

Step Up For Students
P.O. Box 1670
Tampa, FL 33601



Florida P.R.I.D.E.
Parental Rights in Deciding Education



6,000

**NEW SCHOLARSHIPS
AVAILABLE!**

TELL A FRIEND!

For more information:
www.floridapride.org, or
www.childrenfirstflorida.org.

Have a safe and exciting summer and we look forward to working with you again this Fall. Congratulations to our graduates, best wishes for a prosperous future.

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IMPORTANT UPDATES ON SCHOOL CHOICE IN FLORIDA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Reena Basher
Neytz HaChochma
Miami, FL

Reena Basher is a second grader at Neytz HaChochma, a private school for children with special needs in Miami. Reena, who was once very shy and unsure of herself, has emerged from her shell and is now a social butterfly. As her self-esteem continues to rise, Reena gains confidence to meet academic challenges.

In October of 1998, Reena was born with exposure to highly toxic levels of alcohol and substance abuse, and placed into the Basher's home as a foster child at the tender age of 9 days. Months into the placement, they were asked to become Reena's adoptive parents. There was nothing to think about — this little girl was already part of the family and the joy she brings the Bashes knows no bounds.

Over the years, Reena has faced many challenges. During infancy,

Reena battled with severe withdrawal from the substance abuse she was exposed to in the uterus. For the first 6 months of her life, Reena cried day and night, had convulsions and was diagnosed as a failure to thrive.

When Reena was young, she began to display inappropriate social behaviors, was not communicating effectively and had difficulty following directions. Later on, as she entered preschool, it was hard for Reena to concentrate on the tasks at hand or focus with minimal distractions. As a result, her frustration level increased and her self-esteem diminished.

With the financial help of Step Up For Students, Reena's education at Neytz HaChochma became possible. Since her enrollment on the scholarship two years ago, Reena is making excellent academic progress and is a happier child.

Want to nominate your student for our Student Spotlight?
Visit www.stepupforstudents.com/parents.htm to send us your story.
Or contact Jason Wilcox at Jwilcox@flice.org or (866) 590-5364.

HIGH MARKS



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER



OF STEP UP FOR STUDENTS

MORE THAN 4,000 RALLY IN TALLAHASSEE

More than 4,000 school choice supporters traveled from as far as Miami and Ft. Lauderdale to join the nation's largest school choice rally on April 12. Supporters were demanding passage of proposed legislation that would have expanded and protected school choice in Florida.

The rally—the fifth held annually by Step Up For Students—broke all previous attendance records. Wearing T-shirts that read “Many Faces, One Dream,” people representing nearly 35,000 scholarship students statewide expressed their desire for legislators to view school choice as a nonpartisan issue.

Gov. Charlie Crist delivered the keynote address, and was applauded for affirming his support for the state's Step Up For Students Scholarships and McKay scholarships for disabled students, as well as his dedication to a quality education for all Florida's children.

Rev. H.K. Matthews, a civil-rights leader

who worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., shared with the Rally participants how he sees the fight for school choice is an extension of his life's work.

State Sen. Alfred “Al” Lawson (D-Tallahassee) pledged his support for school choice and promised to continue representing his constituents' best interests.

Moving testimonies were given by Sharronda Perkins, the mother of a scholarship recipient from Tallahassee, and Alberto Garrido, a Hialeah student who has been on the scholarship program for the last five years. Both discussed how the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program has impacted their lives.

Thank you to everyone who assisted in this event. We could not do it without your support and we appreciate your continued encouragement as we continue our battle to protect and expand the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program.



Reverend H.K. Matthews and Governor Crist unite to support parental choice at the April 12th Rally in Tallahassee.



Over 4,000 supporters of parental choice marched in Tallahassee to support Step Up For Students Scholarships—hundreds of parents and students from Dade and Broward Counties rode buses overnight to attend the 5th Annual Rally in Tallahassee.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The 2007 Legislative Session ended as a disappointment to many families hoping for improvements to the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program. With your help, we worked hard to have House Bill 7145 filed and eventually passed in the House that would have raised the amount of the scholarship for middle and high school students, allowed certain foster children access to the program, and helped severely disabled children qualify for the McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities while receiving some educational services at home.



Due to your steadfast support of the program, we were successful in gaining bipartisan support for the bill from several new Democrat legislators in the House.

The Senate, however, had another bill that was vastly different from our preferred bill in the House. As has happened too often in the past, our preferred bill went down to the final hours with the House and Senate unable to reach an agreement. Many newspapers also reported that our bill was held up as the House tried to negotiate with the Senate to gain funding for a Florida Marlins baseball stadium.

