TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Tony Fabrizio (Fabrizio, Lee & Associates) and Shira Angert (Benenson Strategy Group)

RE: IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION TO TENNESSEE PRIMARY VOTERS

DATE: July 28, 2017

In recently completed surveys of likely Republican (RPV) and Democratic (DPV) primary voters in Tennessee, Fabrizio, Lee & Associates and Benenson Strategy Group found that Tennesseans place a high value on education and want to see their leaders continue to make education reform a top priority in the state.

Republicans and Democrats not surprisingly have very different views on the current political environment in Tennessee, but they both have positive views of Gov. Haslam and his education reforms and policies.

- RPV approve of the job the State Legislature is doing by a 47-point margin, while Democrats disapprove by an 18-point margin.
- Despite their different points of view, both groups place "improving the quality of public education" as one of the top priorities for the next Governor. 21% of DPV and 13% of RPV rank it as their top issue, ranked 2nd and 3rd, respectively.
    - Among parents of school-aged children, education is an even larger priority, ranking as the #1 issue for DPV parents and #2 for RPV, trailing only jobs and the economy.
- In both parties, Governor Haslam receives high marks from voters. As would be expected, he has a strong approval rating from RPV (+57), but even more telling of his popularity is that DPV approve of his job performance by a 2-to-1 margin (63% approve/31% disapprove).
- Furthermore, pluralities of both RPV (+29 net more likely) and DPV (+8) say they would be MORE likely to support a candidate for Governor who pledged to continue Gov. Haslam's education reforms and policies.
    - Insofar as they are aware of it, both RPV and DPV have a double-digit favorable view of one of Gov. Haslam's key education initiatives – Drive to 55.

Tennesseans are pleased with many of the reforms the state has taken, however they still believe more can be done. While the Nation's Report Card shows that Tennessee is the fastest-improving state in the country, poll results indicate that likely primary voters in both parties have little awareness of the progress.

- More voters think K-12 education in Tennessee is getting worse than getting better, though a plurality believe it is staying the same.
    - Parents, who place an outsized importance on education, are significantly more pessimistic than the electorate as a whole. RPV and DPV parents believe education is getting worse in the state by 16 and 22 points, respectively.
- Asked about education on a local level, voters were slightly more mixed, though once again, a plurality believe it is stagnating.
    - And as with the state as a whole, parents of children are more likely to believe education in their local community is getting worse (RPV: -13, DPV: -10).
- Slight majorities believe graduates of Tennessee's high schools are prepared to meet expectations they face as they take their next steps (53% of RPV and 57% of DPV), but almost all those believe they are only somewhat prepared, with just 6% saying they are "very" prepared.
- Asked more specifically, voters are less confident that high school graduates are properly prepared for college or a job.
    - There is a partisan gap on this issue, with 51% of DPV believing public high school grads are prepared, compared to only 41% of RPV.

While Tennessee's recent progress in education is not known among likely voters, there are a number of ideas for improving education in the state that voters on both sides of the aisle strongly agree with. Support for education reforms has the potential to generate more support for candidates in both parties.

- Voters were given a number of proposed education reforms and asked whether they would be more or less likely to support a candidate for Governor who backed these reforms. For every potential reform, a majority of voters from both sides of the aisle said they would be more likely to support such a candidate by a margin of 25-points or greater.
    - DPV are more positive than RPV on every potential reform except for school choice, which is more appealing to Republicans.

If you knew the following were true about a candidate for Governor, would it make you MORE LIKELY or LESS LIKELY to support that candidate. If it would have no impact on your vote, just say so.	**RPV**		**DPV**	
	MORE LIKELY	**LESS LIKELY**	**MORE LIKELY**	**LESS LIKELY**
Favors expanding early workforce training programs	**79**	**6**	**88**	**3**
Supports higher academic standards for public schools.	**79**	**8**	**85**	**6**

Favors improving early learning opportunities	**71**	**8**	**90**	**3**
Supports increasing teacher pay	**71**	**12**	**88**	**3**
Favors expanding the options of parents to choose the school they send their children to.	**67**	**16**	**55**	**30**
Favors increasing education funding	**66**	**16**	**89**	**5**
Favors teacher evaluations that measure multiple factors	**65**	**15**	**73**	**10**
Has a program designed to recruit young people to become teachers	**64**	**7**	**83**	**4**
Supports tougher statewide testing that mirrors what is taught in the classrooms	**52**	**23**	**56**	**26**

Testing remains an important aspect for public education to the majority of Tennessee primary voters. They see its usefulness in measuring both progression of students, as well as the effectiveness of teachers.

- Both RPV and DPV are nearly unanimous in their belief that testing students from grades 3-11 each year to know if they are meeting the state's education standards is important. 88% of both groups rate this as important, including more than 60% who think this is "very" important.
- By double-digit margins, majorities of both TN RPV (54/37) and DPV (52/41) favor the use of students' year-to-year academic growth in teacher evaluations. Furthermore, when voters were informed that 65% of public school teachers said that teacher evaluations have led to improvements in student learning, those favoring using year-to-year growth shot up to 67% among both partisan primary voter groups.
- While few likely voters are aware of TNReady, when provided information about what the assessment is, it is popular in the state – with most viewing it favorably by wide margins among both RPV (65 Fav/24 Opp) and DPV (70/22). Even when those who favor TN Ready are told that test scores will drop significantly when the tests are implemented, the vast majority (78% of RPV and 74% of DPV) still favor implementation.
- Voters do not like the idea of parents opting out their children from end-of the year standardized testing. RPV oppose it by a 21-point margin (33/54) and DPV by an even greater 27-point margin (32/59).

Likely Tennessee primary voters split along party lines when it comes to charter schools. RPV strongly favor expanding charter schools in Tennessee (72 favor /23 oppose) while DPV are more skeptical of charter schools (37/56).

KEY DEMOS

PARTY	*RPV*	*DPV*
Republican	73	3
Democrat	6	74
Independent	19	20
Something else (DO NOT READ)	1	0
Refused (DO NOT READ)	3	2

IDEOLOGY	*RPV*	*DPV*
CONSERVATIVE	**73**	**19**
MODERATE	**20**	**38**
LIBERAL	**5**	**40**
Very conservative	46	7
Somewhat conservative	27	12
Somewhat liberal	3	18
Very liberal	3	21
DK/Refused (vol)	2	3

AGE	*RPV*	*DPV*
18-34	18	12
35-44	17	11
45-54	20	15
55-64	25	24
65+	18	37
Refused	3	1

RACE/ETHNICITY	*RPV*	*DPV*
White	90	63
African American/Black	3	30
Hispanic	1	1
Other	5	4
Refused (DO NOT READ)	2	3

GENDER	*RPV*	*DPV*
Male	50	40
Female	50	60

REGION	*RPV*	*DPV*
East Tennessee	45	27
Middle Tennessee	30	33
West Tennessee	25	39

METHODOLOGY STATEMENT*: Fabrizio, Lee & Associates and Benenson Strategy Group conducted a Tennessee statewide survey of 500 likely 2018 Republican primary election voters and 500 likely 2018 Democratic primary election voters, respectively. The surveys were conducted via landline and cell phone on July 12-16, 2017. Landline interviews accounted for 60% of the sample and cell phone interviews 40%. Geography by county and media market were matched to previous statewide primary elections. Gender and age were matched to the population of likely voters according to a state-provided voter file. Respondents were randomly selected from lists of known registered voters who had previously voted in a primary election. The margin of error at the 95% confidence interval for 500 voters is ±4.38%.*