

March 9, 2004

Bush Joins Rally in Support of School Choice

Gov. Jeb Bush pledged his unwavering support of voucher programs Tuesday to about 2,000 cheering students, parents and educators during a rally at the Capitol.

“As long as I’m governor we will have private school choice in this state,” Bush said. “Our public schools are better, our private schools are better, our family lives are stronger.”

State Education Commissioner Jim Horne echoed the governor’s sentiments after meeting with a group of about 25 from Zion Academy in Bradenton following the rally. He emphasized that options should exist for parents regardless of their income.

“Allowing people choice is simply the morally right thing to do,” Horne said.

He dismissed criticism that voucher programs lack accountability because private

schools aren’t required to conduct state testing. Horne said it isn’t logical to use standards established by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test to judge the performance of private schools not required to teach state curriculum.

The department is pushing for legislation this year that would require a type of testing for all private schools participating in voucher programs.

“There are still a lot of kids who are trapped and a lot of parents who are trapped and don’t know how to help their kids,” said Alfreda Boyd, a Bradenton woman who said her son would have “slipped through the cracks” if the McKay Scholarship Program had not provided money for him to enroll at Zion Academy.

•
