

The Official Newsletter of the Florida Association of Scholarship Funding Organizations

FLA-SFO Welcomes Florida Child Families

With open arms we welcome the thousands of Florida Child Scholarship recipients into the Florida Association of Scholarship Funding Organizations family. For your information, allow us to take a moment to tell you about Step Up For Students, the Florida Association of Scholarship Funding Organizations, and how you can use your power as a voter to change lives forever.

Step Up For Students is an initiative of the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship program that helps communicate key Scholarship issues to the public. Low-income families that qualify can obtain Scholarships of up to \$3,500 for public or private school education. Scholarship dollars come from Florida corporations that redirect up to 75% of their tax liabilities to a Scholarship Funding Organization. 100% of dollars are used for Scholarships.

The associations that raise the donations are called Scholarship Funding Organizations or SFOs. You will likely recognize one or more of the following SFOs:

- Children First Central Florida: (407) 702-2607**
- Florida PRIDE: (813) 318-0995**
- H.E.R.O.E.S.: (904) 247-6033**
- YES Opportunities: (866) 297-7272**

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Students from Tallahassee's Innovation School of Excellence show their support for school choice.



Bishop Harold Ray, emcee of the day's events and founder of Redemptive Life Academy in West Palm Beach, leads more than 3,000 parents, teachers and students to the Capitol steps in Tallahassee.

We Made History On March 9, 2004! Step Up For Students Rally Drew Record 3,000 Supporters Of School Choice

Records were broken on March 9, 2004, when over fifty large coach buses arrived early on a spring morning, filled with the youngest supporters of educational options, the students themselves, along with their parents and educators. Linked arm-in-arm, a crowd of 3,000 began their march towards the Capitol steps in Tallahassee to take part in the largest school choice rally in U.S. history. Some traveling from as far away as Miami, their determination was evident and their mission was clear as the Capitol building neared.

The Step Up For Students rally kicked off with the spirited singing of the National Anthem, as thousands of proud Americans exercised their first amendment right to be heard. March 9 marked a day when the people of Florida would hear firsthand how important school choice options, like the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship, are for low-income parents and students across the state.

Rally-goers were joined by some of the most powerful political leaders in Florida, including guest speakers Governor Jeb Bush, Senate President Jim King, House Speaker Johnnie Byrd, and Attorney General Charlie Crist. Their message

was universal as they pledged their unwavering support for school choice. They were able to hear from parents like Yadira Colon, whose son Jay Olivo was given a second chance at learning thanks to the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship.

Parents and administrators also had the opportunity to express their opinions to the media including many daily newspapers from across the state. Headlines included the *Tallahassee Democrat*, "Cheering for Choice; Students Lead Rally for Voucher Program," and the Associated Press, "Bush Joins Rally in Support of School Choice." There was no shortage of local television news reporters, and the rally was widely reflected in statewide newscasts ranging from Tampa to Orlando to West Palm Beach. For many it was their first television debut, and they were thrilled to share their personal success stories.

The annual Step Up For Students rally was sponsored by the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (Hispanic CREO) and the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), signifying the ever-growing and expanding support for school choice options.

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As you can imagine, along with the joys of awarding the Scholarships come tremendous financial responsibilities and requirements. So together, the four groups formed a voluntary organization called the Florida Association of Scholarship Funding Organizations, or FLA-SFO. It was designed to provide guidance to its members to ensure each adheres to the highest level of compliance with the law and follows stringent accounting standards and procedures.

We communicate regularly with you regarding key issues about the program through our newsletter. In each edition you will find up-to-date news on legislative issues, corporate donors, real-life stories about families helped by the Scholarship, and ways you can get involved in the cause of educating Florida's disadvantaged students.

With the unwavering support of the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (Hispanic CREO), and the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), Step Up For Students has become a powerful movement for educational alternatives in the state of Florida.

We're glad you are joining us as a partner!

If you have a news tip regarding Step Up For Students, please call our Step Up For Students Newsletter Hotline at (305) 572-2159, or drop us an email at stepupforstudents@yahoo.com with all of the important details.



Rally-Goers Stand Up for Their Rights at "Stand-In"



Representative Eleanor Sobel, (D-Broward) discussed the issue of school choice with parents, students and educators in her office at the Capitol.

The final element of the day's activities was a "stand-in" at the offices of two Florida legislators: Representative Eleanor Sobel, (D-Broward) and Representative Terry Fields, (D-Duval). Both opposed the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship program yet they have sent their own children to private schools. March 9 marked the day these two Legislators would see, hear, and understand firsthand just how important the CTC program is to thousands of Florida's families.

Meeting Face-to-Face to Confront the Issue

Dozens of parents and administrators waited to meet with elected officials to inquire about discrepancies between their public voting

record and their own school choice practices. The long wait at each of their offices paid off for this persistent, concerned group. Following the two meetings, Representative Fields pledged his support for school choice three times, while Representative Sobel agreed to visit a CTC school in her hometown of Hollywood, Florida. **We are holding them to their promises!**

Speaking Up Causes Change

The rally taught us to never underestimate your power as a voter and parent! By uniting our efforts, the "stand-ins" made headlines as reflected in an editorial in the *Florida Times-Union*, Jacksonville's daily newspaper:

