



For Immediate Release
Date: July 8, 2011

Contact: David M. Grubb
Phone: 504-810-3048

**BAEO AFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS FOR
EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE PROGRAM AND CALLS FOR GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY**

Program's successes demonstrate potential for future gains

BATON ROUGE, LA – The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) strongly supported legislation in 2008 that created the *Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence* program, which allows low-income students in New Orleans to attend private or parochial schools. Recent data provided by the Louisiana Department of Education has shown that in a number of instances, scholarship recipients were outpacing their peers locally and statewide. That same data, however, appears to indicate that some schools were not improving the educational standing of their students. BAEO cautioned against making any referendum on the schools or on the program based on limited data or rudimentary analyses and expressed confidence in the long-term viability of the program, even as it goes through growing pains.

Dr. Monteic A. Sizer, State Director of Louisiana BAEO, said “A number of schools performed very well this year, and we should commend them for the successes that they have had in this short time frame. Let’s find out what they are doing right and see if that can help those schools that aren’t doing quite as well. Even with the tremendous changes that have taken place in New Orleans over the last few years, there are still far too many children trapped in schools that do not work. The scholarship program is a critical lifeline for many families who face the prospect of placing their child in a failing school. I believe, and BAEO believes that any judgment today about the success or failure of this program as a whole would be extremely premature.”

Results from a 2010 survey of parents and guardians enrolled in the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program showed that 93 percent of them were satisfied with the program. BAEO leaders also pointed out that children in the program came from failing schools, which certainly has some bearing on these early scores, and that individual student progress from their prior school to their current school is not tracked at this time. The students who participate in state testing during the 2011-2012 school year will include the first class with the benefit of utilizing the scholarships since Kindergarten. Earlier this year BAEO worked with Louisiana’s legislative leadership and others to draft a resolution specifically aimed at achieving greater quality along with accountability in the participating schools.

BAEO’s national president and former Director of Charter Schools for the state of Louisiana, Kenneth Campbell added, “We know that the schools that participate in the program are aware of how their students performed on state tests, and we know that they are not satisfied with the results. We believe that there will be improvement this year, and we are encouraged that the Catholic schools in New Orleans have also publically expressed their support for stronger accountability measures. BAEO has been a part of this from the very beginning and we intend to make sure that schools participating in the scholarship program are held accountable along the same lines as all public schools in New Orleans. Establishing the scholarships was not the end of the process. There is work to be done.”

Dr. Sizer continued, “We’re here to work with parents, elected leaders and school officials to do whatever we can to improve outcomes for children. We believe that this program will be successful and eventually expanded to other districts in Louisiana. But for that to happen, accountability must be a core component.”

“I think the most recent assessment data is a tremendous wake-up call for schools that participate in the scholarship program,” said Mr. Campbell. “We’re not looking to simply move kids from public to private or parochial schools. We are looking to put children in a place where they can be prepared to compete in the 21st century. If these schools can’t do it, it’s our responsibility to help parents find schools that can. BAEO has long supported--and will continue to support—strong accountability measures for all parental choice programs to ensure that families can choose from the highest-quality schools.”

BAEO’s mission is to increase access to high-quality educational options for Black children by actively supporting parental choice policies and programs that empower low-income and working-class Black families. BAEO has been a part of successful parental choice efforts in Milwaukee, WI, New Orleans, LA and Washington, D.C. among others, and has been a champion for parental choice for more than 12 years.

#####