

# **Florida's School Choice Scholarships: *History & Accountability Measures***

House Choice and  
Innovation Committee

January 11, 2005



# Florida's K-12 Scholarship Programs

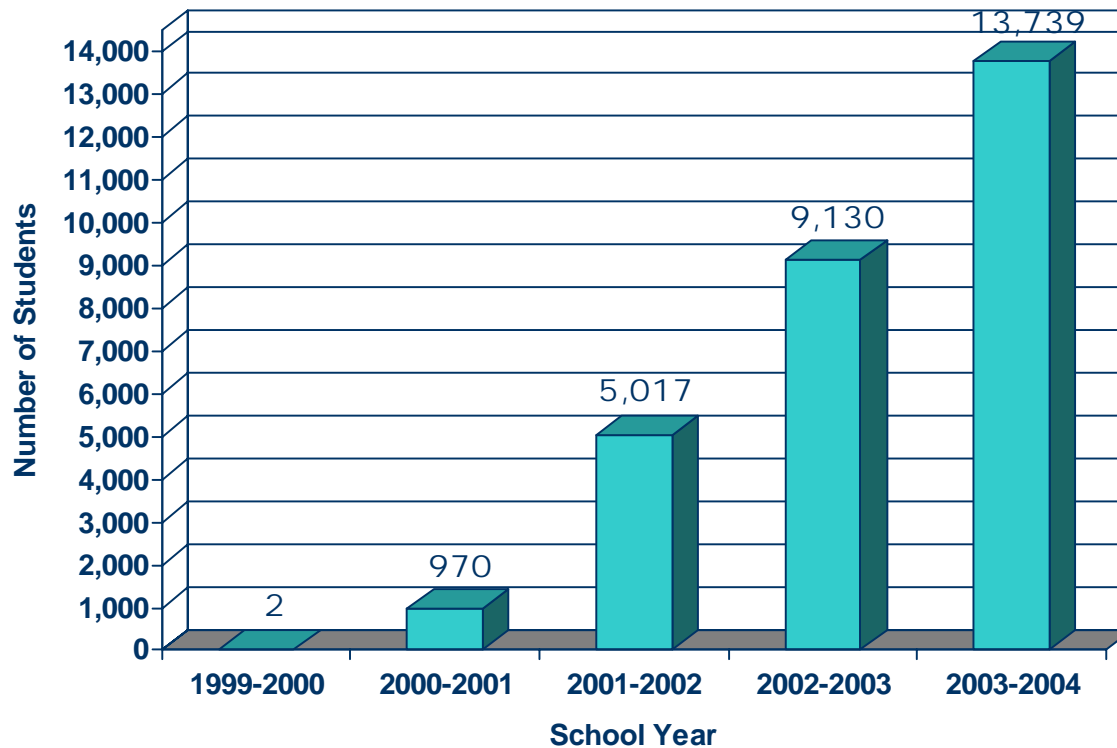
- John M. McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program
- Opportunity Scholarship Program
- Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program

Over half of the 2,231 active private schools in 2003-04 participated in one or more scholarship programs.

