

EDITORIAL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

For the Greeks, speaking truth to power was known as parrhesia or free speech. The Greek citizen understood it was their right to speak candidly and did not think they should have to ask forgiveness for speaking the truth. Speaking candidly was an essential element of the democracy of Classical Athens. We know today that words have meaning, and meaning has consequences. Choosing our words carefully is also extremely important.

On September 22 and 23 the Tennessee House of Representatives Education Committee will convene for their annual "Summer Study." We are expected to hear about several topics, involving K-12 Education. The committee is expected to hear from embattled Commissioner of Education, Penny Schwinn. While Schwinn will face some tough questions and tension will be high, the Commissioner will likely not face a "No Confidence" vote. That is because the Tennessee General Assembly is not currently in session.

The Tennessee House of Representatives, like the Tennessee Senate and Office of Governor, are Republican. The Education Committee made up of a majority of Republicans. They are not likely to want to pass a resolution against the appointed Commissioner of Education during an election year against their Governor. The Democrats have shown a reluctance to be critical of this Commissioner. However, both parties could coalesce around some issues of mutual concern and demand answers.

When the General Assembly reconvenes in January, the mood will likely be different, and the challenges that our districts, educators, and students face must take priority. The political posturing must give way to a new reality - moving public education forward in Tennessee. What are the challenges and how can we best address them?

Our position has not changed. Whether Commissioner Schwinn is retained or removed, it will be the choice of Tennessee Governor, Bill Lee. Governor Lee is committed to the retention of Penny Schwinn. People can speculate on the reason or why he has taken this position. Perhaps he genuinely believes she is moving our state forward on public education. He has stated he likes the disruption she brings to public education, and he likes the way the Commissioner has handled the COVID-19 response. Another likely reason is the ongoing lawsuit against the Education Savings Accounts program. Penny Schwinn is likely to be a critical witness in this litigation moving forward.

There are three branches within our state government, the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Our founders created a system of checks and balances to keep each branch of government from gaining too much control and to keep each branch accountable to the people. The Tennessee General Assembly is responsible

SUMMARY

Next week's Summer Study session by the TN House of Representative's Education Committees is expected to address a variety of K-12 education topics with particular focus on the adequacy of the Department of Education's response to COVID-19.

under our state constitution with enacting, amending, and repealing the laws of our state. Our state was concerned with concentrating too much power in any one branch of government. House Education Chairman Mark White will likely attempt to keep the education committee focused strictly on school reopening and response to COVID-19.

As a representative of the General Assembly, Chairman White will keep a tight rein on the proceedings. A myriad of topics could also emerge, such as the Achievement School District, state standards, textbooks, broadband limitations, lack of devices, contracts, and grants, as well as the well-being checklists. However, the focus is likely to stay focused on the Department of Education's response to COVID-19, whether it was adequate or not.

Hearings of this nature can inform future legislative policymaking and can serve as fact-finding missions to advance future legislative goals. Education stakeholders, parents, and taxpayers should watch this hearing to get a glimpse into the legislative process, and better understand these issues. If substantive and candid conversations are allowed to take place, public understanding and engagement could increase. We encourage stakeholders to contact their legislators and speak candidly if they have a specific question related to education. All eyes in Tennessee will be on the House Education Committee next week. Certainly, legislators will rise to the occasion.

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