



OCTOBER '04

NEWSLETTER

The Official Newsletter of Step Up for Students

A Warm Welcome to our Step Up for Students Parents!

We would like to welcome you to Step Up for Students, an initiative of the Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship Program. The Step Up for Students Newsletter is one of the ways we keep you informed on news such as legislative issues, corporate donors and real life stories about families helped by the Scholarship. The Newsletter also provides you with advice on how to get involved in your child's education and up-to-date information about school choice in Florida.

As the school year progresses, we hope that all of our families, both new and old, have become familiar with the organizations that provide your child's scholarship. For those families that received their scholarship with Florida CHILD last year, please remember that your scholarships were transferred to Children First-Central Florida, Florida PRIDE, HEROES or Yes Opportunities, Inc.

As a parent of a scholarship recipient, you can contact your local scholarship organization for information about application waiting lists, funding, donations, transferring your scholarship to another school or area in the state, or any other information about the Step Up for Students scholarship program.

Children First - Central Florida
(407) 702-2607

Florida PRIDE
(813) 318-0995

HEROES
1-866-266-0790

YES Opportunities, Inc.
1-866-297-7272



H.E.R.O.E.S.

Y.E.S. Opportunities, Inc.

Children First - Central Florida

Florida P.R.I.D.E.

The Florida Association of
Scholarship Funding Organizations

Donor Corner: Education is a Fundamental Value to CarePlus Health Plans, Inc.



CarePlus CEO Mike Fernandez is a strong believer in education and free choice. Through the years, he has built multiple successful and rapidly growing health maintenance organizations (HMOs), and other

health care services which serve in excess of 500,000 citizens of Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.

Since the Step Up For Students program was founded, CarePlus has dedicated \$1,500,000 to the program, allowing more than 425 children to receive educational assistance.

"The opportunities in this great country of ours are endless, and particularly when combined with a good education, children can grow up to be whatever they dream", explained Fernandez. "Since immigrating to the United States as a child, I know first hand what it is like to have lofty goals along with unique challenges. It is wonderful to be able to support a program that gives lower income families some real help."

CarePlus Health Plans is an accredited Florida licensed HMO that has built its reputation on the foundation of responsive customer service and has become the fastest growing Medicare managed healthcare plan in South Florida.

We thank CarePlus Health Plans and Mike Fernandez for their commitment and generous support of the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program.



(left to right)

Mike Fernandez, Chief Executive Officer of CarePlus Health Plans Inc., Afua Baptiste, education director and owner at Phyl's Academy, John Kirtley, Step Up for Students, Leticia Callava, former news anchor and CarePlus spokeswoman and Michael Benjamin, Step Up for Students

Inside: Money Saving Tips!

Legal Battleground in Florida May Affect School Choice Options

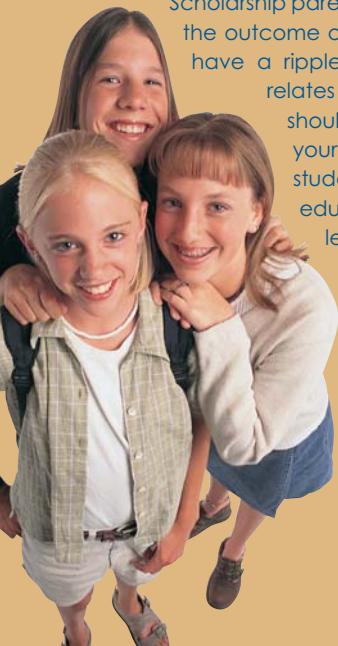
School Choice Is Under Fire In Florida Courts

As you may know, scholarships other than Step Up for Students exist to help Florida students. One particular scholarship, the Opportunity Scholarship, enables parents to remove their children from failing public schools and send them to higher-performing public schools or private schools of their choice. Currently, this program, which serves some 700 students, is under fire by anti-school choice factions and teacher's unions. It is at risk of extinction should the courts rule that the Opportunity Scholarship is illegal because it allows scholarship money to be used for tuition at private religious schools.

In August, the court found that the Opportunity Scholarship program violated the "Blaine Amendment" of the state constitution, which forbids aid for religious schools. The Blaine Amendment has its origin in anti-Catholic immigrant fervor of the late 19th century – even still, it has ramifications to us today. The case will now be heard by the full Court of Appeals and most certainly then go to the Florida Supreme Court, and could possibly be appealed in the U.S. Supreme Court.