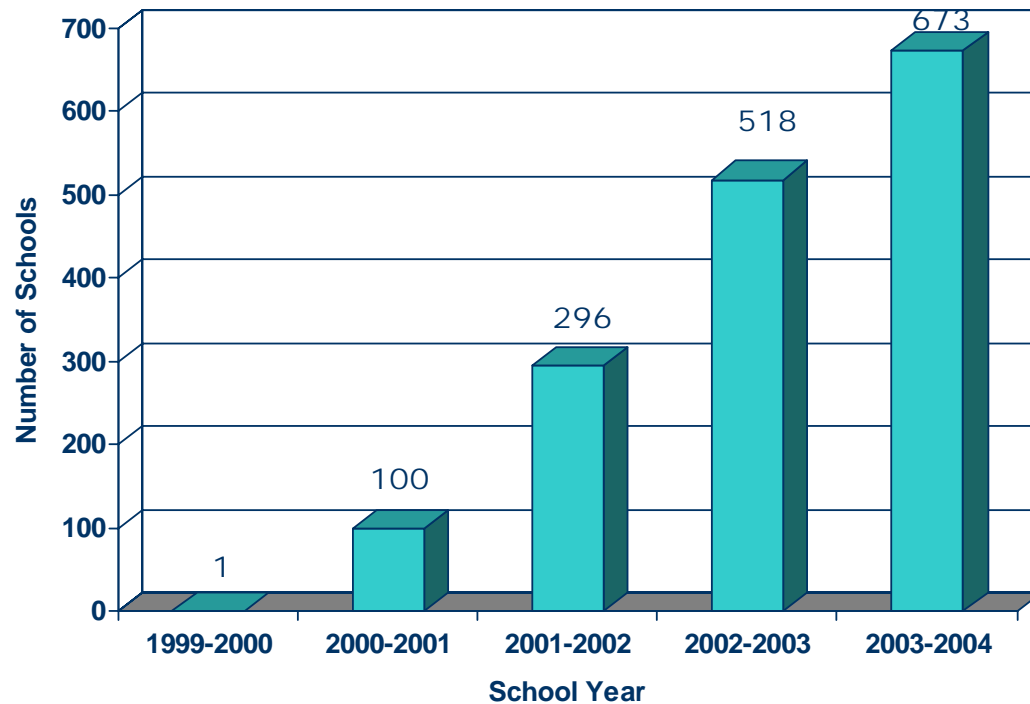
# McKay Scholarship Program

- Created as a pilot program in 1999 in Sarasota County for students with disabilities
- Student eligibility criteria:
  - Has an active IEP (Individualized Education Plan)
  - Spent prior year in attendance at a Florida public school
    - Reported for funding by the school district in the October and February FEFP surveys
  - Parent has obtained admission acceptance for student at an eligible private school

