

From: annette.gray@cox.net [mailto:annette.gray@cox.net]
Sent: Mon 3/19/2007
To: dbeasley@ajc.com
Subject: Special Education Program

Dear Editor,

The AJC article 3/18 expressed concern about the potential scholarship program in Georgia for special education students. Your main fear seems to be that the state will not know for sure if children are doing well. My child has been on Florida's identical program for 2 years. I work with my son each day and I work closely with his teacher. I know first hand that he has improved both academically and socially. This program has given my child a new outlook on life--a more positive attitude in and out of the classroom. He now has opportunities ahead of him that he would not have been able to consider without the intervention of this scholarship program. There is no better judge of a child's progress than their own parents. You must learn to trust their judgment.

Sincerely,

Annette M. Gray

From: lynn huggins [mailto:huggins6404@yahoo.com]
Sent: Mon 3/19/2007

To: editor@ajc.com; dbeasley@ajc.com
Subject: Special Needs Scholarship

Dear Editor,

Your article about special needs scholarships detailed a fear that private schools chosen by parents will not serve children well. My child has been on a McKay scholarship in Florida for 4 years now and speaking from experience, it has been the best decision we ever made. It is critical that you understand that as his parent I know what is best for him and certainly don't need a third party to tell me whether our chosen school is effective, as I am able to come to that conclusion myself. I have taken the time to become knowledgeable and engaged in his options for education and I will always do what is best for my child in every situation and you have nothing to fear by my empowerment.

Sincerely,

Lynn M. Huggins
Parent of McKay Scholarship Recipient in Florida

From: Tina V. [mailto:vsr2843@tampabay.rr.com]
Sent: Mon 3/19/2007

To: editor@ajc.com; dbeasley@ajc.com
Subject: SCHOOL CHOICE

Dear Editor,

Supporting public education and supporting school choice are not mutually exclusive. As a parent of two McKay scholarship recipients in Florida, I am empowered to "shop" for the most fitting education for my son and daughter. School choice enabled me to find a school with a program that worked best for my children. It enabled our children to find a fit that increased their personal learning while taking into consideration the educational needs they require to be successful, and that is what good education is... it is success for the student..and the school. School choice has increased the options and encourages public schools to compete for the enrollment of scholarship recipients, it also benefits children with extreme learning disabilities to receive the additional attention they need to succeed all while freeing up the teachers with non-learning disabled students, to teach their classes fluidly without interrupting those students who do not face educational challenges. It is a win-win situation for all. School choice is a catalyst that is spurring public schools in Florida to change and provide a stronger education for its students. Don't fear empowered parents!

Please feel free to contact me at any time. There are thousands of parents in Florida, whose children are finally making progress and on their way to learning how to be productive and educated future citizens. Don't rob children of what might be their only avenue to success. Support school choice and you are supporting education for everyone.

Tina Velasquez

7220 Dogleg Ct

Port Richey,

-----Original Message-----

From: "John Kirtley" <jfk@jfkintampa.com>

Date: Thu, 8 Feb 2007 16:38:19

To: <PNoth@RN-T.Com>

Subject:

Dear Mr. Noth,

I have been following the effort to pass a scholarship program for special needs children up there. Thanks for covering the issue in your editorial page. I wanted to submit this letter as someone who is familiar with the Florida program. Our non-profit works to help low income parents in Florida have more educational options, and we have worked with hundreds of parents using the McKay Scholarships here.

Thank you,

John Kirtley
Tampa
(813) 310-7122

To The Editor:

First, it is wonderful to see Georgia explore giving parents of special needs children more options, just as Florida has done for several years with its McKay Scholarship Program. In your editorial, you agree that it is a good idea to explore ways to better serve these children, even if it is not in their current public school environment. You cite two main concerns.

First, not every special needs child can be served by private schools. True, but many can-and private schools don't have to cater just to special needs children in order to serve them. In the Florida programs, the vast majority of schools that serve scholarship children are not schools that specialize in disabled children. Parents are very happy with the results-or they would not keep them there.

Second, you fear operators may start schools just to bilk the taxpayers out of the scholarship money, and cite "several fraud charges" from Florida. The amount in question in these Florida cases is a fraction of a percent of the money disbursed to date in the McKay program. Further, current Florida law requires that new schools that wish to serve scholarship students carry a surety bond for three years to protect the taxpayers from fraud.

In the past few years I have talked with hundreds of parents who say the McKay Scholarship literally saved their children's lives. I have talked with public school teachers who agree they are needed. I even know a public school teacher that uses the program for her own child. Parents of special needs children in Georgia deserve the same chance.

Sincerely,

John Kirtley

Florida Alliance For Choices In Education

Tampa, FL