

*A Black Alliance for Educational Options Publication*

# Our Voice, Our Choice

FALL/WINTER 2008

**Democrats Show Support for Parental Choice Programs**

**BAEO on the Radio in GA**

**MO BAEO Fights for Special Needs Students**

**LA BAEO Educates Families about Educational Excellence Program**

**Philly BAEO Awards Bailey Scholarship • Hosts Reception for New Public Schools Superintendent • Receives \$25K from Phillies**

**Summer Membership Campaign Update**

**Ohio BAEO Educates Families about EdChoice Program**

**baeo**

Black Alliance for Educational Options

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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Greetings BAEQ members and allies,

The fall season ushers in the start of a new school year. Millions of children nationwide walked through the doors of a traditional public school, a public charter school, or a private school with support from a voucher or a tax credit. Some of these students sit inside a school building where a well-educated teaching corps and a visionary school leader create an atmosphere of expectation. Sadly, too many students are trapped inside a school building where low expectations are commonplace and a college preparatory curriculum is considered a cruel joke.

Fortunately, BAEQ is in the business of expanding parental choice to ensure our children have a chance at a bright future. Here are a few examples: nearly 300 freshmen enrolled in two BAEQ-Gates Small Public Charter High Schools in Philadelphia, and a BAEQ-Gates Small Private High School in Milwaukee; more than 1,000 students in Dayton, Springfield and Columbus, Ohio received EdChoice Scholarships because of the information campaigns sponsored by Ohio BAEQ; and thanks to the work of Louisiana BAEQ and its allies, 877 K-3rd grade students enrolled in a private school of their parents' choice in the Orleans Parish School District. This is the first publicly-funded, school-district focused voucher program in the South, and a big gain in BAEQ's strategy for promoting educational options in this region.

Included in this issue are updates about BAEQ's work in local chapters and mobilization sites.

In Service to Families and Children,

*Gerard Robinson*

Gerard Robinson

*President*



**CHAIR'S MESSAGE**

# My Response to Richard Hess Article

Recently, a person I respect, Richard Hess – wrote an article entitled, *After Milwaukee* (The American, September 2008). In the article Rick said:

“Howard Fuller, patron saint of the voucher program, has wryly acknowledged. ‘I think that any honest assessment would have to say there hasn’t been the deep, wholesale improvement in MPS that we would have thought.’”

Let me begin by saying, some of what Rick writes in his article notwithstanding some inaccuracies about the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) is on target given the framework he set up to make his argument. I gleaned two basic criticisms from his article. He argues that parent choice:

- Has not brought about significant systemic change of the Milwaukee Public School System; and
- Has not succeeded in fostering the emergence of high quality options.

While I cannot argue against those two points, I can say that a number of good schools exist now because of the MPCP; there are higher graduation rates for those who have chosen the private schools; and there has been increased economic investment in some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Milwaukee.

However, the main point I want to make and the context of my quote was to acknowledge that in retrospect many of us who support parental choice erred in placing too much emphasis on systemic change as the determinant of the value of choice. Some of us in the movement (I happen to be one of them) see this battle as a **social justice** issue, not a market-based reform issue.

The value of the type of parental choice I (and many others) fight for should not be judged on whether or not there is Systemic change. The value of parental choice as a social justice issue is two-fold:

- Low-income and working class families have choice, which they never would have had without it. The program helps create an America where people with money are not the only ones who can make choices for their children’s education.
- We are saving lives every day. Every day there are

low-income Black children going to school who, without parental choice, would not be in school. They are graduating from high school, going on to college and getting on the road to becoming socially and economically productive citizens.

Do I wish that the whole system were changing? **YES!**

But in the meantime we have a moral responsibility to rescue every child that we can.

Do we need to fight to make sure the choices are quality? **YES!**

Do we need to deal with issues of accountability, the talent pool, the restrictions that hamper us, etc, etc? **YES!**

But nothing that Rick wants to happen occurs in an antiseptic political environment. Every day, people are trying to crush us. Much of what Rick says we need does not exist, and it is not because we don’t recognize its importance. It is because we don’t have all that we need because we are fighting opponents who are stronger than we are, more politically and economically powerful than we are, and more relentless than we are.

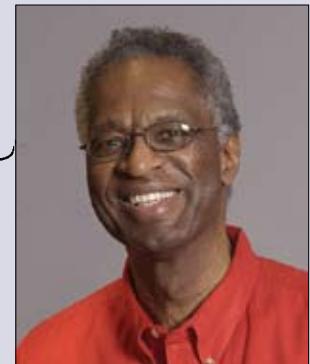
So, our task is to get up every day more determined than we were the day before to actively support parental choice to empower families and increase quality educational options for Black children.

Our struggle is difficult. We are up against very powerful forces who are fierce in their determination to maintain the status quo. But, we must not flinch or be discouraged because we are on the “right side of history” on this issue.

The Struggle Continues,



Howard Fuller  
*Chair*



## NATIONAL NEWS

# Democrats Show Support for Parental Choice Programs

The Bailey and Sullivan Leadership Institute (BSLI) in partnership with the Program on Educational Policy & Governance (PEPG) at Harvard University held its Fourth Annual Seminar on "Education Policy and Parental Choice," in November.

