



Reality Check: Orlando Sentinel's "Schools Without Rules"

The article alleges that there is a lack of oversight in Florida's scholarship program that leads to poor quality, but ignores the proven academic success and the effectiveness of participating schools.

The article claims that private schools are a breeding ground of fraud and abuse and the scholarships in question are its enablers.

- **In reality**, less than 0.1% of funding is subject to fraud associated with the scholarships under scrutiny.

The article makes a few superficial claims such as a school's location in a strip mall and the age of the principal, while ignoring a successful academic track record at the school.

- **In reality**, while TDR Learning Academy is located in a strip mall and has a twenty-four year old principal still pursuing his college degree, the students tested in successive years had huge gains in reading and math, despite the unconventional atmosphere.

The article claims that private schools are not properly held accountable by the state when complaints are brought to their attention.

- **In reality**, the Department of Education has either sanctioned or removed numerous schools and denied participation in scholarship programs to those found to be acting in bad faith.

The article claims that studies show a decline in academic performance in students' math or reading skills.

- **In reality**, annual academic reports show scholarship students are usually the lowest academic performers in their public school. Once placed in their new school of choice, they achieve the same annual learning gains as the national average.

Parent Empowerment: The programs under scrutiny allow students from low-income families or students with special needs to leave their public school and attend an alternative school of their choice. This freedom of choice has made 80% of parents who use the tax credit scholarship "very satisfied" with their child's academic performance compared to 4% at their previous public school.

The Takeaway: The article makes a general assertion about scholarship programs by using selective facts and citing a few bad actors. However, when put into context, the programs have a proven track record of success—satisfying parents and helping students reach their academic goals.

FAST FACTS

- Students who utilized the Florida Tax Credit scholarship for four or more years were 37-43% more likely to attend college than similarly disadvantaged students in public schools. They are also 29% more likely to earn an associate degree than similarly disadvantaged students in public school .

- **94% of parents** who utilize the Florida Tax Credit scholarship rated their schools **7 or above on a scale of 1-10**.

- **92% of McKay special needs scholarship parents chose "satisfied" or "very satisfied"** compared to 32% of parents whose children attend public school.

- According to research by Northwestern University the tax credit scholarship program improves public schools.