Nothing illustrates the problem better than Guggenheim’s vignettes of students from neighborhoods with horrible public schools. They enter lotteries to get into vastly superior charter schools, but there are so few openings that the odds are stacked against them. Charter schools, which are funded by taxpayers but run by private organizations, are one possible solution to the crisis. But charter schools are only one of the options emerging as we write a new definition of American public education. For most of the past century, public education meant a system of public schools to which we assigned students based on ZIP codes. That worked well for a long time, but we are in a different and more challenging era. In this new world, we find we need to educate children using many different methods and many providers, and then let parents choose which is best. It might be a district-run magnet school, such as the nationally recognized Florida Virtual School. But back to Bianca. Bianca was attending an inner city Catholic school. Those tend to enjoy much higher graduation rates at a fraction of the per-pupil spending in New York schools. So why can’t she stay? Why must she wait for a place in a charter school to become available? In Florida, Bianca’s wish could come true. She might attend Miami Union Academy, for example, which has a 96 percent graduation rate with 92 percent of its graduates going to college. Tuition at Miami Union, though far less than per-pupil spending in the county’s public schools, would still be out of reach for her mother. But Bianca could attend through the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship. Under this program, companies get a tax credit for contributing to qualified nonprofit organizations that in turn provide scholarships to low-income parents. Last year, 28,927 low-income children, two-thirds of them black or Hispanic, used the scholarship to attend 1,033 private schools. State research showed these children were the poorest and poorest-performing students from the public schools they left behind, but achieved the same test-score gains as students of all income levels nationally. Their parents were so committed they paid on average $1,000 out of pocket to make up the difference between the scholarship and tuition. These kinds of options in some cases are more plentiful and available than charter schools. In Duval County, for example, there are fewer than a dozen charter schools, and not all of them are near low-income children. Yet there are 105 private schools participating in the tax credit program. Why should low-income parents have to wait for a space in a charter school when there are viable options for their children? The singer John Legend told Winfrey’s viewers that education is the “civil rights issue of our time.” March, more than 5,500 racially diverse and mostly low-income parents and children marched to the state Capitol to speak up for the scholarship. They are not waiting for Superman. They want options today, and they deserve all we can give them. Information from Bloomberg News was included in this piece. John Kirtley is chairman of the Florida School Choice Fund, a nonprofit organization that administers Florida’s tax credit scholarship program for low-income children.