



***At the Largest School Choice Rally in U.S. History,
Teachers, Parents and Students Call on Legislators and
Candidates to Support Equal Educational Opportunities
for Low-Income Families***

**"Step Up for Students" Presents Governor with Check for \$58
Million**

Tallahassee, Fla., March 9, 2004 – According to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement approximately 3,000 supporters of the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program (CTC) participated in the largest school choice rally in U.S. history and marched through downtown Tallahassee to the Capitol steps today to support educational opportunities for Florida's low-income families. The Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program - otherwise known as "Step Up for Students" - provides scholarships to qualifying low-income students for use at public or private schools. The teachers, parents, students and community leaders attending the rally drove from as far away as Miami to ensure their voices were heard by politicians campaigning in Florida primaries, as well as elected officials enjoying their second week of session. The thousands of marchers are representative of millions of Floridians who believe that school choice - in public and private schools - is a necessary educational option for low-income families.

Rally Events

Governor Jeb Bush was the keynote speaker at the rally and offered his continual support for the largest corporate tax credit scholarship program in the United States. Students from Miami Christian Academy had the honor of presenting Governor Bush with an oversized check for \$58 million - the amount of money the CTC program has saved Florida taxpayers since the program's inception two years ago.

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The Step Up for Students Rally, sponsored by the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, the Black Alliance for Educational Options, and the Florida Association of Scholarship Funding Organizations, focused on several key themes:

* Step Up for Students Works: According to The Collins Center for Public Policy and Florida Tax Watch, the CTC could result in as much as a \$600 million increase in the amount of statewide net revenue available for education over the next ten years. To-date, the program has saved Floridians more than \$58 million. Step Up For Students is stronger than ever with 13,000 children being served and another 20,000 on a waiting list, desperate for educational freedom. Florida companies continue to embrace the program, and in fact, the 2003 fundraising cap was hit eight months earlier than last year thanks to stellar corporate support.

* 2004 is the Year of Accountability: Ninety-five percent of CTC-participating schools currently give nationally recognized standardized tests to their students so parents can monitor their child's progress. Moving forward, CTC proponents believe all participating schools should be required to give a standardized test, whether it's the Stanford-10, the FCAT or another nationally recognized exam.

* Step Up for Students parents and school choice supporters want to see the issue de-politicized: Only in Florida is the issue of school choice so polarized by political parties. Nationally more and more Democrats are embracing the wisdom of providing different learning environments for different students - and letting the parents decide what those environments will be.

"Today's gathering sends a dynamic message to Presidential candidates and Florida legislators that school choice supporters are unified and are not backing down from the goal of equal educational rights for all Floridians," said Bishop Harold Ray, emcee of the day's events and founder of Redemptive Life Academy in West Palm Beach, Florida. A CTC-accepting school, Redemptive Life Academy has 135 students and administers the Stanford-10 Achievement Test. "People have

to understand that giving parents choice is not a Democrat or Republican issue - it's a moral issue. We are morally bound to help those less fortunate and few other issues are as life-shaping as education."

In addition to the march, the event featured speeches by Dr. Minnie Woodruff, a school administrator from St. Mark Preparatory School in Orlando, and Yadira Colon, the parent of a CTC student going to Teacher's Hand in Orlando.

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Sit-ins Take Place at Offices of E. Sobel and T. Fields

The final element of the day's activities was a sit-in at the offices of two Florida legislators: Representative Eleanor Sobel, D-Broward County and Representative Terry Fields, D-Duval County. Both have chosen to limit the opportunities for children from low-income families by opposing this program yet choose to send their own children to private schools. Dozens of parents and administrators requested meetings with both elected officials to inquire about discrepancies between their public voting record and their own school choice practices.

More About the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program

The Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship program is an educational plan designed to help low-income families in Florida obtain the best education for their children. Under this program, corporations that owe Florida corporate income tax can redirect a portion of their tax obligation to non-profit organizations that award K-12 Scholarships to students qualifying for the federal government's free or reduced lunch program. Parents can use these scholarships to send their child to a public or private school that provides the best learning environment that meets their particular needs. The average household income of recipients is \$20,000. The corporation in turn will receive a 100% tax credit for every dollar they donate. By law, 100% of a company's contribution will fund Scholarships - not a single penny can be used for administrative costs.

About HCREO

The Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, headquartered in DC, is the only national Hispanic non-profit organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for Hispanic children by empowering families through parental choice in education. The purpose of the organization is to be a national voice for the right of Hispanic families to access all educational options and to be an agent for equity and quality in education. For more information, visit www.hcreo.org.

About BAEO

The Black Alliance for Educational Options, headquartered in DC and with chapters across Florida, is a national non-profit membership organization, whose mission is to actively support parental choice to empower families and increase quality educational options for Black children. For more information, visit www.baео.org.