

# The Florida Times-Union

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## Let's help all students learn, achieve

### point of view

vaughn  
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Monday is a national holiday to celebrate the life and achievements of Martin Luther King Jr., a

man who overcame hate and bigotry by preaching peace. It is a day where we can reflect on how far we've come and how far we must still go.

During the post-Civil War Reconstruction, many of Florida's black and immigrant population had been educated at private religious institutions, often with the support of state funds. But efforts to equitably fund the public education of minorities began to diminish by 1885.

One hundred years ago, in 1916, three white sisters of the Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Augustine were charged with "unlawfully teaching Negroes" against state law. Florida would spend a half-century more under the yoke of racial segregation.

Times have changed.  
And for the better.

We are many colors but one people.

While our schools are no longer segregated by law, our minds remain segregated over what is best for future generations.

Today 1.5 million students in Florida are attending schools of their parents choosing.

### SCHOOL CHOICE IS MATTER OF EQUITY

Florida's students are no longer trapped by their ZIP Code to attend schools that may not work for them.

The state of Florida offers magnet schools, career academies, charter schools and scholarships to attend private schools.

The educational freedom enjoyed today is the result of those who stood up against the injustice of racism and poverty, from Oliver Brown to King to many of us today.

Unfortunately our march for justice met resistance again when a lawsuit was filed to block a scholarship program for low-income students.

The lawsuit attacking an education program benefiting 78,000 low-income students mostly of color has pricked my conscience to the point of pain.

King once stated, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are

*Empowering disadvantaged children to learn is in the spirit of King's legacy.*

you doing for others?'"

How does a lawsuit help these children? I cannot imagine any way that it does.

Such a lawsuit would only serve to uproot economically disadvantaged children from schools that may be working well for them.

Florida's tax credit scholarship program empowers low-income parents to find schools that may better fit their child's needs.

Half of these children live in single-parent households, and the average child on scholarship lives barely above the poverty level.

These children are the most deserving of our love and of our help.

My wife and I co-founded The Potter's House International Ministries and The Potter's House Academy 20 years ago with a calling to socially, economically, educationally and spiritually empower people.

### OUR STUDENTS ARE SUCCEEDING

Because parents are now empowered, the tax credit scholarship program allows us to serve nearly 300 students in Jacksonville with a graduation rate of over 95 percent.

We are one school among many as more than 1,500 other Florida schools have heard the calling, too.

This is not meant as an attack on the valiant efforts of teachers in our public schools, only the recognition that the more options children have, the better chance they have at success.

To help students of color, and all disadvantaged students, achieve success, we can no longer segregate our minds.

As King preached many years ago, "The time is always right to do what is right."

The time is right to drop this suit.

■ Bishop Vaughn McLaughlin is the senior pastor of The Potter's House International Ministries.

■ He is also co-founder of The Potter's House Academy in Jacksonville.