

# SOUTH FLORIDA SunSentinel

## ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

### *When it comes to schools, one size doesn't fit all*

BY STACY ANGIER



Angier

Public schools do an outstanding job with many students. But as all educators know, one size doesn't fit all. Students who thrive in one school may not do so well in another. Our collective goal as

educators should be to place them in the academic environment that fits them best.

That's one reason I was disappointed in the recent March 25 column, "Lawmakers should keep public funds in public schools," by Joanne McCall, vice president of the Florida teachers union. She takes aim at Florida's tax credit scholarship program for low-income students and, in the process, besmirches the intentions of private educators like me. Like public school teachers,

we're not about profits and privatization. And with them, we share a common goal: to help our students become successful in school and in life.

At Abundant Life Christian Academy, we put special emphasis on making sure low-income students live up to their God-given potential. We are aided in this effort by tax credit scholarships. About half of our 300 students in K-8 are on scholarship, and without it, many of them would be unable to attend. McCall misleads readers about a program that clearly has helped them.

Despite the oft-repeated claim, it doesn't "siphon" money from public schools. The value of the scholarship this year is \$4,880, about half of what taxpayers pay for each student in public school. Over the years, studies by Florida TaxWatch, the Collins Center for Public Policy and three government agencies have all found the program doesn't hurt public school funding.

And despite McCall's suggestion, the program is subject to accountability rules. State law requires that scholarship students take state-approved tests, and that average academic gains for schools be publicly posted. It's worth noting what those test results show. Scholarship students are often the ones who struggle the most in public schools. But once in private schools, they're making the same gains in reading and math as students of all income levels nationally.

Every day, I see anecdotal evidence that backs up the hard data. Our scholarship parents tell us, all the time, that their children are doing better, that their children love school now. I don't bring this up as a knock on their former schools. It doesn't mean our school is better; it means we're different — and for individual students, different may be better.

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