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## Donor steps up for kids

Hillsborough's new single-gender schools are the beneficiaries

BY SHERRI ACKERMAN  
The Tampa Tribune

TAMPA — A Tampa philanthropist providing low-income children with educational choices donated \$100,000 Tuesday to Hillsborough County's two new single-gender public middle schools.

The gift from John Kirtley, chairman of Step Up for Students, a Florida tax-credit scholarship program, will be matched by the Walton Family Foundation for a total donation of \$200,000.

"For more than 13 years, I have worked to empower low-income families to be able to choose the right school for their children — regardless of who runs the school," Kirtley said Tuesday during a news confer-

ence at the Hillsborough school district's downtown headquarters.

"In the end," he said, "it's not important who delivers these choices as long as they are high-quality and as long as they are a good fit for the individual students."

Kirtley awarded the money with no restrictions, he said.

It will go toward providing transportation for field trips and other uses that will be determined by the two schools' principals and the district, Superintendent MaryEllen Elia said.

Hillsborough will open a Boys Preparatory Academy at the former Franklin Middle Magnet School and a Girls Preparatory Academy at the former Ferrell Middle Magnet, both in East Tampa.

Madison Middle Principal John Haley will oversee the boys' school.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know boys and girls learn



PETER MASA/STAFF

**John Kirtley, chairman of Step Up for Students, announces a \$100,000 gift for schools that will be matched by a foundation.**

differently," said Haley, who has five sons. "Especially at this age."

Franklin Principal Karen French will move to Ferrell.

"The concept of single-gender schools is really exciting," she said.

The district has experimented with single-gender classes at about 10 elementary schools and a few middle schools. Students like being among peers of the same sex, and some are performing better on tests, officials have said. And parents and teachers welcome having fewer discipline issues.

"All parents, we believe, should have choices," Elia said.

This is the third time Kirtley has teamed up with the district.

In 2009, Step Up for Students helped provide professional development for teachers who served the agency's scholarship youngsters.

Kirtley's group also contributed \$100,000 to the RCMA Charter School in Wimauma, with another \$100,000 matching grant from the Walton Family Foundation to help children of migrant workers.

sackerman@tampatrib.com  
(813) 259-7144