# McKay – Students By Year



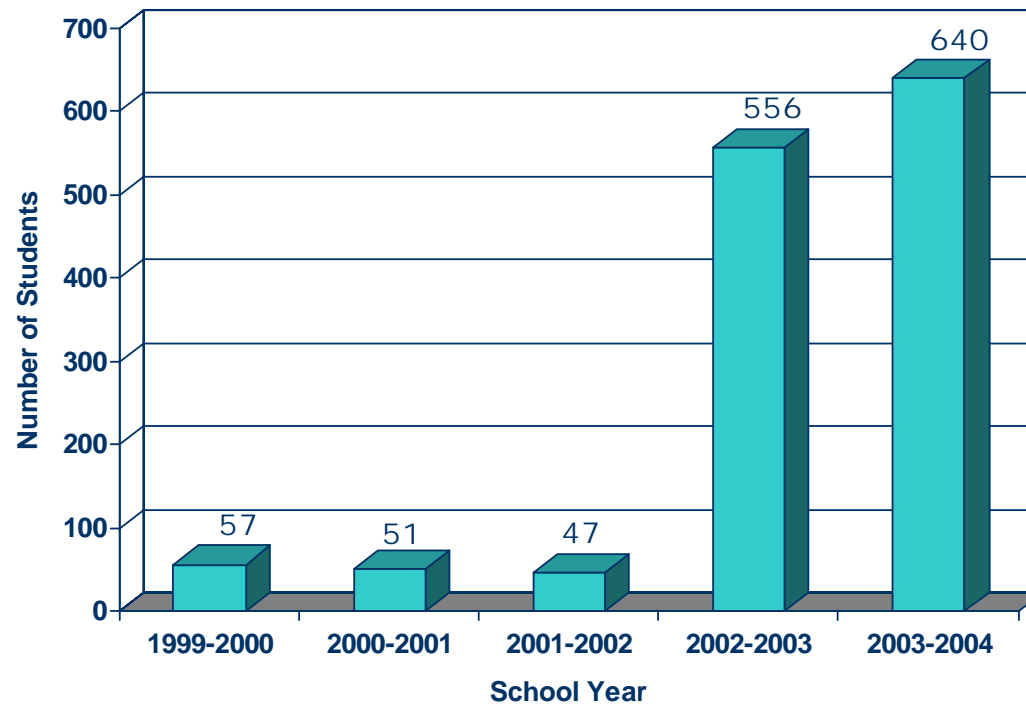
# McKay – Private Schools By Year



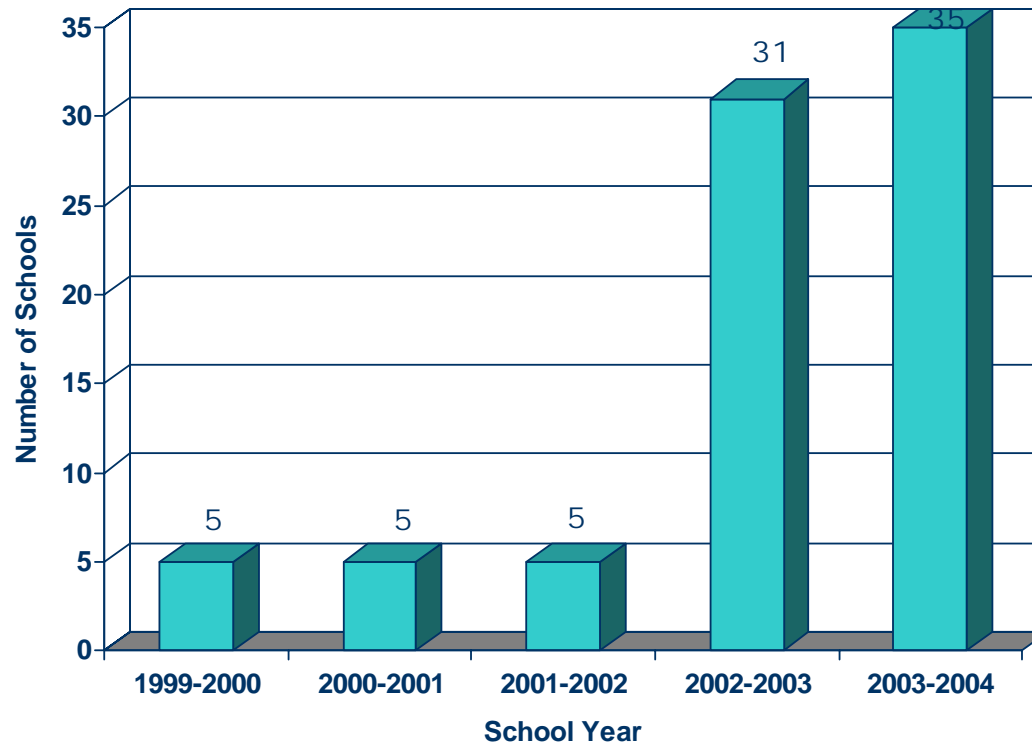
# Opportunity Scholarship Program

- Created in 1999 as part of the Governor's A+ Plan for students affected by double "F" schools
- Student Eligibility
  - Attended a public school the year in which it received its second "F" grade in a 4-year period
  - Assigned to such school for the next school year
  - First time kindergarten or first grade assigned to such school
- Parent obtained admission acceptance at an eligible participating private school