Exceeding our goal this year, more than 152 participants attended — including 83 elected officials and staff of elected officials — from Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin just to name a few.

Participants heard about published research by parental choice and education policy experts. In addition, to hearing from leading researchers, panel discussions with elected officials from Florida and Louisiana included an exchange of ideas about parental choice options for African-American families and students from various states shared their own views about how parental choice programs benefit them.

"As a young Black elected Democrat fighting for options in Wisconsin, I've had to lean on BAEO for strength and support," said WI State Rep. Jason Fields. "That is why I am delighted to be involved in the annual seminar each year. For the past four years I've had the opportunity to meet other Black Democrats across the country."

Our seminar sponsors include the Alliance for School Choice, Democrats for Education Reform, The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, Daniels Fund, John Kirtley, and the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools.

"This event continues to increase with more Black elected officials attending each year," said Howard Fuller, Chair, BAEO Board of Directors. "Their support is important in our work to protect and expand parental choice legislation across the nation."

Check out highlights of this year's seminar at [www.baeo.org](http://www.baeo.org).



New York Gov. David Paterson speaks to the 152 seminar participants via DVD.



[L to R] Davarius Burton, Memphis Academy for Health; Devon Ray, Boys' Latin of Philadelphia; Deborah McGriff, Moderator, and Kenisha Campbell, CEO Leadership Academy share their personal school experiences.

[L to R] Kevin Chavous, Moderator; LA Sen. Ann Duplessis; LA Rep. Austin Badon, and Shree Medlock, State Director, LA BAEO discuss their experiences in leading the efforts to enact the Student Scholarship for Excellence Program in LA.

## Summer Membership Campaign Update

*Kudos to the members that registered, renewed or updated during the summer membership campaign:*

Yvonne Alexander  
Diane Allen  
Amber Black  
Kenneth Boyd  
Harrietta Fowler

Valarie Garland  
Miashia Gaye  
Alicia Hall Vicks  
Rebeca Huffman  
Anika Jackson

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Darryl Ruffin  
Tawanna Sharpe  
Debra Still

Roy Swanson  
Layveana Terrell  
Paul Williams  
Linda Wilson

**NATIONAL NEWS**

# MO BAEO Mobilization Team Continues to Fight for Special Needs Students

Bertha Gilkey-Bonds, State Coordinator for the Missouri BAEO mobilization site, BAEO members and clergy fought diligently for passage of House Bills 2040 and 2430, which would provide private special needs scholarships throughout for students in K-12 Missouri schools.

Unfortunately the bills did not pass. "Our efforts failed to produce the necessary legislative support needed for this bill to become a law, but we are not quitting," Bonds said. "We will continue to fight for the right for all children to have access to quality educational options."

# LA BAEO Educates Families about Educational Excellence Program

The Louisiana BAEO team worked hard this summer to educate parents about the first publically-funded K-3 private school scholarship program in a big southern city.

The state's Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program (SSEEP) provides low-income parents in the Orleans Parish Recovery School District an opportunity to enroll their children in private schools at taxpayer expense. The scholarship funds tuition up to \$6,300 for K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade children. More than 1,250 families in the Orleans Parish are eligible for the scholarship.

To help ensure that families were informed about the scholarship program the LA BAEO Mobilization Team launched a community awareness campaign that included TV ads, neighborhood canvassing and operating a telephone bank. More than 500 families from the district showed up at a LA BAEO registration meeting.

"Before the doors opened at 7:30 a.m., more than 100 parents were waiting," said Shréé Medlock, State Director, LA BAEO mobilization site. "This is a testament that shows parents want educational options for their children."

"I thought it was a dream when I saw the commercial," said Kawana Harris, an Orleans Parish parent. "I'm happy because this

scholarship program helps working-class parents." Harris was one of the first to arrive — among the 500 parents who crowded the Dryades YMCA to apply on the first enrollment day.

Currently, 629 students have received the scholarships. Approximately 277 remain on a wait list. The Louisiana Department of Education is working to register all qualifying students who remain on the list.

According to Medlock, many parents who applied in July for the scholarships admitted they missed going to work to apply for SEEPP. "The chance to obtain a quality education for their children warranted such a sacrifice," said Medlock.

Terry Raymond, an Orleans Parish resident, wants the best opportunity for his son, Tyren Ruffin. When Raymond saw the TV ad, he immediately came to the YMCA to apply. Raymond wants to give his six-year-old son the best opportunity to receive the type of education that will provide him with a solid future. His son attended Abramson Science and Technology Charter School, a failing school in New Orleans last school year. "I believe this student scholarship program will definitely help meet the needs of our community," said Raymond.



Shréé Medlock, State Director, LA BAEO mobilization site works with volunteers to sign up eligible families for the state's first publically-funded scholarship program.

## CHAPTER NEWS

# Philly BAEO Awards Bailey Scholarship

Philadelphia BAEO continues to honor the legacy and commitment of the late Deirdre L. Bailey, a Philadelphia BAEO founder and board member through its scholarship program.

