



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## STICK THAT IN YOUR CAMPAIGN PLATFORM

The key to success in politics is having your message relate to people's lives at exactly the right moment. For all those running for office: Work hard. Tell the truth. Your message will resonate if you are serious and make voters feel that your message is genuine and relevant. Be real and keep it authentic. Tennesseans know innately when you are honest with them, and if you believe in what you say.

All citizens have hopes and dreams for themselves, and their children and grandchildren. As we climb our way back from COVID-19 to a better place, we need the realism of where we truly are as a state and country and optimism of where we can be. Politicians should point out tangible problems while offering actual attainable solutions to the public. You are more likely to change your community, state, nation, and the world by being honest and empathic while offering constructive criticism where warranted with an emphasis on solutions.

We need to have an ongoing, transparent dialogue about education in our communities, as well as in our state and nation. This conversation will lead to increased engagement and trust. By reducing fear, stress, and anxiety we all win. As you campaign for political office locally, you need to take the lead on fostering those conversations. We know the paradigm is shifting in public education as we are witnessing the growing reliance on technology in real-time. Online education may be cheaper and will continue to expand, but it cannot guarantee accessibility, equity, or competency, nor can it fully replace an in-person educator. As this shift is occurring, we cannot continue to measure results as we have in the past. So, if you are running for a state office let me offer you a few suggestions to stick in your campaign platform:

- **Address the Tennessee Department of Education.** To restore trust in this critical state agency, we need greater transparency and oversight. The fastest way to accomplish this objective is to offer one of three options: Option 1 - Elect the Commissioner of Education; Option 2 - Move the agency underneath the State Board of Education, and either elect the state board members or have the state board members appointed by the Governor with legislative approval. This appointed or elected board would then appoint the Commissioner of Education; Option 3 - The Commissioner of Education would be appointed by the Governor, but would require confirmation by the Tennessee General Assembly.
- **Separate student testing from accountability.** Let's keep it simple. Tests are merely a tool that allows the assessment of a children's capacity in a specific domain at a particular time. We should measure student knowledge of a subject. Let's be transparent. Honest test results have been

### SUMMARY

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skewed statewide in Tennessee since 2012, plagued by one problem after another. So, on the campaign trail consider these two points: First, we cannot evaluate the effectiveness of teachers (or schools) based on student test scores in which educators had little or no control. Second, we must develop ways of assessing school accountability by measuring the effectiveness of educators directly, not through student test scores. Failing to address this issue moving forward will prolong the limiting effect on curriculum and further limit actual student learning. The issue is not the tests, but the accountability purposes for which they are used.

- **Kick the Special Interests to the Curb.** Tennessee is a haven to a multitude of special interests that have come into our state to get funding. After the money is gone, they disappear. Outside groups have found a home with their education agenda here in Tennessee. It is time these groups with a national and global agenda not domiciled in our state stop being given preferential treatment in setting our policies. Education must be driven by the grassroots, not top-down. Education is primarily a state and local responsibility in the United States. Most Tennesseans support local control of public education by the district board of education. This includes the autonomy of the local school district to adopt curriculum, assessments, and programs to meet recognized educational goals and objectives. Local school systems know what works or what doesn't work in their communities. Give local leaders the tools and resources they need, and then hold them accountable.

This is why Professional Educators of Tennessee advocates and focuses on strengthening the profession and improving working conditions for those who choose to teach. The student is the center of our universe. The working conditions of educators is the learning environment of our students. We work positively to get our members the support they need to be effective in the classroom. The transformative influence of a teacher is something almost all of us have experienced and understand on a personal level.

Education unions have confused their priorities and lost their impetus to serve the needs of educators. They have replaced their role in leadership in the education profession with politics, culture change, and social justice issues as their objectives. Polarized rhetoric and behaviors divide people while losing public support for public education.

Solutions to many problems we face in our society today hinge on the success of a quality public education system. Education ultimately provides economic mobility for all of our citizens. Taxpayers must 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. A heartfelt message in support of public education in your campaign platform will persuade both educators and citizens alike.

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