

The Unions' War on Parental Choice

By Jeb Bush



As a decades-long advocate for school choice, I've met countless families who have unlocked opportunity for their children through quality education options. That's why, during my time as Governor, we made expanding parental choice a key part of our overhaul of Florida's education system.

The results speak for themselves: Today, more than 300,000 kids in Florida are in school choice programs. Florida leads the nation in reading for low-income and minority fourth graders. Graduation rates have increased by almost 50 percent in the state. The number of 'D' and 'F' schools in Florida decreased from 28 percent to 5 percent, and the number of 'A' and 'B' schools in Florida increased from 21 percent to 74 percent. Finally, Florida is one of the only states in the nation to make real progress in closing the achievement gap.

The statistics capture one half of the picture; the many individual success stories the other.

Take Florida 10th grader Valentin Mendez, who has experienced the results firsthand. He was struggling in school, being bullied, not able to learn. His mother found a school — La Progresiva Presbyterian — that he could qualify for using Florida's Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship program, which we created in 2001. Here's what his mom says today: "Suddenly it was Valentin doing his homework... Valentin playing sports... Valentin doing everything." Each life transformed like Valentin's is proof of the value of hard work by students, insistence on high standards by parents and teachers and a determination to give students more opportunities to do better and try new things.

There are many more students like Valentin out there—living in poverty, facing hardships most of us can't imagine.

Unfortunately, the very educational opportunities that

are giving so many students a better shot in life are under assault by Hillary Clinton's staunchest supporters, the teachers unions. Last August, a group organized by the state teachers union in Tallahassee sued the state of Florida to end the tax credit scholarship program. Even though they rightfully lost the case, the union last week appealed the decision, proving the war on parental choice in Florida continues.

School choice is under assault in other areas across the nation as well. In New York City, Clinton ally Bill De Blasio has succeeded in transforming the city into a downright hostile environment for charter schools, where more than 43,000 students now remain on waiting lists for them. And last week, the American Civil Liberties Union — another liberal interest group — sued the State of Nevada over its innovative new Education Savings Accounts program.

These are the same special interests backing Hillary Clinton's bid for the presidency. And, there is no evidence that Secretary Clinton would buck her friends on the critical issue of education reform if she were elected President.

We need a President who will stand up for students. Restoring the right to rise in America begins with providing every child access to a quality education. Education shouldn't be a federal initiative, but it can be a national priority. I know we can increase opportunity for every American if we take on the special interests and entrenched establishment that are holding too many children back. I know we can do it because I saw what happened when we took on the teachers union in Tallahassee and won, putting students first.

Jeb Bush is Founder, Chairman of the Board and President of the Foundation for Florida's Future and the Foundation for Excellence in Education. He served as the 43rd governor of Florida, from 1999 through 2007.