# OSP – Students By Year



# OSP – Private Schools By Year



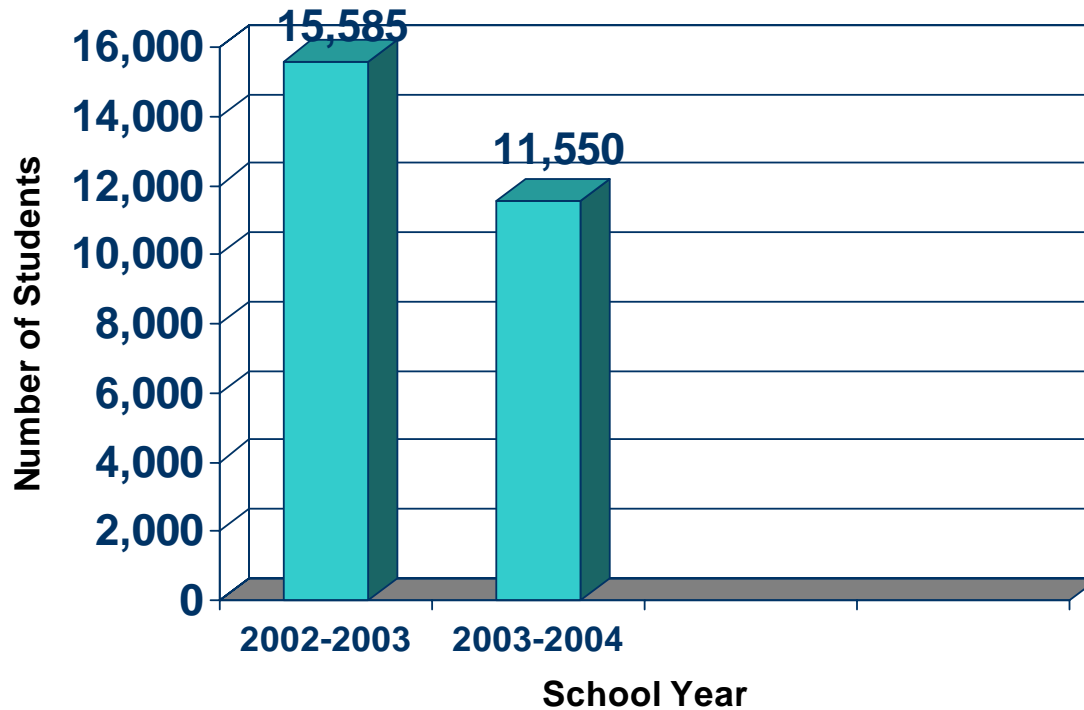
# Corporate Tax Credit Scholarships

- Created in 2001 to offer students from low-income families scholarships to eligible private schools.
- Contributors donating earn 100% tax credit
- Scholarship Funding Organizations (SFO) register students and disburse scholarship payments

