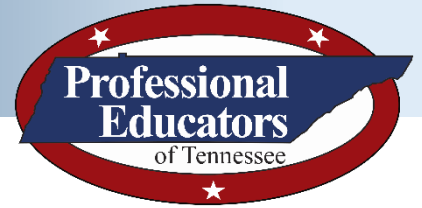


EDITORIAL

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EDUCATION ADVICE FOR PRESIDENT-ELECT BIDEN

Our friends at *Chalkbeat* (national), ardently pointed out teachers' unions will likely influence a forthcoming Biden administration. Jill Biden even thanked teacher unions for their members' support during the election. "Joe and I will never forget what you did for us," stated Mrs. Biden.

Ever since industrial unions worked to reelect President Franklin Roosevelt in 1936, organized labor and the Democratic Party have worked together in U.S. politics. Teacher unions have backed the Democratic Party for decades, using member votes, member money, and member volunteers. A union influencing a politician is as predictable as a celebrity divorce in Hollywood. It just comes as no surprise.

Journalist Mike Antonucci [pointed out](#), "You might argue that Biden is more beholden to the teachers' unions in 2020 than Obama was in 2008, and you would be correct. However, Obama also had 57 Democratic senators and 257 Democratic members of the House. Biden will enter the White House in a much weaker position."

Mr. Biden should take note that traditional unions are on the decline for a reason and the old union model is not coming back. While unions have sometimes been seen as piggy banks for politicians, non-unions have successfully advocated for better pay and protection of workers around the United States. Economically, our education system is the ground beneath our feet. The base from which we build. If we want to strengthen the role of the United States in the world economy, education is going to be a major factor.

Mr. Biden should tap into many pro-public education conservatives who were disappointed in Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. President Trump had many policy areas in which conservatives may have agreed with him, his Secretary of Education is one that was the most ostracized in conservative education circles.

If Republicans end up back in control of the Senate, Mr. Biden will have to move toward a more centralist candidate to replace DeVos. If that were to occur, a unifying voice in the Department of Education would be welcome and allow the President-elect to expand his policy goals. However, it is unlikely he may move in that direction.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, is the presumptive favorite, although she may face strong opposition. Being named a frontrunner most assuredly means she will not get the post.

SUMMARY

Professional Educators of Tennessee executive director recommends that President-elect Biden becomes more inclusive, gives states and LEAs more flexibility, and waives standardized testing for this year.

Biden is expected to search for an Obama Administration retread, that may appeal to his base, but not send off alarms. We need nonpartisan leadership to work in this bipartisan world.

We have already seen some items trickle out on what we need from the federal government in education. Limiting federal control of education, and reducing their footprint in states would be a good start. We agree with Politico writer Nicole Gaudiano that the next secretary will be tested immediately on assessments, and whether to waive federal standardized testing requirements for K-12 schools for a second year or continue to mandate them. We are unsure of any meaningful results from a standardized test in the middle of this global pandemic.

The Biden Administration should also allow interested states and local education agencies (LEAs) to focus their federal education dollars on their priorities and programs. In return for increased flexibility, states and LEAs would demonstrate that their students are improving academically. This approach would give states and local jurisdictions more flexibility to consolidate and administer federal funds; recognize and reward states and locals that succeed in improving academic achievement, and provide additional help for states that do not achieve academically.

By granting states and LEAs more flexibility, they can design and implement programs in ways that best meet the needs of their students and communities. It is a win-win. In the Age of COVID-19, our districts need more flexibility, and not just in the next two years, but moving forward. While the government must fulfill its obligations to fund education, parents also have to do their job too. By serving as a clearinghouse, the federal government should collect best practices throughout the states on how to better engage parents in public education to the benefit of their children. In the past, parent engagement was rarely discussed.

It is still true that education remains the strongest, most unquestionable path for low-income students to move to the middle class. We recognize that there remain differences in learning opportunities for students based on where they live, and now access to education, which has been disrupted by this global pandemic. The federal government could provide funding through block grants to states to offer summer programs for struggling students through partnerships between local schools and community organizations.

We are under no illusion that Mr. Biden will take our advice. Nevertheless, we offer it with the best intentions to see him succeeded with a non-partisan education agenda. It is clear that for now and the foreseeable future, a vast majority of children will continue to be educated by public schools. We must focus on making our public schools successful. A strong public education system is key to our nation, a foundation to build our economy, and how we can help all children achieve their dreams.

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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 communications@proedtn.org or 1-800-471-4867.

