

## **Protect Our Public Schools, Manasota: Florida Corporate Education Reform Timeline**

- 1996:** Florida legislature passes Charter Law allowing for the establishment of charter schools.
- 1996:** The first charter school, Liberty City Charter School, was established in Miami.
- 1998:** Tampa venture capitalist, John Kirtley, sets up the Children's Scholarship Fund of Tampa Bay to provide privately funded scholarships for low-income children to attend private schools. The Children's Scholarship Fund, also called the Florida School Choice Fund, later became Step Up for Students (see 2001).
- 1998:** Jeb Bush wins Florida governorship campaigning on school choice and high-stake testing.
- 1999:** Under Bush, charter schools flourish growing from 76 charter schools in 1999 to 356 in 2007 with the number of students growing from 2,799 to 98,755 students in that same time period.
- 1999:** The Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools (FCPCS) was founded to provide technical assistance and professional development to Florida's charter schools. It is one of the largest and most influential associations in the nation.
- 1999:** Florida legislature passes the Opportunity Scholarship Program, written largely by John Kirtley, giving students attending a "failing" public school a voucher to attend a participating private school.
- 2000:** A Florida state judge ruled that the state's voucher plan violated the state constitution.
- 2001:** Florida starts second in the nation's tax credit scholarship program with considerable input from venture capitalist John Kirtley.
- 2001:** The Children's Scholarship Fund becomes Step Up for Students under the direction of John Kirtley, who served as President until recently when he stepped down from the position. He is currently a member of the Board of Directors. Step Up for Students processes most of the Tax Credit Scholarships and Gardner Scholarships. The non-profit company gets a 3% cut for processing the applications which now comes to close to \$3-million annually with expanded growth projected. The company does marketing to bring more companies into the tax credit program.
- 2004:** John Kirtley sets up the Florida Federation for Children, an offshoot of Betsy DeVos' American Federation for Children, that functioned as an electioneering communication organization making voters aware of candidates stances on the issues of parental choice and education reform. Kirtley worked closely with Betsy DeVos when she was Chairman of the American Federation for Children and now serves as Vice Chairman of this organization, a 501(c)(4) that does lobbying and grassroots advocacy around school choice. It works with a PAC, American Federation for Children Action Fund, to support and oppose state level candidates around school choice.
- 2006:** Florida State Supreme Court ruled the private school voucher program unconstitutional.
- 2008:** Jeb Bush, following his governorship of Florida, set up the Foundation for Excellence In Education, known as ExelinEd, to "support state leaders in transforming education" around a "reform agenda" which includes, charter schools, public school choice, education scholarship accounts, tax credit scholarships and vouchers. William Oberndorf, who replaced Betsy DeVos, as Chairman of the American Federation for Children, serves on the ExelinEd Board.
- 2010:** The Florida Charter School Alliance established as a lobbying organization for school charter schools. John Kirtley is on the Board of Directors.
- 2010:** Florida legislature passed legislation allowing the fundraising cap for tax credit scholarships to grow by 25%. (This theoretically means that by 2032, the fund could grow to over \$21-billion, the size of the entire 2018-19 education budget and by 2039, it could grow to larger than today's entire state budget of \$88.7-billion.)
- 2011:** Gov. Rick Scott begins term as governor of Florida. John Kirtley served on Scott's Education Transition Team.

- 2011:** Florida legislature passes SB 736, the first bill Gov. Scott signs, which radically transforms teachers rights in Florida. Teachers are rated with half of their score based on student performance on standardized tests. The legislation instituted merit pay for new teachers, eliminating the step system and tenure protection. Existing teachers can opt into this system. New hires no longer enjoy long-term contracts but must be rehired on an annual basis.
- 2011:** Florida legislature passes bill that expanded the amount of tax credit a company gets for making a donation to tax credit scholarship program. Twenty-four Democrats supported the bill.
- 2012:** Betsy DeVos and her husband gave more than \$2-million to Florida candidates, between 2012--2017, for state and local offices. When the Florida Education Association challenged the constitutionality of the Florida tax-credit program in court, DeVos raised money to fight the lawsuit and to defeat school board members who backed that court action.
- 2014:** The Florida legislature passed SB 850 creating the nation's second education savings account program. The bill also expands key funding and eligibility aspects of Florida's tax credit scholarship program.
- 2014:** In Sarasota, Bridget Ziegler wins Sarasota School Board race after benefiting from a dark money contribution from an out-of-state company, Phoenix Media LLC, that did not do business in Florida but had a Venice post office box address. Phoenix gave \$45,000 to a political committee run by Eric Robinson, who is now on the Sarasota School Board. The PAC paid for campaign mailers to support Ziegler and slam her opponent, Ken Marsh.
- 2014:** Bridget Ziegler and a small group of Florida Republican pro-privatization school board members form the Florida Coalition of School Board Members as a counter to the pro-public education Florida School Board Association and to lobby for an expansion of charter schools and tax credit scholarship vouchers.
- 2015:** Florida legislature passes Best and Brightest Teacher Scholarship Program which gives teachers large bonuses (upwards of \$6000) based on their high school SAT/ACT scores, often taken decades earlier. It was expanded to include principals in 2017. It was largely ridiculed throughout the nation.
- 2016:** Conflicts of interest abound in Florida legislature. Richard Corcoran (R-Land O' Lakes) becomes Speaker of the Florida House. His wife runs a charter school and he makes education reform a major objective. The head of Education Committee, Michael Bileca, is executive director of a foundation that funds True North Classical Academy charter school. PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee, chair, Manny Diaz, collects a six-figure salary as chief operating officer of the charter Doral College, part of one of the nation's largest for-profit charter management company, Academica.
- 2017:** Koch Brothers' Libre Initiative is a grassroots drive targeting Latino families, to support charter schools and tax credit scholarships. Florida is one of 11 states being targeted.
- 2017:** Florida students receiving tax credit scholarships: 106,958  
Number of private schools accepting scholarships: 1,798  
Florida students attending charter schools: 285,000  
Number of charter schools in Florida: 2,799
- 2017:** House Bill 7069 passes, ushering in what some critics called the "death knell of education." It gives massive funding and incentives to charter schools and extra funding to for-profit, corporate management charter companies to manage "schools of hope" that replace "low-performing schools."
- 2018:** House Bill 7055 passes, another omnibus bill, which many consider even worse than last year's bill. It attempts to bust teachers' unions. It expands tax credit scholarships for bullied students and provides scholarships for private tutoring to elementary school children who do poorly in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading test.
- 2018:** The Koch Brothers plans to put upwards of \$400-million for the 2018 November elections "to remake the nation's education system." Florida lawmakers will be particularly targeted.
- 2018:** Academica, Florida's largest and wealthiest for-profit charter school management company, applied to open its Pinecrest Academy Suncoast in Sarasota. The Sarasota School Board denied the application in a 4-1 vote following widespread community opposition.