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Setting the Record Straight: School Choice is Working for Louisiana Kids

Baton Rouge, Louisiana (July 8, 2011) – The New Orleans school voucher program helps children who have struggled mightily in the public school system, has yielded tremendous parental demand, and primarily benefits younger children in early grades, the Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC) reiterated today.

According to LFC, any analysis of the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence program that ignores these indicators provides a misleading characterization of the program's impact.

LFC, which supports expanded school choice along with strong accountability and transparency measures, said that a recent report issued by EducateNow!—in which the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence program is described as "faltering"—ignores these essential variables and is a poor proxy for a comprehensive evaluation of the popular program:

- **The Report Ignores the Fact that 70 percent of Scholarship Recipients Are Too Young to Take State Tests:** Criticism of the SSEE program that relies on test scores ignores the fact that only 30 percent of students who participate in the SSEE program have reached grade levels in which they can even be tested. Reports that rely solely on test scores ignore 70 percent of the students who receive scholarships—many of whom are Kindergarten or first grade students who have never seen a state test.
- **The Report Ignores the Fact that the Program Serves Severely Struggling Students:** Research tells us that students who move from public schools to private schools using scholarships do so—in most cases—because they are not succeeding in their current public schools. These students are often one

grade—or more—behind, and they enter their new private schools at a significant testing disadvantage.

All credible research regarding school voucher programs nationwide demonstrates that struggling students must overcome significant achievement gaps in their first several years. The first cohort of students in the scholarship program entered only three years ago.

- **The Report Doesn't Consider Parental Satisfaction Data:** In the evaluation of any education reform program, one of the most important and authentic indicators of effectiveness is parental satisfaction and demand. A 2010 survey of parents who send their children to private schools using the SSEE program indicated that 93.4 percent are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their children's schools.

"An accurate, authentic, replicable evaluation of any school choice program is best conducted by an independent evaluator using control groups, treatment groups, and industry-approved evaluation methodology—similar to evaluations conducted by actual researchers in Washington, D.C., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and in Florida," said LFC's Lauren Perry.

"While school-based state student assessment results provide important snapshot data regarding the performance of individual schools—and has already been used by both public, public charter, and private schools to spur improvements this year—the data should not be 'spun' to denigrate a program that is helping so many children and families."

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