The programs that may be at the greatest risk include: McKay Scholarships, Florida's Pre-K Program, and the Bright Futures College Scholarships.

The good news is your Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship is not at risk in this particular court case because it is funded by private donations from corporations in Florida. In addition, an excellent public interest law firm, The Institute for Justice, is representing the Opportunity Scholarship parents in this case. On the flip side, the outcome of this court case will no doubt have a ripple effect on the country as it relates to school choice. If you think it shouldn't matter where you send your child to school, as long as your student is getting a stellar education, then let your state legislator know. You can find out who your state legislator is by going to www.flace.org. Click on "Email Legislators."



It's Guaranteed! Money in Your Pocket

Here is a simple way to put money back in your pocket.

Check out the **Lifeline Assistance Program** and **Link-Up Florida** – a great way to get money back on your residential telephone bill. The Lifeline Assistance Program provides a **credit of up to \$13.50 on your local monthly phone bill** and Link-Up Florida gives up to a **50 percent reduction in the telephone service hook-up charge**. This could save you up to \$30.00 on your home telephone installation. As a scholarship family, you will meet the income criteria necessary to qualify for these programs, and in addition, you may qualify for discounts on services such as Caller ID.

To find out more about these programs, call your local telephone company and ask about the **Lifeline Discount**, or call the Florida Public Service Commission at **1-800-342-3552**. You can also email the Florida PSC at contact@psc.state.fl.us or write to:

Florida Public Service Commission
Division of Regulatory Compliance and Consumer Assistance
2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0850



Dear Step Up for Students Advocate,

Now as never before, parents, educators, community leaders and school choice groups must come together to strengthen the school choice front and defend all school choice options, whether it's the Opportunity, McKay or Corporate Tax Credit Scholarships. We cannot take the scholarships and other school choice options for granted. We must maintain and expand all of the school choice options in order to keep the victory and build on what we have already accomplished in the state.

In March, we had approximately 50 schools and 3,000 participants at this year's Rally in Tallahassee. It was considered the largest school choice Rally in the nation. The only way that happened was by people getting involved. The most effective resource in the struggle for educational freedom is YOU.

In 2003 the Florida Alliance for Choices in Education (F.A.C.E.) was formed to be an organization that represents the interests of parents, educators, community leaders and private schools serving children on Florida's choice programs, primarily the Corporate Tax Credit/Step Up for Students Scholarship Program. The ultimate goal is to be an organization that can be recognized as an authoritative advocate driven by and comprised of choice schools and families.

Please go to our website www.face.org and maximize your impact by joining F.A.C.E. Join others from around the state that are defending school choice and become a point person for informing and empowering educators, parents and community leaders to support schools choice. There truly is "Power of the People."

If you participate in the Corporate Tax Credit/Step Up for Students Scholarship Program and have students from Florida P.R.I.D.E., Children First - Central Florida, H.E.R.O.E.S. or YES Opportunities Scholarships you should become a member of F.A.C.E. and have trained administrators/principals, teachers and parents. F.A.C.E. members are the strength behind the defense of the program that ensures that the benefits and rights of all "vested parties" are protected. **Again, the most effective resource in the struggle for educational freedom is YOU.**

Thank you for Stepping Up For Students,

Michael A. Benjamin
Executive Director
Florida Alliance for Choices in Education (F.A.C.E.)
www.face.org

Helpful Media Outreach

Public Relations is a powerful tool that the media uses to build credibility. If a topic gets positive coverage in the news, the topic receives a valuable endorsement that carries a lot of weight. Now you can become a Step Up for Students "PR representative." Call or email Denise Lasher (813) 318-0995 extension 232 or dlasher@feff.org to report stories you think are newsworthy regarding the CTC Scholarship, your school or a special student. Take action and serve as a catalyst for continued positive change in the Step Up for Students community.

24/7

For information anytime on the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program, visit our website: www.stepupforstudents.com



STAY TUNED ...

In March we stood 3,000 strong at the school choice Rally in Tallahassee. Stay tuned for more information on how you can become a school choice advocate during the upcoming legislative year by joining future rallies to promote and empower the school choice movement.

