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## It's time to stop fighting school choice

By Mark Coats,



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W.E.B. Dubois once said, “To stimulate wildly weak and untrained minds is to play with mighty fires.” I hear Dubois when I see the academic results for Black students. More than 60 years after the U.S. Supreme Court declared an official end to separate-but-unequal schools, only 31 percent of Black students in Miami-Dade can pass the 10th grade reading test they need to graduate. In Broward, it’s 34 percent.

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To get the full measure of this brutal math, add every other sad

educational statistic for Black children, then multiply by generations. A community forced to carry the burden of this wasted potential is doomed to “play with mighty fires.” That’s especially true if the community is divided, as we have sometimes been over the expansion of educational options for our children.

It doesn’t have to be that way. We can put aside our differences and together use every fire-fighting tool we have.

Last week, an appellate court in Tallahassee dismissed the lawsuit the Florida teachers union, the NAACP and others filed in 2014 to kill the state’s tax credit scholarship – the nationally recognized program that is helping 90,000 low-income students this year, including 26,000 Black students. This was a victory for our parents and communities, but the suit is not dead because

the plaintiffs can still appeal to the Florida Supreme Court. We hope and pray they do not.

The scholarship is not a silver bullet. It’s but one more instrument for chipping away at poverty and pain, hopelessness and incarceration. The program has been in existence for 15 years, and it has a worthy track record.

More than 1,600 private schools in Florida participate, 402 of them in Miami-Dade, 146 in Broward. Parents of means enroll their children into these schools all the time, without controversy, but low-income parents, who could not access them without the scholarships, face a monumental court battle and the threat of eviction. This makes no sense.

The scholarship does not pit public schools against private schools, or force a false choice between the two. We must do all we can to bolster our public schools. At the same time, we must continue to empower low-income parents with options.

The First District Court of Appeal said in no uncertain terms the plaintiffs’ claims of financial harm to public schools were unfounded. Multiple studies by independent researchers have gone further, concluding the program doesn’t drain a single copper penny. In fact, it’s saving hundreds of millions of dollars that can be re-invested in public schools.

So why are we fighting?

To the teachers union and NAACP, I make a humble request based on Psalm 11:3. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?

What we can do is sit down and reason together.

*Grace of God Baptist Church in Miami is affiliated with Grace Christian Preparatory School.*