The Deirdre L. Bailey, Esq. Scholarship is awarded annually to an eighth grade female student who demonstrates academic achievement, leadership, and commitment to community service. This scholarship has a maximum award amount of \$7,000.

Philly BAEO awarded Jasmine Martin a four-year scholarship in July. Martin, first recipient of the scholarship, graduated in June from Friends Central High School in Philadelphia, PA with honors. Martin scored a 2020 on the SAT, and she will attend Columbia University in New York City. Martin received her award during a "Tea" held at the Ritz Carlton Hotel.



Jasmine Martin, the 2008 Deirdre L. Bailey Esq. Scholarship recipient.

## Philadelphia Chapter Welcomes New Superintendent

Darlene Callands-Curry, President of Philadelphia BAEO, kicked off the new school year with a "Parents with POWER" workshop. Nearly 300 parents, children and community leaders attended the event. Fifty students received book bags filled with school supplies. Students from the Boys' Latin Charter High School escorted guests to their seats, the principal of Imhotep Charter High School opened the event with a prayer, and students from Philadelphia KIPP entertained the audience with jazz music.

Arlene Ackerman, Ed.D., the new Superintendent of the Philadelphia Public School District, was the keynote speaker. Ackerman shared with the audience her passion for education, her strategy for improving schools, and her interest in working with BAEO.

## Phillies Donate \$25K to Philly BAEO

The Philadelphia Phillies, a Major League Baseball team, donated \$25,000 to the Philadelphia BAEO chapter for their commitment and dedication to the advancement of quality educational options for low-income and working-class families.

"The Phillies' organization is a strong supporter of Philadelphia BAEO," said Callands-Curry. "We appreciate the partnership in helping improve K-12 education." In addition to the donation, the team provided 100 tickets to a baseball game.



Arlene Ackerman, Ed.D., the new Superintendent for Philadelphia Public School District



(L to R) Kocoalouise Pembleton-Smith, Board member; Gene Diaz, Community Director of the Philadelphia Phillies; Darlene Callands-Curry, President of Philadelphia BAEO; and Ernie Jones, Board member received the check. Philly BAEO members and families enjoy the game after the check acceptance ceremony.

**CHAPTER AND MOBILIZATION SITE NEWS****BAEO on the Radio in GA**

**T**housands of parents in Georgia learned about various private school options thanks to radio ads sponsored by Georgia BAEO, with support from the Ohio BAEO team — Tracie Craft, Erika Murphy, and Larry Lindsey. Michelle Outlaw, a mother with a son at Footprints Christian Academy, spoke about the opportunity the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship provides to her family. In 2007, Georgia joined several states that use public money to support the education of special needs students at private schools. Outlaw is one of the nearly one thousand Georgians who participated in the program. The ads aired on 258 Georgia radio stations in July and August. As a result of the radio ads, hundreds of parents called BAEO's toll-free number to request more information.

Georgia BAEO staff also provided callers with information about the new Georgia Tax Credit Scholarship on WGKA's Georgia Town Forum entitled "Solving Georgia's Educational Needs" in August. The Georgia mobilization team also discussed the topic of Blacks and parental choice on WAOK's "The Voice of the Community in Atlanta." Listeners also learned about the organization from Ohio BAEO State Director Tracie Craft who hosted several information sessions in the greater Atlanta area during the summer, including a Town Hall Meeting in Clayton County — where the public school district lost its accreditation in September.



(L to R) Gerard Robinson, BAEO President, State Rep. David Casas (R-District 103) and State Senator Eric Johnson (R-District 1) discussed parental choice options on a GA radio station.

**OHIO BAEO Educates Families about EdChoice Program**

**T**his summer, thousands of Ohioans attended the Ohio State Fair in Columbus. Ohio BAEO and several other non-profit organizations participated in this annual event in August.

Ericka Murphy, State Coordinator for Ohio BAEO, spoke with numerous parents about the different educational options available for low-income and working-class families. Parents who stopped by the Ohio BAEO booth also learned how to make informed educational choices for K-12 school selection.

"Parents who are empowered with the facts, informed about their choices and educated on all the options will ultimately make the best quality decisions for their children," Murphy said.

During the fair, Murphy and Ohio BAEO team members took advantage of the early opportunity to inform parents and community members about the application period for the 2009 Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship program (EdChoice), which provides a limited number of scholarships to students who attend persistently under-performing public schools. "Ohio BAEO wants parents to be informed about the EdChoice program and prepared to enroll next February," declared Murphy.

After the fair, Murphy said chapter leaders and staff will contact parents and assist them with the EdChoice application process to help ensure seats are filled.



Ericka Murphy, Ohio BAEO talks with parents about parental choice programs at State Fair.

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SAVE THE DATE



SYMPORIUM '10  
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Black Alliance for Educational Options



# 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

March 4-6, 2010  
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For sponsorship inquiries, please  
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## OUR MISSION

The Black Alliance for Educational Options actively supports parental choice to empower families and increase quality educational options for Black children.



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