PTA chooses system over kids on tax credit scholarships

By Chanae Jackson-Baker
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The Florida PTA prides itself on its mission to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. It stresses values that include collaboration, accountability, respect, inclusivity and integrity. But its attack on Florida's tax credit scholarship is a direct contradiction of these principles.

The PTA told its members to call lawmakers and get them to fight a bill that would expand the scholarship program. It said, “Tell them to STOP THE ATTACK ON OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS!”

If the premise of the PTA is to advocate for all children, please explain why it would fight what is best for my four children?

I was an active PTA parent before placing my children in private schools using tax credit and McKay scholarships. I was the parent who went to meetings, I coordinated fundraisers, I worked.

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diligently to recruit other parents, I spread the word about the importance of the PTA, I volunteered throughout the school day.

But it wasn’t enough to help my kids.

I witnessed my two daughters leave public school in the top 5 percent and 10 percent of their classes and have yet to catch up to other students in their class at their private school. My high school son (an honors student who received level 4 and level 5 on the FCAT) has to do additional grammar work and take two classes to be on the same level as the other students in his class when he enters private school next year.

Speaking as a parent who invested her time, effort, energy and dedication in my children getting the most out of public education, I need you to understand that examples illustrate that my children were not near their highest level of potential. They would have so many missed opportunities if the tax credit scholarship was not available.

The PTA wants you to believe that vouchers are taking money away from public schools, but the money follows the child. It is no different than if the child lived in another county or chose to go to another school or was home-schooled. The money is the child’s, not the school’s.

Also, public schools receive more than $7,000 per child for children to be in overcrowded, under-performing classrooms. Private schools receive $4,880 per scholarship for children to be placed in academic settings that are more conducive to learning.

The PTA asserts there is no accountability, that scholarship students are attending schools with noncredentialed teachers, that they don’t have to take standardized tests and so on.

I assert that private schools that accept the tax credit scholarships have a greater accountability. Their business is my children’s education.

If they fail to successfully educate my children, then they do not stay in business because we have the choice to take our children somewhere better suited for them.

I researched and toured seven schools before choosing the best fit for my children. I saw schools that had multiple accreditations. I saw that my children would be tested and compared to students on a national level. I saw that learning could be exciting again.

Please understand that my choice to give my children what I deem as a better opportunity is not an attack on the public school system. It is about choice, it is about preference. If an individual chooses Publix over Walmart, or one doctor over another, it doesn’t mean one is bad and the other is not. It just means that each child should be placed in the setting that works for them.

I want the PTA to know that I now realize they are advocating for a system instead of each child. I want them to know that although I don’t have campaign contributions to hold over each legislator’s head, I can help rally up to 60,000 families (that we know support this scholarship) to make a point at local elections.

Most importantly, I want the PTA to know that just because I have a lower socioeconomic status, it does not mean I don’t know what’s best for my children.