Trump offers praise in visit with students

President Donald Trump greets students at St. Andrew Catholic School in Orlando. With the president, from left, Gov. Rick Scott, Sen. Marco Rubio; fourth-graders Janayah Chatelier and Landon Fritz; Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos; son-in-law Jared Kushner; daughter Ivanka Trump and their daughter, Arabella Kushner.

President impressed after stop at private Pine Hills school

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President Donald Trump chatted with students and praised educators at a private Catholic school in Orlando on Friday, part of a trip focusing on a scholarship program for low-income families.

Trump wants $54B for military, but specifics remain unclear. A3

Trump's visit also drew about 100 protesters angry at what they described as an “anti-public schools agenda.”

The president arrived at St. Andrew Catholic School in the Pine Hills neighborhood along with Gov. Rick Scott, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, and U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio. It was the first time Rubio had appeared with Trump since the election.

Trump's daughter Ivanka and her husband, Jared Kushner, a White House adviser, also were on hand.

“Beautiful class, beautiful stu-

Please turn to TRUMP, A8
“You’re going to grow your own business,” Trump told them. “You’re going to make a lot of money. But don’t run for politics after.”

Trump was handed two cards, one welcoming him to the school and another in celebration of Florida’s 172nd anniversary, as he and the other officials made their way through the room. Trump’s visit to the predominantly African American school focused on the Florida Tax Credit scholarship, a voucher program that helps 295 students from low-income families at the school of nearly 850 students.

Started in 2002, the tax-credit program has allowed businesses to funnel tax dollars to private schools, including many religious ones. Across Florida, 97,926 students attend private schools using tax-credit scholarships, officials say. The credit can provide up to $5,886 per student annually.

Trump also spoke with Bishop Moore Catholic High School students Artavia Wesley and Marcus Millien, both of whom told the president about how attending St. Andrew had changed their lives.

“My mother was a struggling Haitian immigrant who came here in search of the American dream,” said Marcus, 16, afterward. Trump “encouraged us as we talked about our stories, and he told us things like, ‘great job’ and ‘proud to hear that.’”

Before a round table session that was closed to reporters, Trump praised St. Andrew principal Latrina Peters-Gibson and Diocese of Orlando schools superintendent Henry Fortier.

“They understand how much students benefit from a full education, one that enriches both the mind and soul,” Trump said. “A good combo.”

Fortier talked about how school choice “is an important part of my career. ... Lots of people have different opinions, but I see it as a partnership, not a situation of ‘us vs. them.’”

Trump cited Rubio and Scott as part of the reason “progress is going further and further” in education in Florida. He added that the state would have “a fabulous relationship” with DeVos, a major advocate of school choice programs.

Scott, Rubio and DeVos said little during the parts of the event open to the news media, with Scott only talking to a student about how the school’s great reputation was why the president was there.

The visit came as Trump headed to Florida for another weekend at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach.

Before the Orlando event, protesters gathered less than a quarter mile from the school just after noon to protest the visit and the Trump administration’s education priorities.

The protesters, many coordinated by progressive advocacy groups Organize Florida and For Our Future, chanted slogans and displayed signs at passing traffic on busy Colonial Drive near Hastings Street, denouncing Trump and demanding support for public education.

“We’re here to say that we don’t want our taxpayer money diverted to charter schools, which are not held to the same accountability and standards that public schools are,” said Wendy Doromal, president of the Orange County Classroom Teachers Association. “We’re disappointed that President Trump decided to visit a private school on his first school visit instead of visiting one of our amazing public schools.”

As Trump’s motorcade came and went from the school, protesters lined both sides of Colonial Drive, booing and chanting as he passed. “This is what democracy looks like,” the crowd repeated as he arrived. As he departed, they shouted, “No Trump, no KKK, fascist U.S.A.”

“We are not falling for it, Mr. Trump,” said Robin Harris, an Organize Florida activist and Pine Hills resident. “We know that your program and your ideology and your rhetoric about school choice does not have the black and brown student community in mind. We don’t like school choice. We don’t need it. We don’t want it.”

Staff writer Annie Martin contributed to this report.