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Drop lawsuit against school choice scholarships

By Alyson Hochstedler



Thanks to Florida's tax credit scholarship program, my son Gant was rescued from bullying in public school. But the prospect of finding another safe place for him, should the scholarship be taken away, is daunting.

What a blessing, then, to get news about the recent in *McCall v. Scott*. Leon Circuit Judge George Reynolds concluded the Florida Education Association and Florida School Boards As-

sociation, which filed suit last summer to end the scholarship program, didn't have standing to sue because they couldn't show how it harmed them.

Our family breathed a sigh of relief, and I imagine parents and students across Florida did, too. There are 70,000 low-income students using the scholarships, which are safe for now. But are they safe for good?

Unfortunately, I'm told we should temper our excitement because the teachers union has vowed to appeal all the way to the Florida Supreme Court. I have to ask: When is enough enough? This is the second time in six months a judge has ruled the union does not have standing to attack school choice because it can't show negative impact.

In Gant's case, the harm wasn't abstract. The bullying started in third grade and continued for two years. Gant was choked, punched, slammed into a locker, cornered by a kid with a pair of shears, threatened with strangulation because he told a teacher what was happening, and on and on. We wanted another school but couldn't afford the move.

I repeatedly told school authorities about the bullying, but the nightmare continued. Gant had constant stomachaches and anxiety attacks. He cried in bed. A therapist said he showed signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

In January 2014, Gant was enrolled in Christ Classical Academy where he remains today thanks to the scholarship. He is 100 percent better. There's no bullying. His anxiety is gone. The adults listen to him and respond accordingly.

His education is perfect for him. The school partners with the families, which is helping Gant blossom into a young man of integrity and character with a love of learning.

Children across Florida are being helped by this program. Studies show scholarship students were often the lowest performers in public schools, and that as a group they're now making steady progress. Studies also show the program doesn't financially hurt public schools. But if the lawsuit wins, the scholarship students will be sent back to schools where they struggled, and districts will have to find more money to accommodate them. So why do it?

One last thing: While Gant's younger brother attends Christ Classical, his sister and step-sister attend Leon High. I note this because of the misperception that the students and parents who love the scholarships are anti-public school. No! Like all parents, we just want schools that meet our children's needs.

The unions and school boards should honor parents' wishes. It's time to drop the suit.

Alyson Hochstedler is among 15 scholarship parents granted status as interveners in *McCall v. Scott*.