes magazine asked the key questions about the concept of moving fast and breaking things. "What is it acceptable to break? Why? And under what circumstances?"

The answers to those questions are critical. In education, moving fast may not always be the best interest of children. You may fix one thing but break three.

Clayton Christensen put forth a notion of "disruptive innovation" as a concept for business theory. When it comes to government programs, we have been made to conform to the existing business model. Politically, too much oversight of our schools has moved away from the local community via the school district, to the state, and subsequently on to the federal government. However, services such as public education are not always a precise science. The further away decision is made the more likely it is not in the best interest of every child. Education is and should remain primarily a local responsibility and a state priority.

In business, the bottom line is selling a good or service. In education, that good is someone's child. Every single attribute of education or business simply cannot be documented and measured. Phil Lewis points out that "innovation is ultimately a human enterprise, to do with our ability to inspire each other, think creatively and collaborate." We need more innovators and fewer disrupters in education. Education is a pathway to the future and provides a critical foundation for life.

Certainly, we have to end the political game of chicken when it comes to education policy. One thing is certain; both sides of the political aisle risk the destruction of public education. That will hurt generations of children

SUMMARY

Because Tennessee's economy and future are dependent on educating our children effectively, the education funding debate in our upcoming legislative session is critical.

while harming both parents and educators. Too many people simply bought into the jargon fostered by disruption innovation. They are so enthralled by breaking the rules of the game that they forget what game they are even playing, thus losing sight of the real objective: the child in the classroom and the teacher who is there to educate them.

In public education schools alone can never be fully responsible for the outcomes that our students achieve. Parents and educators know a child better than any philanthropist, non-elected bureaucrat, or elected official. We need greater parent engagement. Parents need to be involved.

We should embrace parents as the partners they have always been. Parents know their children best and recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their children. Parents want to have more influence than school boards on what their children are learning. Robert Pondiscio [warns](#) that “angry and activist parents” are “a political force to be reckoned with in next year’s midterm elections and races nationwide from statehouses to school boards.” The battle is not coming, the battle is here. And it will dramatically affect the education landscape for children. Parents and educators are caught in this crossfire and have grown more frustrated with elected leaders.

Glenn Nye states “our current system rewards politicians who appeal to narrow partisan constituencies that demand ideological rigidity.” He is undoubtedly accurate. Gerrymandering and shaping districts via redistricting has certainly aided in this effort. The influence of non-elected, appointed bureaucrats, political donors, and philanthropists has created an [invisible government](#).

Educators are the key to solutions that schools face, but they need more assistance and parental involvement to confront serious societal problems. We must frequently ask ourselves: What kind of state or community do we want to live in, work in, and raise our family in? What kind of schools do we need? Who do we trust to meet the challenges that our school districts, educators, parents, and students are now confronting? At the heart of education is trust. We must mend broken trust with transparency, openness, and honesty. However, time is not on our side.

Pondiscio states: “The relationship between parents and their local public schools is one of the most enduring and resilient relationships in civil society.” Roughly, ninety percent of students attend public schools. The pandemic has indeed created issues where some parents are now revisiting this relationship. To restore that trust, we need parents and educators to improve their mutual communication, and for both to play a more meaningful part in future decision-making processes.

On Twitter, Pondiscio added: “Fight, vote, win or sharpen your arguments for the next round. Those are the rules. Polarization is a feature of our system, not a flaw. The threat is from those--left or right--who regard the legitimacy of this process as an inconvenience rather than a third rail.” The battle is here. When it comes to education policy and educating our children, we must remind those who are in charge and making the decisions in Tennessee of the Pottery Barn Rule: "You break it, you own it."

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