

MY WORD CHANAE JACKSON-BAKER

Why is the PTA blocking what's best?

Recently, the Florida PTA told its members to call lawmakers and get them to fight a bill that would expand Florida's tax credit scholarship program. It said, "Tell them to stop the attack on our public schools!"



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But 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 (for economically-challenged children) and McKay scholarships (granted to students with special needs). I went to meetings. I coordinated fund raisers. I worked diligently to recruit other parents. But it wasn't enough to help my kids.

I watched my two daughters leave public school in the top 5 percent and 10 percent of their classes, yet have to catch up to other students at their private school. My high-school son (an honors student in public school) has to do additional work to be on the same level as other students when he enters private school next year. 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. The money is not the school's. Also, public schools receive more than \$7,000 per child for children to be in overcrowded under-performing classrooms. In 2013-14, private schools received \$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. I argue that private schools that accept the scholarships have greater accountability. Their business is my children's education; if they fail to successfully educate my children, we have the *choice* to take our children somewhere better. My choice is not an attack on public schools. If an individual chooses Publix over Walmart, it doesn't mean one is bad. It just means 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. Most importantly, I want the PTA to know that my lower socioeconomic status doesn't mean I don't know what's best for my children.

Chanae Jackson-Baker lives in Ocala.