

Jay P. Greene's Blog

With Help From Some Friends

Setting the Record Straight on Florida's Tax-Credit Scholarships

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Opponents of school choice spend a great deal of time and energy perpetuating all sorts of **easily debunked myths** about choice programs. In Florida, the state teachers' union has worked very hard to spread **two such myths** about the state's tax-credit scholarship program, which Mark Pudlow of the Florida Education Association calls a "scheme":

"It's a scheme because this tax credit voucher [sic] was enacted by the Legislature to circumvent a previous state Supreme Court ruling saying that public money could not go to fund vouchers," he said. "So the Legislature set up a scheme that would allow certain types of taxes to be 'donated' to the groups administering the voucher program. So instead of paying taxes to the state, they were forgiven their tax obligation if they donated the exact same amount of money to the voucher administrators."

Fortunately, the *Daily Commercial* gave Ron Matus of **Step Up for Students**, Florida's largest scholarship organization, the opportunity to set the record straight:

"The union kept saying the tax credit scholarships were done to circumvent the ruling," he said. "Their timeline is off. The fact of the matter is the tax credit scholarship program was passed by the legislature and signed into law in 2001, five years before the Supreme Court ruling. The opponent keeps arguing the program drains money from public schools. Every single study that has been done over many years by multiple different parties that has looked at the fiscal impact says it does not harm public schools or drain money from public schools."

The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability estimated the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program saved the state \$36.2 million in 2008.

Government Accountability stated that while the program "reduces the amount of tax revenues received by the state, it produces a net fiscal benefit."

This academic year, Step Up for Students will provide **more than 90,000 tax-credit scholarships** to students so that they can attend the school of their choice. Additionally, they will administer nearly 6,000 education savings accounts. Florida also has a second scholarship

organization, **AAA Scholarship Foundation**, so it's likely that more than 100,000 Florida students will receive tax-credit scholarships this year.

As Step Up demonstrates, scholarship organizations do much more than just cut checks. They also can provide parents with vital information about their educational options, help connect parents and schools, and—when necessary—they can **organize to defend the scholarships from outside attacks**. As Jay noted in a **recent post**, politically viable policies require “constituents who can then be mobilized to protect and expand” them. School choice policies generate those constituents, and as Step Up has amply demonstrated, scholarship organizations can mobilize them.

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