We thank all of our parents and schools that contacted your legislators to tell them to support House Bill 7145. And now that the legislators are back in their districts, we encourage you to contact them again and share your disappointment in their failure to help the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program and also children with disabilities that need McKay Scholarships.

Next year we will be pushing for an increase in the scholarship amount and total number of scholarships we award needy families. Also, we must insist they pass our legislation early so we are not held hostage again for such things like a baseball stadium. Your voice is making a difference, even if it is small steps, you are making a difference. Keep up the good fight!



WELLSTUDENT

If your children meet the income standards to qualify for a Step Up For Students Scholarship, they may also qualify for Florida's health insurance program for uninsured children, Florida KidCare.

Florida KidCare is a program that includes Medicaid, MediKids, Healthy Kids and the Children's Medical Services Network.

Healthy Kids and KidCare is what every parent wants. And that's exactly what Healthy Kids and KidCare is about. It's quality, affordable insurance to help keep your children healthy. Good health insurance protects them when they're sick and even when they're not, with regular check-ups.

TO QUALIFY FOR FLORIDA KIDCARE, HERE ARE SOME OF THE REQUIREMENTS:

- Be under age 19
- Be a U.S. citizen or qualified non-citizen

COST:

- Monthly premiums depend on your household size and income. Most families pay \$15 or \$20 a month. Some families may pay more.
- You may have to pay small charges or co-payments for some services.

You can apply for Florida KidCare by mail, fax, and online:

Florida KidCare

Mail: Post Office Box 980, Tallahassee, Florida 32302-0980

Fax (Toll Free): 1-866-867-0054

Web: www.healthykids.org

To have an application mailed to you or if you need additional information, call toll-free 1-888-540-5437





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Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, Sharing Advantage® program makes it easy for you to support local community efforts while financing your home.

When you close your home loan, Wells Fargo will make a \$300 contribution to a faith-based or non-profit organization of your choice, such as Children First Florida and Florida P.R.I.D.E.

As Wells Fargo provides mortgage services to their clients, they are also aware of the needs of those who are less fortunate, and of those causes that require our focus, attention and resources.

For more information on the Sharing Advantage program, call Christine Valdes at 1-800-955-9305 ext. 6308.

PARTICIPATING IN THE SHARING ADVANTAGE PROGRAM PROVIDES:

- ▶ **Affordable mortgage options plus free home financing guidance**
- ▶ **Help for aspiring homeowners to reach their goals**
- ▶ **The designated donation feature enables you to support a worthy cause without making a cash contribution yourself**
- ▶ **Donations are paid by the Wells Fargo Housing Foundation without any additional expenses charged to you on your mortgage transaction**

DONOR CORNER:



A committed donor since 2006, Mercantile Bank has contributed greatly to the growth and development of the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program. The company has provided funding in the form of \$1 million corporate tax credit dollars for scholarships for economically disadvantaged students and offered leadership by participating as a Step Up For Students Advisory Board member.

As Vice President of Business Banking for Mercantile Bank, Gordon Fales has served on the Step Up For Students Advisory Board since 2006. He was first introduced to the Corporate Tax Credit (CTC) Scholarship Program, now known as Step Up For Students, a few years ago when he was working on a community redevelopment activity with Pioneer Academy, an inner city private school in Overtown, a low-income neighborhood in Miami. He discovered that many of the students at the school were receiving CTC Scholarships from Step Up For Students.

The one-of-a-kind scholarship program peaked his interest and he searched for ways his company could get involved.

Mercantile Bank has provided funding for 286 low-income children to receive Step Up For Students Scholarships. The company was a sponsor of the October 2006 Donor Appreciation Rally in Orlando. Through his active participation on the advisory board, Gordon Fales has provided leadership and introductions to prospective CTC donors.

Mercantile Bank is a subsidiary of The South Financial Group, a financial services company headquartered in South Carolina that focuses on fast-growing banking markets in the Southeast United States. The South Financial Group uses a super-community bank strategy, serving small and middle market businesses and retail consumers by offering a full range of financial



Gordon Fales, VP Business Banking for Mercantile Bank, Former Governor Jeb Bush and Kathy Hazelwood, VP, Community Development Officer for Mercantile Bank.

services, including cash management, investments, insurance and trust services. The company is the largest publicly traded bank holding company in South Carolina and ranks among the top 50 U.S. commercial bank holding companies in total assets. Mercantile Bank serves select Florida markets. For more information, visit www.bankmercantile.com.