

October 24, 2004

Items: Call to Action

Change is coming to the McKay Scholarship Program. Some of these changes can be positive and make the program a more fiscally and programmatically accountable. However, different groups and legislators are suggesting changes that could endanger the private school's ability to provide alternate programs to parents of children with disabilities.

The Coalition of McKay Scholarship Schools has represented you at both DOE legislative meetings and at the Senate Task Force and Senate Education Committee meeting this week. It's now your time to act.

#### BETWEEN NOW AND THANKSGIVING IS THE TIME TO ACTIVATE YOUR PARENTS

As a school you can assist your parents in speaking out:

- 1) Have a one hour letter writing session with McKay Parents
- 2) Provide a structure for them to tell their stories
- 3) When possible, have their children write thank-yous or draw pictures
- 4) Help in copying and mailing the letters to the appropriate people

HINT: Have a pizza party for parents and students after school hours.

#### PARENTS NEED TO TELL THEIR STORIES:

What problems did their child encounter in the public school?

Why did they choose to go to a private school?

What differences have they seen in not only their child's life but also their family's life?

End with a strong request that the McKay Program be allowed to continue to give parents a choice in their child's future.

If a parent wants to give permission for their story to be used elsewhere, have the parent write that permission on the bottom of the letter.

Have all contact information clearly written

WHO SHOULD THEY SEND THEIR STORIES TO? (Addresses are at the end of this FYI)  
Their local representatives

Copies to:

Governor Jeb Bush  
Commissioner Jim Horne  
Senator Lee Constantine, Chair of Senate Education Committee  
Representative Bev Kilmer, Chair of House Education Committee  
The local media (and try to get a human interest story written)

The Coalition of McKay Scholarship Schools would like to have copies of these letters so that they may be used to underscore the importance of the McKay Scholarship Program as we speak to legislators and the media.

ALL MCKAY SCHOOLS NEED TO TAKE THIS CALL TO ACTION SERIOUSLY. Unless we raise our voices louder than the voices that are being raised against the McKay programs, we will not be heard.

The purpose of this first contact is to highlight the successes of the McKay Scholarship, which is providing lower cost schooling for our parents who are taxpayers. After Christmas, we will ask for another round of parent and school letters concerning the legislation that will be presented during session.

Let us know any other inventive ways in which you have activated your parents.....

October 6, 2004

Items: McKay Conference Was a Great Success

The McKay Conference was full of energy and information. Over 75 people participated in the conference. A survey of legislative issues was completed by the participants and discussed with a panel consisting of Coalition Board Members, Senator Lee Constantine and Dr. Patricia K. Hardman. The results of the survey are attached to this FYI.

The Coalition Board members took the results to the DOE Legislative Committee and shared your comments, concerns and stands with the committee. The legislation that was drafted last week was responsive to many of the private schools' concerns about maintaining autonomy of the private sector while providing programs that are accountable to Florida's taxpayers.

Over the next few weeks we will share more information from the Conference with you.

#### ADDRESSES

Governor Jeb Bush  
Office of the Governor  
Florida State Capital  
400 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Commissioner Horne  
Florida Department of Education  
325 West Gaines Street  
Suite 1514  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Senator Lee Constantine  
378 Centerpointe Circle  
Suite 1268  
Altamonte Springs, FL 32701

Representative Bev Kilmer  
Suite K  
4636 Highway 90 East  
Marianna, FL 32446

Dr. Theresa Klebacha  
Executive Director, Independent Education  
Florida DOE  
325 West Gaines Street  
Suite 1514  
Tallahassee, FL 32322

To find your senator's contact information go to <http://www.flsenate.gov/>

To find your representatives' contact information go to <http://myfloridahouse.com/legislators.aspx>

May 3, 2004

Items: The Legislature Heard Our Voices

The Legislature ended on Friday evening with neither HB-313 nor SB-2882 being passed. **YOUR VOICES WERE HEARD IN THE HUNDREDS OF LETTERS, EMAILS AND PHONE CALLS MADE IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS.**

We would have preferred that HB-313 have been passed, but so many amendments were being made to over-regulate the McKay Scholarship program that no legislation was seen as a better option than bad legislation. We are beginning to work with DOE to develop the rules and management systems to make the program more effective.

Special thanks go to House Speaker Johnnie Byrd, Representative Bev Kilmer, and Representative Dudley Goodlette for continuing to support parents' rights to choose appropriate programs for their children with disabilities and for staying strong in the face of opposition in both the House and the Senate.

Special thanks also go to Governor Bush who met with a delegation from the Coalition on May 20 and pledged his continued support to giving parents choice in their children's education.

Even though we can breathe easier at the moment, **DON'T THINK THE OPPOSITION TO CHOICE HAS DISAPPEARED.** We anticipate that they will be back next session with more of the same types of bills and regulations. During this year, you need to continue to let your legislators know how well the McKay Scholarship Program is working for your children and that any legislation made should allow the private schools the ability to continue to provide diverse programs for children with disabilities.

Thank-you again for all of your contacts to the legislators. You truly did make a difference.

