

## AN EARNEST PLEA

To the Florida Education Association and the Florida School Boards Association:

# Please don't evict 68,000 poor children from schools where they are thriving



More than 5,500 low-income parents, students, educators and activists marched to the state Capitol in support of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program in 2010

A lawsuit filed in late August by the Florida Education Association (FEA) and Florida School Boards Association (FSBA) seeks to uproot 68,000 low-income students from schools that are working for them across the state. These children, who were once among the state's poorest academic performers, are now succeeding. The catalyst for their newfound success, the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program, is now under legal attack.

Why would the FEA and FSBA attack a scholarship program for children from economically disadvantaged, primarily African-American and Hispanic families?

The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program encourages private, voluntary contributions to fund school scholarships for poor children in Florida. Scholarship funding is provided by corporations that receive a tax credit for contributions to the program, not state budget dollars.

Here are the facts about students who benefit from Tax Credit Scholarships:

- They live in households that are only 5 percent above the poverty line.
- More than two-thirds are African-American or Hispanic.
- More than half live in single-parent homes.

An attorney for the two organizations said he wants the courts to throw out the 13-year-old Tax Credit Scholarship Program because it has reached a "tipping point," even though it serves fewer than 3 percent of Florida schoolchildren and its funding is less than 2 percent of what is spent on public schools. Public school spending has increased 40 percent since the scholarship program was created.

A half-million Florida students now choose from five different privately operated education options: charter schools, Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten, McKay Scholarships, Tax Credit Scholarships and Personal Learning Accounts for students with special needs. All these programs are in jeopardy if this suit is not dropped.

Academic research is clear – parental choice benefits both students on the program and those in public schools. A Northwestern University study showed that students who used the Tax Credit Scholarship were among the worst performers in the public schools they left. But once in the program, they achieved the same reading and math gains as students of all income levels nationally, including wealthy ones.



Faith Manuel and her daughter

“My daughter is now in a place where she thrives academically, socially and emotionally. Why would anyone want to take that away from her when we know these scholarships are working?”

- Faith Manuel, an Ormond Beach scholarship parent

These students face the greatest education obstacles and tend to have the fewest options.

Research also shows that the more children who leave a public school with a scholarship, the larger the learning gains for the children who remain at those public schools. This program is actually helping improve public school performance.

Also, five independent and state agencies have reported that the program offers significant savings for Florida taxpayers. The State Revenue Estimating Conference projected a 2012-13 savings of nearly \$58 million.

**This program doesn't compete with public education; it complements it. The program offers options to children who need them the most. Don't take these options away.**

**On behalf of 68,000 low-income, mostly African-American and Hispanic students, we urge the FEA and FSBA to drop this misguided lawsuit now.**

### Florida Save Our Scholarships Coalition



**JULIO FUENTES**

Founder and president of the Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, representing 38 chapters and 80,000 minority businesses, and CEO of Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (CREO)



**BISHOP C. E. GLOVER**

Representing the Black Ministers Parental Choice Alliance, which includes more than 60 ministers across Florida



**MAURY LITWACK**

Director of State Political Affairs, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America — one of the largest orthodox Jewish umbrella organizations in the country representing Jewish day schools, synagogues, and families throughout Florida



**KENNETH CAMPBELL**

President of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, representing 4,600 members and 288 black elected officials



**RABBI MOSHE MATZ**

Executive Director of Agudath Israel of Florida, representing roughly 100 rabbis and synagogues



**LORENA CASTILLO**

Chairwoman of the Coalition of Hispanic Instructors in Support of Parental Awareness, representing 84 public school teachers primarily in Miami-Dade and Broward counties



**REV. H. K. MATTHEWS**

Leader in Florida's historic civil rights struggle who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma

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