



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A K12 EDUCATION AGENDA WE SHOULD EMBRACE

I am excited about the future of public education in Tennessee. Many critics like to point out some of the shortcomings of our system, and rightly so. A one size fits all system does not work for everyone. It never has, and never will. The system will continue to evolve, albeit slowly, and adjustments will always be needed. We should welcome debate on public education, which remains our greatest priority.

In order to attract and keep industries and business that we need for a global economy, we must build and develop a quality workforce. A quality education system ultimately provides economic mobility for all of our citizens. It is imperative that taxpayers understand that education is an investment for our state's future, not merely an expense to bear. It is also a constitutional requirement in our state.

As a businessman, Governor-elect Bill Lee understands that higher salaries will encourage more people to join the teaching profession and hopefully entice current educators to remain in the field, resulting in better outcomes for Tennessee students. Lee has stated his three major priorities: 1) Getting our students ready to enter the workforce; 2) Strengthening the foundations of a quality system; and 3) Encouraging innovation. It is a K12 education agenda we should embrace.

Tennessee's business community has expressed increased concern about workforce development. In the future, people with solid, transferable skills that are open to continued learning will be critical for our workforce. To get our students ready for the workforce we must better link state and local efforts for economic development and job creation. This will also necessitate expanding post-secondary vocational training. Many occupations are developed through apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and vocational programs offered at community colleges. That does not always mean expensive, four-year degrees for which many students are not suited. In high school, Tennessee may want to consider giving students the option to use the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate examination, rather than the ACT/SAT in the 11th grade year.

Strengthening the foundations of our public-school system, begins with support for local control of public education. It is also critical to look at how we fund our schools. The methodology we use to fund our schools has constantly been litigated by school districts. These lawsuits prove we must incorporate and take into consideration the dramatically different cost of living and doing business in different counties across the state. We must update our school funding formula to reflect changing 21st century needs. At the state level we have to improve the teacher pipeline. This means we must identify and develop a community of well-trained, highly compensated educators who can flourish in the teaching profession. Any investment we make in education must be high quality, and position our children for success in the classroom, career and life. We have much work to do.

We need our new Governor, our new Commissioner and our new Tennessee General Assembly to listen to educators and continue to champion innovation in public education. Educators want that chance to be inventive, and they understand the need to challenge the status quo. The testing culture has killed the enthusiasm of many educators. Although we need testing to measure the progress of our students, we should recognize these tests are often unreliable in evaluating teachers and schools. We should pursue reliable standardized tests that provide accurate feedback for educators, parents, and students. No single test should be a determinant of a student's, teacher's or school's success. True measurement of progress should instead consist of several benchmarks, not just testing.

SUMMARY

Governor-elect Bill Lee has stated his three major priorities: 1) Getting our students ready to enter the workforce; 2) Strengthening the foundations of a quality system; and 3) Encouraging innovation. It is a K12 education agenda we should embrace.

We must also break down the bureaucratic barriers that have kept educators and school districts from pursuing solutions to the unique challenges of their communities. Governor-elect Lee has promised to “pilot innovative approaches that encourage our schools and their communities to work together and design solutions without bureaucratic hurdles.” That is a wise strategy to pursue. Lee, like many other business and community leaders, understands that the solutions to many problems we face in our hinge on a quality public education system. Our future depends on that success. Let’s all work to make that happen.

#####

JC Bowman is the Executive Director of Professional Educators of Tennessee, a non-partisan teacher association headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the author and the association are properly cited. For more information on this subject or any education issue please contact Professional Educators of Tennessee. To schedule an interview please contact [Audrey Shores, Director of Communications](#), at 1-800-471-4867 ext.102.