Fall Conference

The Coalition of McKay Scholarship Schools will be hosting its second annual conference September 27-28 at the Marriott Tampa Airport Hotel in Tampa. **PUT THIS DATE ON YOUR CALENDAR.**

Some of the topics up for discussion are:

- 1) Legislative issues

- 2) DOE rules and regulations
- 3) Troubleshooting issues with contracts, student fees, etc
- 4) Networking with schools across the state,
- 5) And more (We will be asking you what topics you want to hear.)

We will be sending out more information shortly.

Have a great end of the year.

Sincerely,

Robyn A. Rennick

March 20, 2004

Items: Senate Education Committee Meeting

Parent Petitions Make a Difference, Send Yours In

Random Audits

The Coalition was very pleased with the turnout at the Senate Education Committee meeting on Tuesday. We had over 35 parents, teachers, administrators and students attend. Magnolia School, Maranatha Christian School, Atlantis Academy, Woodland Hall Academy, and Panama City Christian School represented the McKay Coalition. We all wore red and the Senators did take notice.

We supported SB2882 with reservations. We are continuing to work with the Senate Education Committee to fine tune this bill and should have some amendments before they bring it to the Appropriations Committee. I will keep you posted as to our next step.

"Parent Petitions Make A Difference, Send Yours In"

Woodland Hall Academy's PTO President Brenda Shiner presented 1135 petitions from McKay parents requesting that the legislators take great care to keep from writing restrictive and unnecessary regulations.

Keep the petitions coming. If your school has not sent their petitions, we still need you to speak out. We will be presenting the petitions to Governor Bush, Representative Beverly Kilmer, House Speaker Byrd, and Senate President King.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE PETITION INITIATIVE...GO TO "IN ACTION."

## Random Audits

The DOE has sent a number of schools requests for "Follow-up to the Sworn Compliance Form". We don't know how many more schools they may ask for documentation. The easiest way to be ready for this is to have copies of all your documents in one place. What they have asked for thus far are the following:

1. A copy of the Criminal Records Background Check report for the owner/operator;
2. A copy of the current Private School Inspection report;
3. A copy of the Radon Testing results report (if required, otherwise provide proof that it is not required);
4. A copy of your Commercial License, if applicable;
5. A copy of the Fire Code Inspection report; and
6. Proof of accreditation, if claimed on the Sworn Compliance Form.

## June 29, 2005 - FYI

### ITEMS

- \* Change of Address
- \* NEW Deadline for Compliance Form
- \* Be Careful Enrolling and Withdrawing Students From DOE's Web-site
- \* Fall Conference

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Please note that we have moved the office of The Coalition of McKay Scholarship Schools to a new address. Our mailing address is 5746 Centerville Rd, Tallahassee, FL 32309. We will be keeping the telephone number (850) 523-0688 but won't be hooked up for a week so if you need to reach us by telephone try (850) 893-2216. Our fax number will be changed to (850) 893-2440.

### THE COMPLIANCE FORM IS DUE AGAIN!

Please be aware that DOE is requiring schools to fill out the compliance form by AUGUST 1<sup>ST</sup> for the 2005-2006 school year. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL JULY 31<sup>ST</sup>, DO IT NOW!

### DOCUMENT ALL ENROLLING AND UNENROLLING THAT YOU DO

DOE has still not fixed the computer problem concerning how to enroll students into another private school when they are leaving a private school. They are telling schools to re-enroll students and then to withdraw them. One school reported that the list on the web-site contained students that had not been enrolled in their school for the 2004-2005 school year.

We are urging you to be cautious when enrolling and withdrawing students from DOE's web-site. The following are The Coalition's suggestions (not DOE's), but we feel they will protect your school should any future questions be asked.

1) If a student was not enrolled in your school for the 2004-2005 year, but has shown up on the website as your list of students to re-enroll, send an e-mail to DOE listing these students and tell DOE that you WILL NOT re-enroll them because DOE needs to find out where they were enrolled last year. Keep a paper copy of this correspondence.

2) If a student has left your school after the 2004-2005 year and transferred to another McKay Scholarship School for the 2005-2006 school year, follow DOE's guidelines and re-enroll them

on-line, then withdraw them. KEEP a paper copy of where you have re-enrolled and withdrawn the student.

We have repeatedly asked that this glitch be fixed for we feel that private schools are being placed into a situation of being asked to enroll students who we know are not attending and that this could have negative repercussions. DOE has not resolved this problem yet.

### **Pending topics**

- \* Legislative Liaisons ? with state legislators
- \* Best Business Practices ? Looking at Schools Contracts and Student Policies|
- \* Discussion group concerning issues/problems of mainstreaming children with disabilities in more traditional programs
- \* Transitions: What Happens to Our Kids After H.S. ? Future Planning Has to Begin Before They Graduate
- \* Study Strategies
- \* And more????

If you have a speaker who you feel would be an asset to the conference, please have them get in touch with Robyn Rennick at [drills@talstar.com](mailto:drills@talstar.com)  
We'll be sending more information your way through the summer concerning the conference.