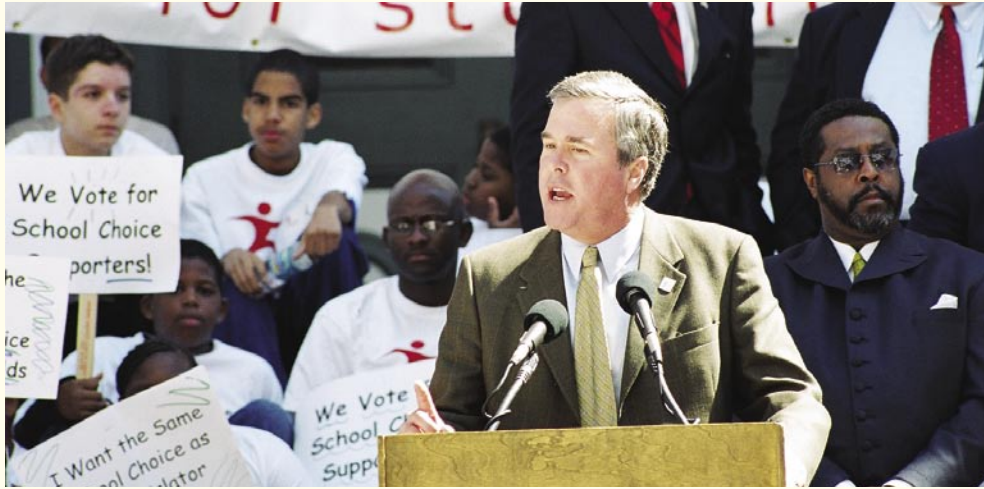
"When 3,000 parents rallied in Tallahassee this week to support school choice they asked Fields why he was opposed to a program that allows children from low-income families to escape failing schools. Fields explained that he is a Democrat and not given to supporting everything the Republican governor and GOP majority favors. The parents had another question to ask Fields. Why does Fields send his own child to a private school? He was not doing very well in public schools, Fields told them candidly. Neither are ours, the parents said. Eventually, Fields said — three times — that he would support the corporate tax credit Scholarship program, according to parents who attended."

"Fields should be commended for having the courage to do the right thing for his constituents. Florida's choice programs are helping more than 25,000 children. But, powerful special interests are arrayed against them, hoping to maintain the public school monopoly by eliminating the competition. Tuesday's rally shows that parents who want a better education for their children can make it happen if they persevere." — Florida Times-Union

FLA-SFO members can't do it alone! While they continue to follow-up regularly with these Florida Legislators to ensure they have the latest accurate information on the program and its beneficiaries,

[your voice is critical to the success of the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship program!](#) To contact your hometown legislator, visit www.stepupforstudents.com, click on [Parents](#), and then click on [Write Your Legislator](#).

Keynote Speaker Jeb Bush Rallies the Crowd



Governor Jeb Bush was the keynote speaker at the 2004 Step Up For Students Rally and offered his continual support for the largest corporate tax credit Scholarship program in the United States. The following is an excerpt from his inspiring words:

"I have been an advocate for more choices for parents when it comes to the most important thing mom and dad can do – which is to be involved in their child's education. To me it is as American as apple pie to suggest that parents be given the power to make choices...a wide array of choices, because that means they are going to be more involved in the activities of their children in school and outside of school.

Why should income limit the choices parents make? More choices create more opportunities and make all

schools better. Our public school system today is better because low income parents, as well as parents of children with some form of disability, now have the choice to be able to go to a private school.

Our public schools are better. Our private schools are better. Our family lives are stronger and that's why I strongly support all of the school choice programs...as long as I am Governor we will have private school choice in this state. Public education and private education will be the top priority for our state."

Donor's Corner:

A \$800,000 Priority for Chico's FAS, Inc.

CHICO'S®

Since its inception in 1983, Chico's FAS, Inc., an exclusive clothing retailer, has helped children achieve their maximum potential through education by dedicating both volunteer time and dollars throughout Florida. A founding partner of the Step Up for Students program, Chico's has invested over \$800,000, allowing more than 250 low-income children to receive a quality education that best meets their needs.

"Chico's is honored and privileged to help in the education of the children in Florida," said Cole Peacock, Chico's Community Development Manager.

"We have witnessed the great effect this program has not only on the children but the family as a whole."

Chico's 418 stores nationwide are known for their private-label designs and high-quality service personnel that will assist customers with coordinating, accessorizing, and building a wardrobe to suit any woman's needs. Chico's has not only developed a truly unique retail environment, but has also created an educational opportunity for those children who need it the most.

Thanks, Chico's, for your unwavering support of the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship program!

For more information on becoming a corporate sponsor, please call Kerri Vaughan at (786) 314-5609.

Scholarship Application News

Current Scholarship families: You should already have received a renewal application at your home or your child's school. If you have not, please contact your SFO to request your renewal application today.

✓ Renewal applications must be postmarked by **May 31, 2004** to be processed.

New Scholarship families: If you submitted your information to the application wait list prior to March 24, 2004, you should already have received a new Scholarship application. If you have not, please contact the SFO representing your county to request an application or visit www.scholarshipfunding.org to receive an application.

Take note of important application dates for new Scholarship families:

✓ Deadline to sign up for a new application on the website: **June 1, 2004.**

✓ New applications will be sent out on a bi-weekly basis until **June 1, 2004.**

✓ All new applications must be postmarked by **June 30, 2004** to be processed.

If you have friends or family members interested in applying for a Scholarship, please have them visit www.scholarshipfunding.org prior to June 1, 2004 so we can ensure they receive an application in time to apply. Please note that new Scholarships will be awarded once corporate funding is secured, so there is no guarantee that new Scholarships will be awarded this next school year.

Need additional information? Call your local Scholarship Funding Organization.



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Important Update on Scholarship Program for Florida's Children



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