

# **F.A.C.E. Spartan's Tools**

## ***Let Legislators know their value!***

Over the years, F.A.C.E. has conducted trainings for hundreds of individuals who learned how to be a supporter of parental school choice. We call these individuals ***Spartans***. These Spartans are willing to take significant action to defend and advance parental school choice. Actions may include but not limited to; writing letters to legislators and/or newspapers, calling legislators, attending press events, editorial board meetings, hosting legislators or donors at their schools, rallies and etc.

### **We have put together a few tips to keep you organized:**

- I. Instructions on how to call
- II. Instructions on how to send letters or emails
- III. How to find your legislature
- IV. Talking points

### **I. Calls to the Legislators office:**

- Be polite at all times and get the name of the person you speak to.
- Ask to speak to the legislator.
- They will most likely ask you what this is in regard to and they simply will take your information and forward to the legislator.
- Tell them your child (ren) benefits from the Step Up For Students / Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship or say you personally have seen many children benefit from the Step Up For Students / Corporate Tax Credit Scholarships Program. And you wish to make sure your legislator will support (and VOTE for) this program this Session in Tallahassee.
- Ask if you can see them in their local district office or when you are in Tallahassee in March.
- Invite them to visit your school this month or next.

**If you do get an appointment please call Michael Benjamin at 727-642-4444 right away so we can help you prepare for that visit.**

This is very simple and you need not go into lots of details. Always be polite and pleasant- remind them you and your family and friends will be following this issue very close this Session and thank them for their time.

**Remember they might say they supports the scholarship program but we need them to VOTE for the legislation in the 2008 legislative session. If they don't vote for the bill this session then they do not support it...**

### **II. E-mail or send letters to "your" legislator:**

- Tell them you support the Step Up For Students / Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship Program because it has helped your child and/or many children you know. Ask them to support (and VOTE for) this program this upcoming legislative session.
- Then ask if you can see them in their district office or in Tallahassee.

- List three things that the program has done for your child or children you know. Examples would be: improved their attitude and interest in school; getting better grades and higher test scores; happier and feels safer at school; doing better in reading and math; more outgoing and involved in school. Use your own words and personal stories but keep it very brief.
- Next tell them you will be following all actions related to the scholarship program and hope you can count on their support of and VOTE for this important program.
- Include your name address and telephone number

If they have written a response please forward a copy to Michael Benjamin or supply the Spartan coordinator with a hard copy. After they have set an appointment please send an update email to Michael Benjamin at [mbenjamin@face.org](mailto:mbenjamin@face.org). The coordinator will keep track of completed actions. The coordinator will make a copy of all e-mails and letters, keep one for their records and send the copies to FACE when task is completed (Deadline is March 1, 2008).

### **III. How to find your legislature and their contact information:**

- Please go to the following websites to determine your *nine digit* zip address and to locate your legislator and their e-mail address:

<http://www.usps.com/zip4>

- Please go to the F.A.C.E. website to find the link to look up your legislator:

[http://www.face.org/legislative\\_updates.htm](http://www.face.org/legislative_updates.htm)

\*Click on Find your State Senator – located on *right* side of page.

### **IV. Talking points**

Here are a few talking points and other interesting facts that you might want to use in face-to-face meetings or when writing letters, emails or calling legislators:

- ◆ What is the Step Up For Student Scholarship Program and how does it work/what is it's mission?
  - In 2001, the Florida legislature created this program to expand educational opportunities for low-income families.
  - The Step Up for Students Scholarship Program is a Florida Corporate Tax Credit (CTC) program that allows corporations to redirect up to 75 percent of their state income tax liability to Step Up For Students, which in turn provides education scholarships for low-income children. The corporation then receives a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for their contribution.
  - The mission of Step Up For Students is to improve Florida's K-12 educational system by creating and sustaining affordable educational options for low-income families and their children.
- ◆ Can it be used at any private school?
  - The Step Up for Students Scholarship can be used at over 900 *approved* private schools throughout Florida.
- ◆ How much does it pay and what does it cover?
  - The scholarship is worth up to \$3,750 for tuition and books at a private K-12 school OR \$500 for transportation costs of attending an out-of-district public K-12 school.
- ◆ Do the scholarships drain money from the public schools?

- The CTC program does not drain money from public schools! In fact, dropouts are the biggest drain on public schools. Our public schools lose massive amounts of funding when those children drop out. In a crisis situation, we need to offer more options, not take options off of the table.
- A study conducted by the Collins Center reported that the scholarships will save \$600 million over the next 10 years.