Hope you are having a great summer.  
Robyn A. Rennick, MS  
President

**FEBRUARY 15, 2005**

**Items: Missing Checks**

**FCAT Preparation**

**Government Forms You Don't Need to Buy**

### **Missing Checks**

Many of our schools have reported that their parents have not received their scholarship checks. We have been told that the issue is verification of student enrollment, even though many of the students in question have been enrolled in the private school for several years.

We are concerned that, for the second time this year, scholarship checks have been very late. This puts a great burden on private schools accepting parents' payments through the scholarship program since private schools rely on tuition payments to meet their budget.

If you are still missing checks, and can't get any response from DOE, we suggest that you call and/or email your legislators.

Explain briefly the problem and the position it places the parent who owes tuition and the private school who is providing an educational program to these children with disabilities.

Ask your legislator how this constant problem can be investigated and fixed. If the parents and the private school are being held accountable and fulfilling their responsibilities, shouldn't the

state of Florida be held accountable to fulfill its responsibilities?

Keep in touch with your legislator. Let them know how matters are progressing.

### **FCAT Preparation**

Some McKay parents are taking the option of having their child take the FCAT. Please let them know that children who are in the McKay Scholarship Program may use the FCAT Explorer, an online tutorial that works on the benchmark requirements of the FCAT. Parents can be assigned a login name and a password by calling 1-888-750-3228.

Parents do not have to sign up for the FCAT in order to use the FCAT Explorer.

This may be a good opportunity for parents to see if their child is "ready" to take the FCAT.

### **Government Forms You DON'T Need To Buy**

(The following information was provided by Phyllis Dechant of Providence Christian Academy, one of our member schools.)

Within the last three weeks our school has received two "notices" which are really scams that have all the appearances of the IRS or other government agency. One says in bold black letters, "**Compliance Update, 2005**" and also has "**Form 20110**" in one corner. It says "As a registered employer in the state of Florida you must immediately replace your out-of-date 2004 Labor Law Notices with new 2005 notices, etc. etc. On the back you can "purchase" the posters for a tidy sum of \$39.95 from "Personnel Concepts, 2865 Metropolitan Place, Pomona, CA 91767".

The other notice is from "E.C.S. Employer Compliance Service, 611 Pennsylvania Ave. S.E. #4000, Washington, D.C. 20003-4303. It also resembles notices printed by the IRS. From this address you are urged to order a "Complete Federal & State Poster Set" for \$54.95, additional sets for \$49.95 each, and \$39.95 for only the State posters.

Schools need to know that they can download every one of these posters for **FREE** on-line at **www.myFlorida.com**. I just did. You can download and print them in color or in black and white and on regular 8 ½" x 11" paper.

**January 28, 2005**

**Items: Institute of Justice Amicus Brief and Press Conference**

**Legislative Initiative**

**Membership Drive**

### **Institute of Justice Amicus Brief and Press Conference**

Monday, January 24, the Institute of Justice held a press conference on the steps of the Florida Supreme Court concerning the Amicus briefs which have been filed. The briefs discuss the effect that a negative finding for the Opportunity Scholarship Program will have on other programs such

as the McKay Scholarship Program.

Over 100 children and parents filled the steps of the Supreme Court while Bishop Harold Ray of Redemptive Life Academy and parents and students spoke urging the Florida Supreme Court to overturn the lower court ruling against the Opportunity Scholarship.

The McKay Coalition wants to thank staff, students and parents who participated in the press conference. Those who participated were: (Tallahassee) Woodland Hall Academy, Atlantis Academy, Innovation Schools of Excellence, Magnolia School, Betton Hills Preparatory Academy, Providence Christian Academy; (Panama City) Fellowship Christian Academy, Panama City Christian School; (Lake City) Lake City Christian School; (Jacksonville) Foundation Academy. If I missed anyone, forgive me. THANKS FOR COMING. IT MADE A DIFFERENCE.

The Amicus brief is at: <http://www.ij.org/schoolchoice/florida/index.html> (See amicus briefs on the right side, under "Legal Briefs and Decisions.")

### **Legislative Initiative**

The Coalition was asked to speak before the House Education Innovation Committee on Tuesday, January 25. Robyn Rennick represented The Coalition and presented the Fact Sheet which gives an overview of the program. We felt the committee was very receptive and we continue to ask that they take care that any bills passed do not attempt to over-regulate the McKay Scholarship Program.

We have met with the House staff and are working on an Accountability Bill for the scholarship programs. As bills are filed and begin to go to committees, we will let you know which we feel will be beneficial and with which we are concerned.

**Please have your parents organized on email and phone lists to be ready to contact their representatives when we make a call to action.**

This is still the BEST time to let your legislators know about The McKay Scholarship Program and the GREAT things it is doing for Florida's children with disabilities. Attached is the fact sheet which is a great instrument to give to parents and have them present to their legislators. **If you haven't done so, set up appointments with your legislators BEFORE they go to Tallahassee for session.** We take for granted that they understand what the McKay Scholarship Program is, but many really do not.

Let The Coalition know who you have seen and what their response was. This will assist us as we talk with them in Tallahassee.

### **Membership Drive**

We have been pleased with the response to our Membership Drive and Renewal. If you have not sent in your membership fees, please do so now. Attached is a membership form and Code of Ethics. Send both back with the fees.