



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STRIKE OUT IN TENNESSEE

I have never been an advocate of strikes, particularly in the public sector. Beginning last year, and in recent days, several media outlets have contacted our organization about “teacher strikes” in Tennessee. Members of our organization have always believed that educators have the right to teach without being forced to join any particular organization, and that strikes or work stoppages are detrimental to children, parents, the community, and the profession.

Strikes are rooted in the erroneous Machiavellian belief that *the end justifies the means*; they are also emphasized in the works of Saul Alinsky. Most educators understand the important role that our public schools play in society. In many cases, public schools offer the critical support necessary to maintain student health, nutrition and safety, including students with severe intellectual disabilities and serious health conditions. This includes many children living in poverty and those who are homeless. Professional activists and agitators that urge educators in our state to strike do not care about these children and, truth be told, have little concern for the professionals in our classrooms.

Former mayor of Los Angeles Antonio Villaraigosa, an ex-union organizer, wrote in a Washington Post editorial that a teacher strike hurts families and kids. He said: “under today’s circumstances, a strike isn’t what we need to improve our schools.” He is correct. A strike is a throwback to an archaic factory model of governance. More importantly, public servants usually have a higher expectation associated with their trusted role. *Governing* magazine’s Heather Kerrigan points out: “Teachers, firefighters and police are the public workers who people feel a lot of empathy for because of the challenges of their job.” She adds: “I think that public opinion and tolerance level for public-employee strikes is probably fairly low.”

So, as you read or hear buzzwords like “collective action,” “sickout” or “strike,” remember that it is critical we avoid alienating the public. The old expression rings true: “don’t bite the hand that feeds you.” However, we can and must inform citizens through a more positive means about significant issues impacting our public schools and the children we serve. Educators do need to be more vocal about spending priorities at the federal, state, and local levels. It is why educator associations like ours are vital and why we have been engaged in the debate.

SUMMARY

In education, strikes are detrimental to children, parents, the community, and the profession. A strike is a throwback to an archaic factory model of governance. Public education in Tennessee wins when we all work together through civil discourse to address our considerable issues, not with outworn strategies from the industrial age.

Tennessee has made tremendous investments in public education in the last decade. Not including new investments projected by Governor Bill Lee in his proposed budget, Tennessee added \$1.5 billion in new dollars to public education from 2011 to 2019 under Governor Bill Haslam. There is still much more work to do. We must continue to invest in our educators and teacher assistants, and critical school staff, making sure those dollars reach their pockets. We must work to reduce testing and give districts other options to measure student achievement. We still need to work to create a simpler and more fair evaluation system. We must address student discipline issues that are spiraling out of control. We survey our members on a regular basis and these are issues of importance across the state according to educators in Tennessee.

However, it really does not matter our opinion about strikes: teacher strikes have been illegal in our state according to Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) since 1978. In TCA 49-5-606., Unlawful Acts include that it is illegal for educators to *engage in a strike*. In addition, it is illegal to *urge, coerce or encourage others to engage in unlawful acts as defined in this part*. The next section of the law 49-5-60., Strikes – Remedies offers more clarity: *When local boards of education have determined which employees have engaged in or participated in a strike, the employees may be subject to dismissal and, further, shall forfeit their claim to tenure status, if they have attained tenure, and shall revert to probationary status for the next five-year period. Any professional employee who engaged in, or participated in, a strike and who is not a tenured teacher may also be subject to dismissal.*

Public education in Tennessee wins when we all work together through civil discourse to address our considerable issues. Education is the great equalizer for all children in the state. Passionate and effective teachers, principals, and superintendents must lead with creative solutions to problems, and not with outworn strategies from the industrial age. In the 21st-century, we must be policy driven and mindful of economic concerns, providing realistic answers to difficult challenges. Adversarial tactics spurred on by outside groups - with dubious agendas - simply will not benefit Tennessee educators or children.

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