

# StAugustine.com

Published on *StAugustine.com* (<http://staugustine.com>)

[Home](#) > [News](#) > Education battles ahead for Scott

---

## Education battles ahead for Scott

By MORRIS NEWS SERVICE

Created *01/06/2011 - 7:57am*

TALLAHASSEE - With a number of proposals to expand voucher programs and other options outside of traditional public schools floating around the Capitol, there are signs that a battle about school choice could be brewing.

But even those who watch fights about Florida schools aren't certain whether the focus of the 2011 session will be vouchers or a renewed push to overhaul teacher pay.

One recommendation by the transition team that was advising Gov. Rick Scott on education policy could give a glimpse into the future fight. The panel suggested that parents be allowed to set up education savings accounts, with the state depositing 85 percent of the per-student funding for their children.

That idea closely mirrors a proposal by the Foundation for Florida's Future, an education group founded by former Gov. Jeb Bush. Patricia Levesque, who heads the foundation, chaired the transition team.

"We're very excited about it," press secretary Jaryn Emhof said of the report.

According to the transition team, the proposal would save money by allowing the state to keep the additional 15 percent of per-student funding.

But some lawmakers aren't certain that choice programs - a catchphrase used to refer to everything from online schools to transferring between public schools to full-fledged voucher programs - will be a major focus in 2011.

Rep. Bill Proctor, R-St. Augustine, who heads the House Education Committee, said he's skeptical about the chances for school choice to share the limelight in the 2011 session

with an expected battle over performance pay and employment protections for educators, commonly known as tenure.

"I think there may be some broadening of the voucher, but I don't know to what extent," Proctor said.

Mark Pudlow, a spokesman for the Florida Education Association, the state's main teachers union, said his organization is still waiting to see what Scott proposes.

"Until we see something coming up the legislative pike, we'll withhold judgment," Pudlow said.

But he suggested FEA would fight an effort to institute an expansive education savings account proposal, which some public school advocates view as a threat to funding for public education.

"Obviously, we would have some problems with vouchers for all," Pudlow said.

Even some voucher advocates, like Andrew Coulson of the libertarian Cato Institute, have warned that the savings account plan could run afoul of a 4-year-old Supreme Court ruling on funding for private schools. Scott's transition team also acknowledged that land mine in its recommendation to keep a program that allows corporations to get tax credits for sponsoring private school vouchers.

"Education savings accounts are not recommended as a replacement for Florida Tax Credit Scholarships, since tax credit funding remains the safest legal structure for choice programs," the team wrote.

How that plan would be preserved in light of Scott's promise to repeal the corporate income tax is not addressed; the team simply recommended that the administration "find a constitutionally-defensible alternative funding source" without specifying where the money might come from.

But the success of the scholarship program suggests that state funded school choice will grow one way or the other, said Doug Tuthill, president of Step Up For Students, which helps oversee the program. Tuthill said his organization, which provides scholarships to students, including those attending one of 107 eligible schools in Duval County, is growing at 20 percent a year and has 6,600 students on a waiting list.

"It's a very, very robust growth industry right now in school choice, and it's basically being driven by the parents. ... If there's no legislation this year, all the school choice programs would continue to grow," Tuthill said.

Even so, Tuthill said that if education savings account legislation includes certain limiting provisions, like a requirement for students to have attended public schools before getting vouchers, it might not have as dramatic an impact as some believe.

"I'm sure there will be a bill that will be that radical once it comes out of bill drafting," Tuthill said. "It might be a very narrowly crafted bill, to be honest with you."

Thu, 01/06/2011 10 1294318629
-------------------------------------

**iPad News Update:**

Do not add this story to the iPad News Update RSS feed.

**iPad Breaking News Alert:**

Do not add this story to the iPad Breaking News Alert RSS feed.

---

**Source URL:** <http://staugustine.com/news/local-news/2011-01-06/education-battles-ahead-scott>