



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### LET THE TEACHERS TEACH

Seemingly all the ills of society have been laid at the feet of public education. Until we start recognizing education as part of the solution it will continue to be treated as a problem.

The public must begin to view educators as the professionals they are. Most educators have an unwavering commitment to children. Teachers love their job when they get to teach. They are committed to their schools and their communities across the state and the nation. They are committed to the cause of educating the next generation.

Teaching is a calling to serve something bigger than yourself. However, when the job responsibilities are bigger than the time allotted to complete the task, their motivation to serve this greater cause will ultimately disappear.

Educators are caught between a rock and a hard place. They are by nature problem solvers. They are the ones who find solutions to challenges. However, no matter how much effort they exert to meet current challenges, the mission continues to change, by both stakeholders and policymakers. Schools are never given the autonomy to adapt and innovate. They just move from program to program which adds more to our teachers' workload every year.

Researcher Robert Pondiscio recently highlighted a few examples for the [American Enterprise Institute](#) about the central purpose of education shifting from education toward social and emotional learning. Pondiscio said this has been done “without a full and proper examination of its role, or a sufficient discussion about its practices or expectations for its effectiveness.”

He states that [teaching SEL] is “traditionally the work of families, faith, culture, and other institutions and relationships in American life.” We can spend years discussing those claims, and debating those needs and issues, trying to figure out why the shift has occurred. How do we keep families, faith, culture, and other institutions engaged in the social and emotional needs of children?

What caught our eye is the assertion that educators are working “*beyond their training and expertise.*” From our experience that is certainly somewhat accurate. Most educators go into the education field to teach, not become mental health professionals. Indeed, we are seeing the vast array of “ideas and techniques borrowed from popular psychology” being inserted into classroom practice like Pondiscio highlights. It creates a backlash from parents and policymakers alike, with little or no manner to measure for effectiveness. The people who demand accountability on every other issue go silent on this subject.

#### SUMMARY

*Most teachers have an unwavering commitment to children. They love their job when they get to teach and are committed to their schools and their communities.*

Researchers Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor argued early on those knee-jerk reactions to creating policy would create a backlash where schools would constantly be confronted with requests and mandates for another initiative, another pilot project, another program to address a specific learning, behavior, or emotional problem. Most schools are stretched thin by the many programs. As a result, a common reaction of education professionals is, “Enough – we can’t take on another thing!”

One Tennessee teacher wrote: “Teachers are not trained counselors nor do we have time for these one-on-one needs with a room full of other kids and a very tight schedule. We are expected to also maintain and standards and assessments.” It seems like the simple mandate of preparing students to succeed in our knowledge-based economy has shifted without educator buy-in, stakeholder support, or policymaker’s knowledge. It creates a recipe for criticism and loss of public support.

However, the reality is many schools have many serious behavior and discipline issues that must be addressed. Behavioral manifestations and infractions are no longer chewing gum, being out of a seat, or throwing paper. Reports include offenses of cursing teachers, online slander, physical and sexual assault, and sometimes even worse. Students are frequently permitted to commit offenses in school with little repercussion. Student discipline is now a time-consuming and exasperating issue, and teacher input has rarely been solicited. The Tennessee General Assembly worked to address that issue last session, and Governor Bill Lee did set aside \$250 million to establish a mental health fund to help.

Future employers care if Little Johnny can read, write and do basic math. They are not concerned whether Little Johnny has good self-esteem. Now we as a society should certainly help address the assortment of social and emotional issues our students face. However, it will be better addressed with parental inclusion and by appropriately trained personnel working in conjunction with the school system, freeing up teachers to do what they do best- teach. It becomes a win-win for all. We also need to increase the number of Guidance Counselors in our schools and give them time to counsel and work with individual students.

Therefore, we must revisit the purpose of public education and decide what are we building that leads to improved student outcomes. Tomorrow’s teachers must master the science of teaching and learning, classroom management, various methods of improved instruction. We will also need to look at how we can recruit those who are willing to undertake this challenging task of teaching in the future.

It is evident that educators are leaving the classroom and fewer people are seeking to become teachers. If you want to address problems in education, teachers have to be a key part of the solutions.

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