◆ **How do students qualify? What population does Step Up For Students serve?**

- Only families that qualify for the **National School Lunch Program** are eligible, which is determined by the national poverty guidelines.
- For example; in a household with four people the income limit is \$39,220
- Families must submit a detailed application each year and financial records as proof of income before scholarships are awarded that year.
- In 2006, the average income of the families receiving scholarships was \$23,000 with a household size of four. Approximately 76 percent are minorities and 60 percent are single parent homes.

◆ **How many students are currently on the scholarship?**

- For the 2007-2008 school year, **20,000 low-income children** are enrolled in the CTC scholarship program. And this next year there are 4,000 additional new scholarships available.

◆ **Is it a voucher?**

- These scholarships are **awarded with private funds from corporations**, thus some may not consider them vouchers. We need to improve our public schools but we also need to provide other options – right now, today- for poor families that are not satisfied with the public school their child is assigned to attend. We can't wait 5- 10 15 years for the system to get better. These low-income families need help right NOW!

◆ **How is the students' learning being tested?**

- We support accountability and are pleased the legislature passed legislation that will require all Step Up For Student recipients to take a national standardized test that has been approved by the state. The test scores will be compiled and annual reports will be issued on the strong gains our students are making.

◆ **How much of the scholarship money goes to the students' education?**

- **One hundred percent** of the scholarship money is used for students' education at a private school or to help defray transportation costs for transferring to an out-of-district public school. None of the money can be used for operating or administrative expenses.

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◆ **Are there other costs?**

- The decision to accept a CTC Scholarship is not free of sacrifices. An essential and often overlooked element of the program is that scholarship funding is for tuition and books up to \$3,750 only. The majority of program parents still contribute over \$900 annually to pay the additional tuition and other related school costs so their children can attend a facility that improves their child's scholastic achievement. These parental contributions are significant when taken in context of the applicants overall financial condition. Parents tell us that their financial sacrifice is insignificant when compared to the differences they observe in their children's academic achievements and social performance after entering a school better suited to their needs.

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◆ **Where does the operating money for the Scholarship Funding Organizations come from?**

- The funding for operating costs for Scholarship Funding Organizations (S.F.O.) must be raised through philanthropic support from individual, nonprofit, and corporate donors. No funds raised for scholarships may be used for administrative costs.

- ◆ Can families combine money from the corporate tax credit scholarship program with other funds?
  - Private schools are not permitted to combine money from more than one Florida choice program (i.e. CTC or McKay) to pay for the education of a student. However, families can seek additional financial support from private schools and privately funded programs to make up any difference in their total education costs.
  
- ◆ Does this program skim the best students from the public school system?
  - In fact, the opposite is true. Most CTC students were not performing well in the public school environment. Their parents sought a learning environment where their children would thrive academically.
  
- ◆ Is this simply a way for parents and students to avoid the FCAT?
  - An accountability bill passed by the Florida Legislature in May 2006 requires all CTC Scholarship students to be given a norm-referenced standardized test and a longitudinal study of the students gains be conducted. Under the bill, private schools are required to annually administer or make provisions for students to participate in one of the nationally norm-referenced tests identified by the Department of Education (DOE) and report the student's scores to the parent and to an independent research organization selected by the DOE. The results will be compared to gains of public school students as well.
  
- ◆ Is it legal to use public funds to support religious private schools?
  - CTC Scholarship funds are private funds that do not come from the state treasury. Besides the CTC Scholarship funds support the parents and the parent choose the schools. The CTC Scholarship funds do not support schools.
  
- ◆ When in doubt, personal experiences are always influential and persuasive! Here are a few ideas:

**Parents:**

- ◆ Describe your child's struggle before the scholarship
- ◆ What does the scholarship mean to you?
- ◆ How did you choose the school for your child? **If you chose a school because it is religious, that is fine but consider communicating that you wanted the moral training and discipline the "religious" are known.**
- ◆ How is your child currently doing?

**Students:**

- ◆ Before being awarded your scholarship, explain your experience in your public school?  
How did you feel about yourself?
- ◆ What was different when you began attending your new school? **DO NOT** mention avoiding the FCAT as a reason you like going to private school!
- ◆ What are your plans for the future?  
Where do you predict you would be today if you had not had this opportunity?

## **Thank you for Stepping Up For Students!**

All Spartans who make an effort to organize and assist in the completion of the call to action task will also be invited to the Step Up for Students in Tallahassee the week of March 24, 2008. Transportation and lunch will be provided or you will be reimbursed. Spartans will receive special recognition.

Please send information upon completed action to:

**Michael A. Benjamin**  
**Executive Director, F.A.C.E.**  
**Florida Alliance for Choices in Education**  
**813-258-2700 ext. 227**  
**727-642-4444 cell**  
**[mbenjamin@fpace.org](mailto:mbenjamin@fpace.org)**

FACE and especially the children tremendously appreciate your efforts with this "Call to Action"