

FLAPOL

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For Josiah's sake, end the school choice scholarship waiting list

By Ghismide Saint Jean



My son, Josiah, is in the perfect school suited for him. He is 6-years-old and in kindergarten at St. James Catholic School in North Miami.

However, I work 10 to 14 hours a day as a waitress, six days a week, to keep him there. And frankly, I am uncertain how much longer I can do that.

The problem is, although Josiah is eligible for a Florida Tax Credit Scholarship for low-income families, there isn't enough funding to provide a scholarship for

every child who needs one.

So, Josiah is currently on a waiting list for a scholarship, along with 13,000 other children.

I hope and pray that Gov. Ron DeSantis and our Legislature can find a way to fix this problem. I hope and pray that if people hear our story, they will understand why this is so important.

I chose St. James Catholic School for Josiah over the public schools in our neighborhood. Please know I am not against public education, to say the least.

However, Josiah has been battling severe asthma since the age of two. Due to countless hospitalizations over the years, he, unlike most children, requires a smaller classroom setting and more one-on-one attention.

Already this school year, he has been hospitalized six times and missed 32 days of school. So, it was very important to me that he be in a safe environment where the teachers can help him succeed despite his health issues.

St. James is close to our house. It's a Christian school that reflects our values. It's important to me that what

Josiah learns at school is consistent with what he learns at home.

St. James is doing that. It is a school where everybody treats each other like a family. Thanks to the care and attention they give to my son, Josiah is already reading at a second-grade level. It gives me so much peace of mind to know he is safe and learning.

Hundreds of other parents use the scholarship to send their children to St. James. I know there are 100,000 other parents all over the state who use the scholarship for their children.

But the waiting list shows there are still so many like myself who must make tremendous sacrifices to keep their child in a school that is right for them, or unfortunately watch them struggle in a school that is not.

We are hardworking people who are giving our all to raise our kids right. We are asking for nothing but the opportunity that the scholarship gives us.

We know if our children are educated, they will become doctors and lawyers and engineers and business people. They will grow up and make Miami an even more beautiful place than it already is.

Without the scholarship, keeping Josiah at St. James has been extremely difficult. I am currently behind on tuition because I recently had to move into a new apartment, where Josiah and I share a bedroom.

Thankfully the school is patient and understanding.

Last month, I got to tell my story to Gov. DeSantis and several lawmakers. This was at an MLK Day event at Piney Grove Boys Academy, a school in Broward that also serves scholarship students.

It was so encouraging to hear Gov. DeSantis say it was a priority for him to end the waitlist.

I don't know what it would take to make sure that every parent like me can get a scholarship for their child.

But I want people to understand what a relief they would be giving to parents like me, and what an opportunity they would be giving a child like Josiah.