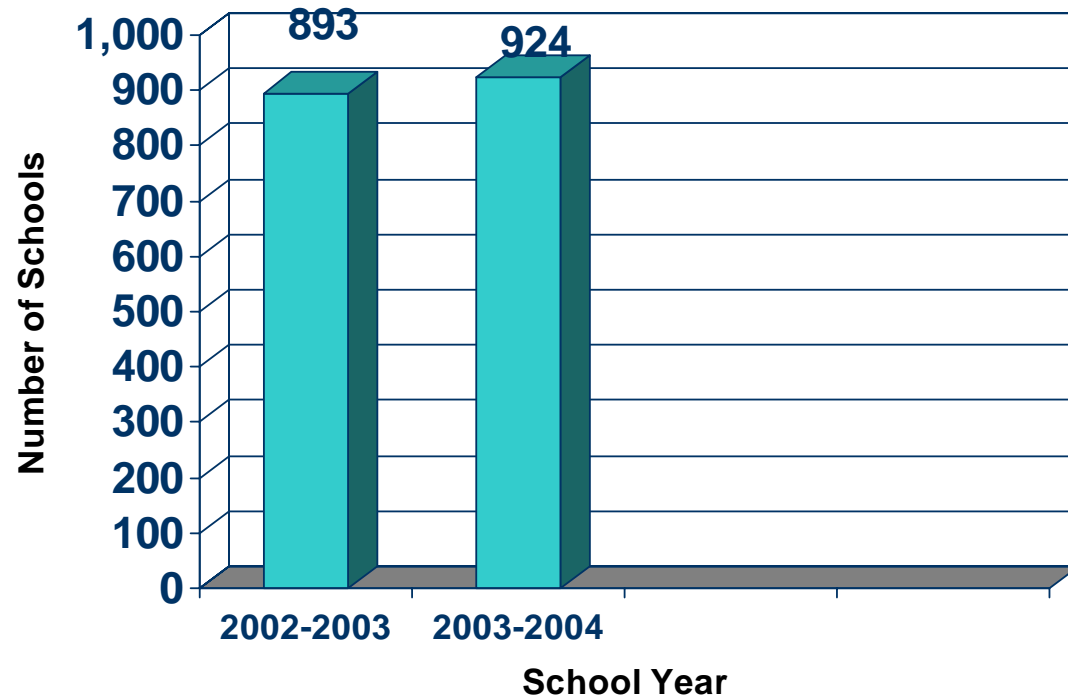
# Corporate Tax Credit Scholarships

- Student Eligibility
  - Qualified for free or reduced-price lunch under the National School Lunch Act
  - Counted as full-time equivalent student for district funding purposes
  - Eligible to enter kindergarten or first grade
- DOE verifies eligibility of SFOs and participating private schools

# CTC - Students By Year



# CTC - Schools By Year



# Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice – 4 Point Action Plan

1. Eliminate Fraud and Abuse
2. Implement a Comprehensive Parent and Consumer Education Plan
3. Partner with Industry to Self-Regulate
4. Establish, Monitor and Revise Accountability Mechanisms

# 1. Eliminate Fraud and Abuse

- Combined databases to execute data matching to ensure no student was simultaneously enrolled in more than one scholarship program
- Established district enrollment verification to ensure students were not simultaneously enrolled in a scholarship program and in public school

## 1. Eliminate Fraud and Abuse, con't.

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- Continuous updating of school districts to ensure there is no duplication of students
- Scholarship staff execute cross-checks against students reported by school districts to ensure there is no duplication

# 1. Eliminate Fraud and Abuse, con't.

- Take decisive action in suspected cases of fraud and abuse
  - 57 schools placed on “suspended payment” list at some point during the 2003-04 academic year
  - 29 schools had a case opened to investigate anomalies and/or compliance issues

## 2. Implement a Comprehensive Parent and Consumer Education Plan

- Implemented a single point of contact in IEPC Office for private schools
- Better trained staff working on the hotline
- Increased number of parents contacted about McKay Scholarships by 40% over prior year

## 2. Implement a Comprehensive Parent and Consumer Education Plan, con't.

- Called 19,863 parents about the Opportunity Scholarship Program within 2 days of school grades being released
- Provided template letters in 3 languages to districts to disseminate to parents of students eligible for OSP and established a deadline for notification within 2 days of grades being released

### 3. Partner with Industry to Self-Regulate

- DOE coordinated working relationships with other state agencies (e.g. DFS, FDLE, DOH, etc.)
- Provided agency contacts to private schools to assist in compliance measures (e.g., fire code inspection, health inspections, radon testing, etc.)

## **4. Establish, Monitor and Revise Accountability Mechanisms**

- Designed and implemented comprehensive complaint/compliance process to allow consumers to report suspected fraud and abuse
- Streamlined compliance reporting through on-line access

## **4. Establish, Monitor and Revise Accountability Mechanisms, con't.**

- Established a compliance verification procedure to verify private school compliance
- Published and supported private school accountability requirements in the 2003-2004 Private School Accountability Report

# Ongoing Improvements

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- Develop interactive on-line tutorial to assist private schools in using on-line services
- Expanded parent education workshops

## Ongoing Improvements, con't.

- Continuous improvements to the scholarship website to assist private schools and districts in submitting student information
- Customer satisfaction surveys

# Learn More About Florida School Choice Options

- Visit office website at: [www.floridaschoolchoice.org](http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org)
- Visit scholarship website at: [www.opportunityschools.org](http://www.opportunityschools.org)
- Call toll-free information hotline at:  
1-800-447-1636
- Call main IEPC Office number at:  
850-245-0502