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## PARENTS AND TEACHERS NEED TO WORK TOGETHER

There are many key policy levers needed to improve public education and many are intertwined. Moving education policy is a lot like the game Jenga. If you remove the wrong piece the structure collapses.

We must create a better funding plan and formula that reflects our modern educational mission, priorities, and strategies. In funding our schools, the only way to create education policies that are clear, inclusive, and child-centered is by removing quasi-public entities from driving the debate. Too often outside organizations are promoting particular pre-determined solutions that often disenfranchise legitimate stakeholders. Outside organizations and policymakers fail to recognize that even good ideas in education cannot always be replicated.

The critical key in assessing policy changes is the feasibility of implementing the policy. It is important to identify barriers that will prevent the policy from being implemented successfully. In policy, you must be able to identify a window of opportunity or obstacle and move accordingly. You have to also evaluate other factors such as the budget or economic impact.

The debate around how to improve the education system in the United States and Tennessee is complicated with incredibly high stakes. As with any change, the devil is always in the details. Unquestionably, public education is an investment that benefits all of society. In most states, teacher evaluation systems didn't do anything for students. [The Hechinger Report](#) states that nationwide, evaluating and penalizing teachers rarely works.

Educators feel they are in a constant battle against the false assumption that public schools are failing, and that they are seen as the problem. Too many believe outsiders, usually non-educators, should take control of running our schools. In public education, we are succeeding, despite challenges sometimes self-inflicted.

Teachers shape the future with the knowledge and experiences they impart to their students. That is a great responsibility, and it also comes with a demand for accountability. I have never met a teacher who is afraid of being held accountable. We know we test too much. We can have fewer tests and achieve the desired results of transparency and accountability.

However, our schools alone can never be solely responsible for the outcomes that our students achieve. Educators are critical in finding solutions that schools face, but we need more assistance from others to confront serious societal problems. As I reminded an audience in Memphis, our problems are community issues and need community solutions.

### SUMMARY

*Many outside groups and philanthropists are making policy decisions about education that drive parents and teachers away from the debate.*

We do not only need parent involvement and parent engagement; without it, our schools cannot succeed. People use the phrase “the truth be told” a lot yet the truth is rarely told. And the truth is that outside groups and philanthropists who are making policy decisions have driven many parents from the debate, along with the teachers. When parents and teachers unite to work on solutions to address issues it becomes a win-win for all students.

Tennessee has now spent several years trying to disentangle itself from the vestiges of Common Core, but efforts have been somewhat thwarted by the use of supplemental materials and pilot projects, even as legislation has been passed to disengage from the advocacy of philanthropic groups and *Race to the Top* monies. The outcome of that battle will shape our culture and politics for years. Groups upset with public education are missing the “man behind the curtain.”

There is little doubt that philanthropy has solved some important problems in this world. Policymakers and stakeholders alike must avoid government overreach in many policy areas. However, we must also limit advocacy philanthropy and welcome real public engagement into policymaking decisions. Whether it’s Bill Gates, George Soros, Warren Buffett, or any other philanthropist trying to shape public policy we must begin to push back. We need more media scrutiny to enhance accountability for advocacy philanthropy and their organizations that impact our education policy.

Our fear is we have removed so many pieces of our education policy that whatever system we create becomes unstable, just like the game of Jenga. Rather than focusing on what sets us apart, it’s important to listen to all voices, focus on the challenges that we can work on together, and create alliances where there is support on the solutions. Parents and Teachers need to work together.

In the end, we want all our students to succeed. That means keeping focused on preparing students for life after high school, whether their path takes them to college or careers. And making sure our students must have the knowledge, abilities, and habits to enter and complete postsecondary education without remediation after graduation, so they can move seamlessly into a career that allows them to live, work, and maintain a living wage.

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