

# U.S. Rep. Cantor visits Academy Prep Center of Tampa



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TAMPA — U.S. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, a staunch supporter of school choice, toured Academy Prep Center of Tampa in Ybor City on Friday and met with parents, students and school staff.

The Republican congressman from Virginia said the private middle school, which serves children in low-income families, is an example of how school choice can succeed.

“We’re here today because we’re looking around the country to find models that work for educational choice,” Cantor said. “I’m hopeful in Congress we can build on the success we see here. These schools are gems when it comes to the most vulnerable kids.”

Academy Prep opened its doors to students in grades five through eight in 2003. It is in the former V.M. Ybor Grammar School. A second campus is located in Saint Petersburg.

Students attend classes and participate in enrichment activities — including golf, gardening and chess — for 11 hours a day, six days a week and 11 months a year. Boys and girls go to separate classes. Boys and girls go to separate classes. By the end of the eighth grade, Academy Prep students’ achievement typically is about two grade levels higher than average in reading and math, officials say.

A year’s tuition for one student is \$16,000, but they all attend for free because all of them qualify for need-based scholarships. Parents secure scholarships through Florida’s Step Up for Students program, which provides corporate tax credit scholarships to 60,000 schoolchildren from low-income families. Students may use the scholarships to attend a private school or an out-of-district public school.

Cantor said he hopes to bring a scholarship program like this one to Virginia.

After visiting a sixth-grade boys’ technology class and a fifth-grade girls’ “transition” class, he attended a round-table discussion on school choice.

“It really taught me school can be a place you can love,” said alumnus Mattaldi Morris, who is in a pre-med program at the University of South Florida.

Parent Niki Bryant said her sons are excelling at Academy Prep.

“I believe in this, and I know that it works.”