

# IN THIS ELECTION, OUR CHILDREN NEED OPTIONS TOO

*To the honorable Alex Sink and Rick Scott:*



As we approach this election for a new governor, we challenge both of you to find at least one clear patch of common ground in an education debate that too often divides us. Florida, which leads the nation in providing learning options to all students, offers one of those options to 29,000 of its poorest schoolchildren. We know firsthand how the Tax Credit Scholarship has helped turn around the lives of many underprivileged students, and we urge you both to join the cause.

Earlier this year, we marched to the Capitol as proud members of a bipartisan political coalition that simply wants to give struggling students more tools. We know a painful reality – that nearly half of all low-income students read below grade level. And we’re frankly tired of arguing over whether their education is best delivered in a district school, a charter school, an online school or a scholarship school. Parents don’t care. They just want a place that is safe and academically stimulating and helps their children become successful adults.

Antonio Trigo, raised by his grandmother since he was 5, is one such student. He was near failing and constantly in fights before his grandmother put him in a scholarship school in the seventh grade. His turnaround was so profound that by the end of eighth grade he was named valedictorian. Now a sophomore at Miami Union Academy, a small Seventh Day Adventist school with mostly Haitian-American students, Antonio is scoring two years above his grade level on standardized tests and sees college in his future.

The students served by this scholarship live, on average, only 17 percent above poverty. Three-fourths are black or Hispanic, three-fifths come from single-parent homes, and a state researcher found they were among the lowest-performing students in the public schools they left



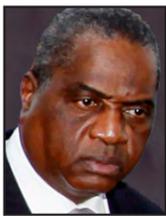
behind. So we implore both of you to join our bipartisan cause, a cause endorsed by an extraordinary majority of the Legislature’s Black and Hispanic Caucuses. These are the very students for whom our state’s commitment to equal educational opportunity is a moral imperative. In this arena, party labels should never matter.

## Will you publicly state that you will protect this learning option and allow more poor children to choose it?



**JULIO FUENTES**

founder and president of the Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, representing 37 chapters and 80,000 minority businesses, and CEO of Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options



**REV. C. E. GLOVER**

representing the Black Ministers Parental Choice Alliance, which includes more than 30 ministers and 50 churches across Florida.



**JOSE FERNANDEZ**

director of the Florida League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), representing nearly 20 civil rights councils



**KEVIN CHAVOUS**

chairman of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, representing 4,600 members and 288 black elected officials



**RABBI MOSHE MATZ**

director of Agudath Israel of Florida, representing roughly 100 rabbis and synagogues



**LORENA CASTILLO**

chairwoman of the Coalition of Hispanic Instructors in Support of Parental Awareness, representing 78 public school teachers mostly in Dade and Broward counties



**REV. H. K. MATTHEWS**

leader in the historic civil rights struggle in Florida who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma

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On March 24, 5,521 low-income parents, students, educators and activists marched to the State Capitol in support of the Tax Credit Scholarship.