

# GOAL provides corporations a voice in school choice

As more and more Americans embrace school choice, individuals, corporations and policy makers are seeking to provide children with greater educational options. It is especially heartening that corporations, who are rightly concerned with the quality of K-12 education in Georgia, are increasingly participating in the tuition tax credit scholarship program. Moreover, many corporate donors want to actively partner with a student scholarship organization, or SSO, that takes a community-based approach to educational choice.

Since 2008, the Georgia GOAL Scholarship Program has received 447 contributions from “C” corporations, totaling \$17,760,661. Based on GOAL’s average scholarship award of \$3,660, these corporate contributors have enabled 4,800 scholarships to be awarded to children to attend the private schools of their parents’ choice. Some of these corporations have contributed anonymously, leaving it to GOAL staff to award scholarships to recipients from wherever in Georgia the financial assistance is needed. However, some corporations have chosen to partner with GOAL to provide scholarships to deserving students who reside in the local communities where these corporations do business. In



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these cases, some corporations prefer a full-service scholarship program that consults with designated company officials throughout the scholarship award and administration process, and deepens their connections with families and schools in the communities in which they are most interested.

As a member of the GOAL Corporate Advisory Board, I have witnessed the extra mile that GOAL staff will go to create customized scholarship fund solutions for corporations that desire a “hands-on” role. In some instances, these corporate contributors recommend the geographic locations in Georgia where they would like GOAL to award scholarships. If requested, GOAL

establishes a scholarship committee including representatives from the corporation who are connected to the local community. These scholarship committees engage in a “blind” review of scholarship applications that emphasizes directing the scholarship funds to students whose families have the greatest financial need. Scholarship committee members attend scholarship award ceremonies conducted with as much, or as little, fanfare as desired by the recipient families, participating schools, and corporate officials. Each year, the scholarship committee members follow the academic progress of the scholarship recipients and monitor the ongoing financial needs of their families.

GOAL understands the importance of enabling all of its contributors to support families and schools located in their communities and to monitor the impact of their philanthropic investments. A recent survey of GOAL donors revealed the extent to which these donors appreciate being able to support their neighbors and local private schools. The survey results, which are based on 2,032 donor responses (an extraordinarily high 29 percent response rate), include the following key findings:

- ▶ 93 percent of donors believe that they are helping children receive a better academic education.
- ▶ 87 percent of donors believe that they are helping children receive a better character education.
- ▶ 83 percent of donors believe that they are helping children access a safer school and classroom environment.
- ▶ 83 percent of donors feel good about supporting their local private school.
- ▶ 81 percent of donors feel good about financially assisting parents in the education of their children.

The sentiments of corporate donors who responded to the survey are evidenced by the comment of one donor who explained how contributing to GOAL provides a “great opportunity for our corporation to engage with the communities in which we operate.”

Just as one size does not fit all in the classroom, when it comes to supporting K-12 education, different donors have different philosophies and approaches. In GOAL, Georgia is fortunate to have an SSO that is striving to make it easier for corporations to craft effective school choice contribution strategies. Likewise, recipient families are fortunate that there are visionary and compassionate business leaders who want to make an important and lasting difference in the lives of thousands of Georgia children.