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The Fight Is Not Over, Says Civil Rights Icon H.K. Matthews

ORLANDO, Fla.—The Rev. H.K. Matthews addressed a crowd of over 100 students and local dignitaries at St. Mark Preparatory School on Tuesday. Matthews shared his experiences during his fight for equality that began in the 1950's and how his battle for civil rights is still underway.

Matthews, civil rights icon and minister, is a revered figure in the Florida civil rights movement. He marched with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, and then worked tirelessly in Pensacola and other Florida cities in the struggle for equality.

Matthews has dedicated his life to being a guardian of civil rights and continues to fight for basic liberties. The Reverend has recently determined that parental choice in education aligns with his continued fight for equal opportunities and delivering this liberty is an extension of his life's work.

"The fight for parental choice brings flashbacks of the civil rights movement, during which I was jailed thirty-five times as a political prisoner for the staging of various protest demonstrations," Matthews said. "It shouldn't matter the color of your skin, or your socioeconomic status—we are all Americans and have the right to a great education."

Matthews stated his support for Step Up For Students Scholarship Program, created by the Florida legislature in 2001 to empower parents to choose the best school for their child by providing scholarships to low-income families.

Students attended the assembly from St. Mark Preparatory School, El Bethel Christian Academy and Victory Christian Academy and celebrated Black History month while honoring Matthews' contribution to the civil rights movement.

Matthews' fight for educational freedom is fueled by the staggering statistics facing African Americans. According to the Harvard Civil Rights Project, less than 50 percent of African American students graduate, with black males even lower at 38 percent.

Among the dignitaries who attended Matthews' celebration was Senator Gary Siplin (D-Orlando) who pledged his support of parental choice in education and honors his promise of representing his constituents' best interest.

"Parental choice is a bold and powerful idea that I will support," Sen. Siplin said. "I am here today to celebrate the civil rights victories that we all enjoy due to the dedication of Rev. HK Matthews as well as other civil rights heroes and to illustrate the bipartisan support of the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program."

Ronald Diltz, principal at St. Mark Preparatory School, introduced Matthews to the students and welcomed him into the school. St. Mark currently educates over 60 students who are benefiting from the Step Up For Students Scholarship,

locally administered by Children First Florida.

"It is such an honor to stand before such a distinguished individual who has dedicated his life to the betterment of

others," Diltz said. "The students at St. Mark are talented and aspire to do great things with their lives. We are committed to providing a quality education to each of these children that will lay a solid foundation for a successful and fulfilling future."

At the conclusion of the general assembly, Matthews joined 50 students from St. Mark Preparatory School, El Bethel Christian Academy and Victory Christian Academy to have a roundtable discussion on his life's battles and answer questions generated by his presentation.

The Florida Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program—also known as "Step Up For Students" – provides K-12 scholarships that allow over 20,000 low-income Florida students to attend a private school or out-of-district public school. Step Up For Students scholarships are funded by corporations that redirect up to 75 percent of their corporate state liability to a qualified Scholarship Funding Organization in exchange for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. One hundred percent of corporate contributions go directly to funds scholarships—not a single penny can be used for administrative costs. For more information, visit www.stepupforstudents.com



St. Mark Preparatory Principal Ronald Diltz, left, and Senator Gary Siplin (D-Orlando), right, welcome Rev. HK Matthews, center, to St. Mark Preparatory School where the civil rights icon spoke to a group of students about civil rights battles of the past and present