



July 26, 2023

The Honorable Bill Lee  
First Floor, State Capitol  
600 Charlotte Avenue  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

RE: Investigation Request into Chinese Government Ties to Sumner County Schools

Dear Governor Lee:

Our partner organization, Parents Defending Education, released an investigation on July 26 into Chinese government ties to American K-12 schools. Documents uncovered via online searches and public records requests show that Sumner County Schools forged ties with Chinese government backed programs.

PDE Action respectfully requests the Office of the Governor of Tennessee to investigate ties between Tennessee schools and Chinese government sponsored programs, such as Confucius Classrooms. While it's vital for American students to have opportunities to learn world languages and cultures, schools should not give the Chinese government unfettered access to K-12 classrooms. This has the potential of posing significant security risks to students, families, and our national interests.

Through its Ministry of Education, the Chinese government's ties to American K-12 schools is one facet of the Chinese Communist Party's larger soft-power effort to influence policies in nations throughout the world. According to the United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, developing its Confucius Classroom network in the United States is a top priority for the Chinese government.<sup>1</sup> They openly acknowledge this is a way to advance their strategic goals around the world. In a Chinese state media article from [2016](#), the Chinese Communist Party "lauded" Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms for promoting its Belt and Road Initiative.

In several cases, Parents Defending Education found that university Confucius Institutes provided the foundation for Confucius Classrooms at nearby school districts. In 2020, the State Department designated Confucius Institutes—the university counterpart of Confucius Classrooms—a "foreign mission" of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>2</sup> As Parents Defending Education notes in its report: "Confucius Institutes are

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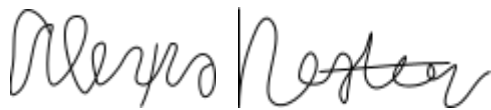
<sup>1</sup> Portman, Rob and Tom Carper, "China's Impact on the U.S. Education System," Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Accessed July 11, 2023, <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/PSI%20Report%20China's%20Impact%20on%20the%20US%20Education%20System.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Confucius Institutes U.S. Center" designation as a foreign mission - United States Department of State." Accessed July 23, 2023. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/confucius-institute-u-s-center-designation-as-a-foreign-mission/#:~:text=The%20Australian%20Strategic%20Policy%20Institute,currently%20chairs%20the%20Confucius%20Institute%E2%80%99>

funded in part by the Chinese government under guidance from the Chinese Communist Party's United Front Work Department, 'the Chinese Communist Party's overseas propaganda and influence operation.'" Li Changchun, the former chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, in 2009 boasted that Confucius Institutes are "an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up."<sup>3</sup>

PDE Action hopes you will take this opportunity to audit Tennessee schools' ties to the Chinese government—which is inseparable from the Chinese Communist Party. American students should not be subjected to Chinese Communist Party propaganda under the guise of Chinese language and culture programming. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request, and please do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Nester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alex Nester  
Political Director, PDE Action

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<sup>3</sup> Ethan Epstein, "How China Infiltrated U.S. Classrooms" Politico Magazine. January 16, 2023.  
<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/16/how-china-infiltrated-us-classrooms-216327/>