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## Fight over school choice is about freedom and justice

By Bishop Vaughn McLaughlin



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I know many of you have heard by now that 10,000 people rallied in Tallahassee last month to support school choice scholarships for low-income students. You probably also heard that Martin Luther King, III was the keynote speaker, and that Black, White and Hispanic leaders joined him in denouncing a lawsuit the state teachers' union filed to kill the scholarships.

But here's something you probably haven't heard, though it demands your attention. After the rally, the teachers' union president, Joanne McCall, referenced the pleas from parents to drop the suit and asked, "What are they so afraid of?"

### Obvious answer

That statement cannot go without a response, even if the answer is obvious.

We are afraid 78,000 students on scholarship, including 23,000 Black students, will be evicted from schools where they are thriving. We are afraid for our communities, which have already endured too much pain. We are afraid the vicious cycles of generational poverty will rev back up again.

Truly, we are afraid for our children.

The tax credit scholarship program, as it is officially called, is not a miracle. But it is a tool that can help, and in fact has been helping for 15 years. It is opening doors of opportunity for 78,000 students that they and their parents could never have imagined.

Some parents are so thrilled when they get the scholarship, they scream for joy. Some are so relieved, because their children now have a greater shot at success in school and in life, that they cry. Yet Ms. McCall asks, "What are they so afraid of?"

### No controversy

I consider the scholarship program an equalizer. It gives

low-income parents the power to send their kids to private school, if they think that is best. In other words, it allows them to do what wealthier parents do all the time, without controversy or headlines.

Somehow, giving low-income parents the same opportunity causes a scene. The teachers' union has been fighting the program since the beginning. Every single objection – that it takes money from public schools, that it cherry-picks the best and brightest students, that it doesn't have accountability – has been refuted by hard evidence, common sense, or both.

Yet the attacks have gone on, and have now made their way into the courts. Ultimately, it may be up to the Florida Supreme Court to decide.

In the meantime, tens of thousands of parents will worry, for good reason. Could 78,000 children really be removed from the schools they love and sent back to schools where so many were failing?

Yes. Could that really happen in America in 2016? Yes. Yet Mrs. McCall asks, "What are they so afraid of?"

### Important to me

The scholarships and the good they do aren't abstractions to me. My wife and I founded The Potter's House International Ministries and Potter's House Academy in Jacksonville so we could empower people – spiritually, socially, economically, educationally. Thanks to the scholarship, we can provide nearly 300 students with a top-notch education.

Many of their parents attended the Rally in Tally. As they stood near the Capitol, 10,000 strong, they heard these words from Martin Luther King, III: "This is about justice. This is about righteousness. This is about truth. This is about freedom – the freedom to choose what's best for your family, and your child most importantly."

Yes, it is. The scholarship parents know better than anyone. That's why they're afraid.

That's also why they'll never give up.

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