

Press Release
Georgia GOAL Scholarship Program, Inc.
For Immediate Release
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In today's edition of *The New York Times*, while neglecting to detail the excellent outcomes and practices of the Georgia GOAL Scholarship Program, reporter Stephanie Saul highlights certain abuses in which some of Georgia's other student scholarship organizations (SSOs) are engaging. GOAL encourages the Georgia General Assembly to amend the Georgia Education Expense Credit law to prevent these abuses; however, legislators should not do so in a way that undermines the effectiveness of this model school choice opportunity.

Sadly, Ms. Saul failed to disclose any of the outstanding results achieved by the GOAL Program. Likewise, the article fails to describe the exemplary procedures GOAL and its 118 participating schools have adopted to ensure that the GOAL Program is operating in an ethical and transparent manner, which is accountable to Georgia taxpayers.

- GOAL guidelines emphasize the needs of low and middle-income families. To date, the average AGI, adjusted for family size, of the almost 6,000 GOAL Scholarship recipients is \$24,223, and the average GOAL scholarship award is \$3,882
- GOAL is governed by a eleven-person Board of Directors, all of whom are independent and derive no income from GOAL, either directly or indirectly
- At its inception, GOAL's Board adopted, and monitors continued compliance with, Model Ethical Principles and Standards, available on GOAL's website
- GOAL prohibits the brief enrollment in public schools to qualify for scholarships, requiring proof of public school attendance for at least one semester
- Since its inception, rather than charge the 10% administrative fee permitted under the law, GOAL has charged an effective administrative fee rate of 6% of contributions

Unfortunately, despite GOAL's leadership in these areas, some of Georgia's 39 student scholarship organizations (SSOs) are engaging in practices that should be prohibited by law. For this reason, during its upcoming legislative session, state legislators should consider legislation that:

1. Prohibits a student who has been enrolled for less than one semester in a public school from receiving a SSO scholarship;
2. Prohibits parents from "paying it forward" by making scholarship contributions in exchange for a promise from a SSO to receive a scholarship for their child;
3. Prohibits a SSO from charging an administration fee of more than 7%;

4. Prohibits a SSO from seeking recommendations from legislators on where to direct corporate scholarship contributions; and
5. Prohibits the granting of tuition discounts or other financial incentives to parents for contributing to the SSO program in which the private school attended by their children participates.

GOAL and its participating schools are proud that, from its inception, GOAL has prohibited these practices. The GOAL Board has also adopted a policy prohibiting schools from using the possible receipt of GOAL Scholarships as a means for recruiting athletes from public schools. GOAL takes this policy very seriously and, when appropriate, takes remedial actions.

Although GOAL supports key reforms to the law, the legislature should not use the questionable practices raised in the article as an excuse to adopt unwarranted amendments to this excellent school choice law.

First, by contributing to SSOs, thousands of individual taxpayers have expressed their support for greater parental choices in education. Therefore, SSO contributions should not be limited to corporations, which is the case in Florida where there is no personal income tax.

Second, because individuals can designate the private school at which they would like their SSO contributions to be used for scholarships, individual contributors have enthusiastically supported this initiative. The school designation permitted under Georgia law should be preserved.

Third, the Georgia program is relatively free from the type of onerous state regulation that opponents of school choice seek in order to dilute the impact and value of k-12 tuition tax credit programs. The legislature should avoid requiring or permitting state officials to interfere with the operation of private schools participating in the program.

Fourth, though the GOAL Program and its participating schools use a voluntary form of means-testing to direct as much financial aid as possible to low-income families, in these difficult times, many middle-income families need assistance. The legislature should avoid adopting scholarship household income limitations that would prevent many families from securing the tuition assistance they need.

Finally, the legislature should avoid adopting any restrictions that would limit the choices public school parents have under the law to send their children to the private school best suited for their learning needs or to ensure their character formation or safety. Scholarships should not be limited to students who are coming from “poor performing” public schools.

The Georgia Education Expense Credit program is a national school choice model. The Georgia GOAL Scholarship Program, which has received close to one-third of all SSO contributions to date under the state-wide program, is doing its part to operate in an ethical manner, with transparency and accountability. GOAL encourages legislators and the media to resist letting a few “bad apples” cause changes to the program that would deprive parents, private school communities, the citizens of Georgia, and our children of hope for a brighter educational future.

The article may be found at the following link:

http://www.goalscholarship.org/docLib/20120523_NYTimesArticle52212.pdf

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