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TEACHER ATTRITION IS A GROWING PROBLEM

There remains a growing disparity between teacher supply and demand here in Tennessee. This is only likely to grow in the immediate future. With the pending retirement of experienced teachers, and a shift in teacher longevity, many educators opting for briefer careers. Additionally, with many young adults not opting to enter education as a career, it poses an unquestionable threat to public education. The demand will only worsen during the next decade.

Why the decline? “Over the past two decades, the perfect storm of lowered respect, toxic teacher evaluation systems, adverse working conditions, inconsistent leadership, lack of efficacy, professional isolation, and inadequate pay have combined to create the ideal conditions for shortages,” writes Douglas Reeves author of *From Leading to Succeeding: The Seven Elements of Effective Leadership*. Reeves is spot on in his assessment.

Todd Garlington wrote: “Once people said: Give me liberty or give me death. Now they say: Make me a slave, just pay me enough.” Despite all of the negative perceptions, and projections, we should be astonished by the high-quality, energized young people, and those seeking a second career, who still want to enter the education profession. The Learning Policy Institute discovered that students perform better and log fewer absences when instructed by an experienced teacher. To fill vacancies, school districts are increasingly turning to a backdoor path like alternate certification for their teachers. You can’t kill idealism.

Schools must be places where people want to go to work. We must also work to remove any barriers that keep quality people out of the teaching profession here in Tennessee. There is no debate that educators, especially those graduating college and joining the profession, feel more stressed and less valued than at any previous time in our history. Since 2010, enrollment in teacher prep programs has plummeted 42% nationwide.

Everyone understands that having a strong pool of potential educators is a critical issue in creating a quality education system. When teachers leave the profession, it means a loss of knowledge for a school district and a cost to recruit new educators as a replacement. Roughly “half a million U.S. teachers either move or leave the profession each year—attrition that costs the United States up to \$2.2 billion annually,” according to a 2014 report from the Alliance for Excellent Education.

Unfortunately, too often when bureaucrats get together for thoughtful, productive conversations they may exclude the very people that could help them address many of these challenges. We need all stakeholders at

SUMMARY

We must remove the barriers that keep quality people from choosing to be in education and make schools places where people want to work.

the table, including Colleges of Education. If meeting the teacher demand for such a critical profession as education is not working, (as is currently happening) the ripple effect on recruitment will be felt across the state.

We have to acknowledge that as a state we have not responded to this critical need of teacher recruitment effectively. We are already seeing and feeling the decline of quality educators entering the profession. We must not just address a teacher shortage, but a shortage of great teachers in the schools and communities where they are most needed. We must welcome teachers from other states to come to our state by making their transition seamless and easier. Tennessee is a destination state for many Americans. We must welcome educators to come and be part of our state and continue in their profession.

Teacher demand is urgent for the future of public education. The model we have used in the past likely will not work in the present or the future. It has taken us too long to see the importance of the need to shift and change directions. One of the primary roles of leaders is to change the culture when needed. The time for addressing teacher supply in Tennessee is now. A one size fits all solution to this issue will not solve the issue short-term or long-term. We need a diversified strategy.

The state's education system directly relates to our future economic performance. Countries such as Finland understood early the relationship between student performance, teacher quality, and professional development. Without an adequate supply of teachers, no amount of professional development will lead to an increase in student performance. Quality teachers are not just critical for the success of our students. They are also the key to the success of our future economy. It is time to address the disparity between teacher supply and demand.

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