

School choice opponents' motto: No child allowed to get ahead

By Kyle Wingfield

The Southern Poverty Law Center, last seen inspiring a man to attempt a mass shooting at the Family Research Council's Washington headquarters, is suing to overturn a school-choice measure passed next door in Alabama. The SPLC's argument? That because some people might not benefit from the law, which provides a \$3,500 voucher that kids in one of 78 **failing schools** can use to attend a private school instead, the law shouldn't be on the books at all.

This is a refrain sung faithfully by school-choice opponents everywhere, including Georgia. And the refrain's moral and intellectual emptiness is ably pointed out by the Cato Institute's Jason Bedrick:

"The SPLC lawsuit claims that the law 'creates two classes of students assigned to failing schools -- those who can escape because of their parents' income or where they live and those, like the Plaintiffs here, who cannot.' In fact, those two classes of students already exist. In our existing education system, low-income families are trapped in failing schools while wealthier families can afford either to live in districts with better public schools or to send their children to private school. The scholarship tax credit program is too limited to solve all the existing inequities, but it moves more students out of the first category and into the second. In other words, by expanding opportunities to low-income families, it makes an already unequal education system more equal." (emphasis and link original)

This is the same argument I made last fall when school-choice opponents tried to play this faux segregation card. The segregation of haves and have-nots already exists; school-choice measures help more have-nots move into the haves category. And it would help even more move up, if the education status quoists didn't fight so viciously to limit it.

Then again, as Glenn Reynolds notes, they don't call themselves the Southern *Escape-from-Poverty* Law Center.

Seriously, though: The SPLC once was on the right side of history when it came to civil rights. It's sad to see them take the wrong position on the civil rights issue of this era.

