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Gov. Lee Announces Key Leadership Transition at TN Department of Education

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Today, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee announced the appointment of Lizzette Gonzalez Reynolds as commissioner for the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), effective July 1. Reynolds will succeed Dr. Penny Schwinn, who will step down at the end of the school year after more than four years of service to Tennesseans.

“During her years of dedicated service, Penny has played a key role in our administration’s work to ensure educational opportunity for Tennessee students and secure the next generation of teachers, while navigating historic learning challenges,” said Lee. “I have tremendous gratitude for her leadership and wish her much success in her next chapter.”

Dr. Penny Schwinn joined the Lee administration in January 2019 and has served the state through some of the most challenging education crises in modern history. During Schwinn’s tenure, considerable initiatives to accelerate K-12 education have been implemented and several nationally recognized initiatives have been introduced, including:

- **School Funding Reform:** In 2022, the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) Act reformed the state’s outdated 30-year-old funding formula and made the largest recurring investment in state history.
- **Education Savings Account Program:** Tennessee implemented the Education Savings Account (ESA) program to give Tennessee parents a choice in their child’s education. Today, 1,400 students have been approved to attend the school of their choice and nearly 500 students are enrolled in a participating school.
- **Preparing the Future Workforce:** Tennessee has strengthened vocational education opportunities to give students the skills needed to join the workforce, investing \$500 million to expand middle and high school career and technical education programs and extending additional dual enrollment credits for high school juniors and seniors through the Governor’s Investment in Education (GIVE) program. Tennessee also created the Future Workforce Initiative to increase STEM training in K-12 schools, aimed at placing Tennessee in the top 25 states for creating technology jobs by launching new Computer Science and STEM-focused programs.
- **Teaching Apprenticeship:** Tennessee became the first state in the country to make teaching an apprentice-based profession, making it free to become a teacher while being paid to do so. The Grow Your Own initiative has significantly increased the number of teachers, special education and ESL endorsements, aspiring principals and assistant principals, and school leaders of color.
- **Prioritizing Literacy & Learning Loss Intervention:** Tennessee was among the first states to get students back in the classroom in 2020 and swiftly address learning loss. During an historic special

legislative session in January 2021, Gov. Lee and members of the General Assembly passed strong literacy programs to benefit students, namely Reading 360, which has led to almost full academic recovery and created the largest permanent summer school program serving pre-K–9th grade and the largest state tutoring program in the country with over 200,000 students served.

- **Innovative School Models:** With the single largest one-time investment in public education in state history, Tennessee’s Innovative School Models grant expanded postsecondary opportunities for middle and high school students and more than quadrupled the number of apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities for students.

Lizzette Gonzalez Reynolds will succeed Schwinn as commissioner of TDOE.

“Lizzette’s significant education policy expertise and leadership make her well-suited to continue our work to deliver a high-quality education and expand school choice for Tennessee students,” said Lee. “I welcome her to Tennessee and appreciate her service to students, families and teachers across the state.”

Reynolds is currently the Vice President of Policy for ExcelinEd and has previously served as deputy legislative director for then-Governor George W. Bush, Special Assistant in the Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs for U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, Regional Representative for U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and Chief Deputy Commissioner at the Texas Education Agency. Her career reflects a deep commitment to school choice, assessment and accountability, college and career pathways and education policy. She earned her undergraduate degree from Southwestern University. She is married to David Reynolds and has three children, Luke, Lillianna and Joaquin.

Sam Percy, currently Deputy Commissioner of Operations at TDOE, will serve as the department’s interim commissioner until July 1.

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