

# THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

LIFE. PRINTED DAILY.

*Published Tuesday, January 6, 2009*

## Study Touts Benefits of School Vouchers

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The number of students in Florida receiving private school vouchers backed by corporate taxes has grown by 86 percent since 2003, to nearly 21,500 students, according to the Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, an agency that conducts research for the Legislature.

That number spiked two years ago when Florida's Supreme Court ruled that another voucher program, the Opportunity Scholarship, violated the state constitution by diverting public dollars to private schools.

The corporate tax voucher pro-

gram, however, diverts corporate income taxes to scholarships allowing low-income students to attend private schools.

Despite resistance from some Democrats in Florida, researchers with the accountability office say lawmakers can save more if they direct additional corporate tax dollars to vouchers.

Last year, the state spent \$3,750 on each voucher that went toward a private education, and it spent more than \$6,100 a student in public schools. That difference saved the state more in education spending than it lost in corporate tax revenue, researchers said.

However, some critics are ask-

ing whether the public is getting its money's worth.

Mark Pudlow, the spokesman for the state teachers union, said families can't compare private schools using apples-to-apples tools available in public education.

After the report's release this month, Martin Kiar, the ranking Democrat on the House's Pre K-12 Policy Committee, said it "should have looked at how the program interferes with the constitutional duty of the Legislature to provide an adequate education to all students. To do that, it should examine the effect on students who remain in public schools."

