Betton Hills School was founded to serve students whose needs were not being met by traditional public schools. For their disenchanted parents, it made little difference whether the prior school was “low-performing” or “high-performing.” What mattered was their child was falling behind. Thankfully, Florida parents now have options. Most students at BHS use one of three different state scholarships: the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship for low-income students, the McKay Scholarship for students with disabilities and the Gardiner Scholarship for students with special needs, such as autism.

Many families benefit from these scholarships, but some still criticize them. In a recent column in the Tallahassee Democrat, the author suggested these programs were “robbing public schools,” and their supporters were driven by “instinct and ideology rather than unbiased data.” I think the opposite is true.

The value of the tax credit scholarship and McKay scholarship is less than the cost of educating the same child in public school. The tax credit scholarship is about 60 percent of total per-pupil funding in Florida. Numerous studies demonstrate it saves taxpayer money. This is also why the recent attempt to kill the scholarship failed in court. The plaintiffs couldn’t provide evidence the scholarship harmed public schools. Furthermore, I have yet to hear of a single study that shows how McKay or Gardiner scholarships harm public schools.

Parents like what our school offers. We’re a smaller school, with smaller classes and more individual attention. Our teachers have flexibility to find different ways to introduce course material and help students attain mastery. We also place emphasis on life skills and financial literacy, which we introduced before it became a state requirement. We didn’t want to leave it to chance that our students will know how to pay bills.

A few years ago, one of our students told lawmakers that when he was in a public middle school, he skipped almost every day. But at our school, he stayed, thrived and graduated. He said he knew we pushed him – and at times called him out – because we cared. Now he is at Tallahassee Community College, pursuing a degree in computing. He is one of many success stories we could share.

Many studies on school choice show positive gains for students who are enrolled, and for students who choose to remain in public schools. One study on charter schools in Florida found their students graduated at higher rates, stayed in college longer and secured higher-paying jobs.

I do not mean to suggest one type of school is better than another. All have their strengths. But not every school works for every child, and that’s where choice comes in. It gives more parents (especially those who do not have abundant finances) the ability to find what works.

While many parents still prefer traditional public schools, some want a magnet school, or charter school, or private school, because that’s what they feel is best for their children. Are not all students equally deserving of the best possible education?

Caroline Accorsini is director of Betton Hills School.