

Democrats for School Choice

May 19, 2008; Page A14

When Florida passed a law in 2001 creating the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program for underprivileged students, all but one Democrat in the state legislature voted against it. Earlier this month, lawmakers extended the program – this time with the help of a full third of Democrats in the Legislature, including 13 of 25 members of the state's black caucus and every member of the Hispanic caucus. What changed?

Our guess is that low-income parents in Florida have gotten a taste of the same school choice privileges that middle- and upper-income families have always enjoyed. And they've found they like this new educational freedom. Under the scholarship program, which is means-tested, companies get a 100% tax credit for donations to state-approved nonprofits that provide private-school vouchers for low-income families.

The program already serves some 20,000 students. The expansion will allow it to assist an additional 6,000. It's no surprise that poor families would embrace educational options, given that their government-assigned schools are clearly failing their children. The high

school graduation rate for black students in Florida is 45% overall, 38% for black males. The 52% graduation rate for Hispanics is also nothing to brag about.

What's encouraging is that these parents have managed to convey their pro-choice sentiments to their representatives, who are responding even though voucher programs infuriate powerful liberal special interest groups like the teachers unions. Given that 70% of the program participants are black or Hispanic, you'd think Democrats would be taking the lead on a measure that mostly benefits their traditional constituency. Apparently they needed a little prodding, but we're glad to see they did the right thing.

