

2009 TBR KEY LEGISLATIVE / POLICY ISSUES

EDUCATION

Elected vs. Appointed Superintendents

Sixteen years ago, the Education Improvement Act ordered the move from elected school superintendents to appointed. Every year since then, legislation has been introduced to allow counties to elect their local superintendents and only two other states in the nation hold elections opposed to appointments. For the following reasons, this legislation should be rejected:



- Superintendents should be hired based on qualification and skill. The process of appointment allows for a larger pool of qualified applicants, expanding beyond the county or district.
- Superintendents should be accountable to a board of education who is elected by the public. School boards should have the ability to dismiss a superintendent for not meeting goals and standards set by the board. An elected superintendent not accountable to the board, would render the board insignificant.
- An appointed superintendent has an incentive to cooperate with the board on reaching their shared goals. An elected superintendent creates divided control and separate agendas, missing the overall mission of student learning.

If an ineffective superintendent is elected, it would take four years to replace him/her. We simply cannot afford to let gaps in student needs and learning go unaddressed until the next election cycle. Time cannot be wasted on our children and the process of true education reform cannot be slowed.

Pre-K

TBR advocates for universal Pre-K to all students, particularly at-risk who are typically behind their suburban, middle-class peers. A multitude of studies across the nation have proven the positive effects of Pre-K learning. Children who receive high quality Pre-K education programs are 40% less likely to need special education or be held back a grade. They are also less likely to need remediation and more likely to graduate from high school, go to college and get a job. Studies have shown that such programs can “return more than seven dollars to society for every dollar initially invested in increased earning for participants and reduced costs on special education, welfare dependency and crime.”

An evaluation of Tennessee’s pilot Pre-K program revealed that for reading, language arts, and math, students who participated in Pre-K tended to score significantly higher on their kindergarten assessments relative to peers who did not attend Pre-K.



BEP Funding

Fully-funding education should be a priority for our state, especially in these times of uncertainty. We support complete funding and implementation of BEP 2.0.

Charter Schools

For charter schools to be an effective education option, as well as effective legislation, we support 1.) opening the enrollment to other than at-risk students 2.) eliminate the sunset provision 3.) remove the “50 school gap” 4.) allow multiple authorizers such as higher education.

WORKFORCE

Unemployment Insurance

Tennessee, as with many other states, is experiencing rapidly increasing growth in unemployment. This sharply increasing trend is expected to continue through 2009, requiring action by the General Assembly to ensure the fund’s solvency. There are several options available to maintain solvency, ranging from an overall increase in the tax rate to borrowing from a federal fund. Whichever measures are adopted must be done sensibly and not worsen business conditions. At the same time, Tennessee should build efficiency into the system, as well as measures to counter-abuse.

Fiscal Responsibility

Encourage the state to use the \$750 million in the Rainy Day Fund and federal stimulus monies for one-time expenditures, and not for recurring budget items.

Economic Development

Tennessee’s economic development incentives are based on old-economy, manufacturing, and distribution industries. We encourage state government leaders to shift their focus to encouraging existing and new companies engaged in innovative and emerging industries.

Pro-Business Climate

TBR members/investors consistently support measures that preserve Tennessee’s pro-business climate such as:

- Maintaining our tradition as a right -to-work state, and opposing mandatory collective bargaining for private or public employees
- Strengthening reforms made to Tennessee’s workers’ compensation laws in 2004
- Promote letting labor market forces determine proper wage level
- Defining injury in the “workplace” in a fair and reasonable manner
- Removing existing employers’ liability for pre-existing medical conditions and outside of the workplace injuries
- Opposing Federal “Card Check” legislation - *Employee Free Choice Act (EFC)* - which will effectively eliminate the secret ballot in union elections, ease the organizing process and mandate federal arbitration of contract disputes

