



NEWSLETTER



Step Up students outpace public school peers

A new state report on standardized test results concludes that scholarship students outperformed their public school counterparts in 2009-10. The news also prompted state Education Commissioner Gerard Robinson to tip his hat to the children who participate in Step Up For Students.

"I am encouraged by the findings in the latest Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program report,"

said Commissioner Robinson. "The upward trend demonstrated in the report illustrates that scholarship students are keeping pace with, and sometimes exceeding, their public school peers in both reading and mathematics. I look forward to continuing to offer support to a program that provides our lower income families with learning options they historically could not access."

The report, written by Northwestern University researcher David Figlio and based on nationally norm-referenced test results from the 2009-10 school year, is the fourth annual academic assessment of students on the Step Up scholarship. It offered three general findings:

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PHOTO BY COLIN HACKLEY

Step Up scholar Na'Dajae Waters raises her hand to answer a question during the first day of classes at Seven Hills Academy in Tallahassee. The scholarship program enrolled thousands of new students this fall, continuing a trend of sharp growth year to year.

SEE INSIDE FOR A PROFILE OF SEVEN HILLS

off in May and a waiting list reached more than 13,000 students before the program reopened in mid-September to offer a limited number of scholarships.

"The rapid pace of the program's growth absent any major marketing campaign continues to astound us," Step Up president Doug Tuthill said.

The spike in enrollment is particularly concentrated in Florida's major urban areas. Miami-Dade led the state with 8,752 Step Up students last year, and 87 zip codes in urban counties had at least 100 students each. Two adjacent zip codes in west Orlando had a combined total of 1,028 students.

This year, the scholarship is worth up to \$4,011. That's a decrease of \$95 from last year due to cuts in public school spending.

The loss for Step Up parents would have been worse if the Florida Legislature had not tied an increasing share of the scholarship amount to what the state spends in public schools. The scholarship this year increased from 60 percent to 64 percent of the public education per-student operational funding amount.

Enrollment in the scholarship program is capped by law, but in 2010, the Legislature streamlined the process to allow for 25 percent growth following any year in which at least 90 percent of the cap is reached.



DOUG TUTHILL

SCHOLARSHIP ENROLLMENT SOARS AS SCHOOL BEGINS

As children return to the classroom this fall, Step Up For Students is enrolling thousands of new families, continuing a trend that has seen the program grow by nearly 61 percent in just the last three years.

Enrollment in Florida's Tax Credit Scholarship for low-income students increased 20 percent last year and appears to be on a similar growth track for this year.

For the year just ended, 2010-11, the scholarship

served about 34,550 students in 1,114 different private schools – an increase of about 5,623 students over the previous year and more than triple the number from 2004-05. But those enrollment numbers tell only part of the story.

Last year, the applications were closed in September, leaving a waiting list of about 8,000 students for the 2010-11 school year. This year, applications were cut

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Step Up For Students Newsletter



SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT Seven Hills Academy/ Tallahassee

Established in 2008, Seven Hills doesn't yet have the storied legacy of its sister school, Betton Hills Academy. However, Headmaster DuWayne Baum is laser-focused on directing Seven Hills to develop a reputation as a learning center where students receive a more personalized educational program.

Baum limits class size to 15 students so that students get ample one-on-one attention from teachers. Students are paired with an adult adviser from whom they can seek counsel regarding matters outside the classroom. It's personal attention from a teacher – coupled with creating a stimulating environment and engaging parents in the education process – that can produce a positive outcome in a student's academic performance, Baum said.

Baum personally meets with prospective students and their parents to gauge the student's needs and develop a customized education plan. Most students who come to Seven Hills have struggled in school settings that were too large for them and have fallen behind. In those cases, Seven Hills teachers focus intensively on pulling students up academically to their right grade. Much of the coursework at Seven Hills involves visual, hands-on assignments that are tailored specifically to each student's needs, Baum said.

Parent involvement plays a critical role in the success of a student at Seven Hills, where, 45 of the school's 135 students Step Up For Students scholars. Parents receive a daily progress report detailing their child's

Teacher Mariana Powell reads to second- and third-graders on the first day of school



activities, tests and assignments. That report must be signed and returned to the classroom each day, Baum said.

Annual tuition at Seven Hills is \$8,000.

Baum has challenged his staff of 45 teachers and employees to "Make It Happen," Seven Hills' motto for the new school year.

"That's going to apply to every classroom," he said. "The principal and staff set the mood of the campus. If you set the mood, that will get down into the classroom."

Seven Hills' curriculum includes a personal development class, in which high school junior and senior students earn credit for service in school completing various assignments such as office assistant or reading to Kindergarteners. It administers the Stanford Achievement Test.

Seven Hills is entering its second year at its new campus, located on Tallahassee's north side. The new location offers a more home-like environment when compared to the building the school used to occupy, which was 60 years old. Settled on 4.2 acres, the campus features soccer field, baseball diamond, play areas for elementary students, and two classroom buildings.

Donor Corner

WYNDHAM

VACATION OWNERSHIP®

This fall, Step Up For Students is celebrating the generosity of one of its 2011 corporate partners — Wyndham Vacation Ownership, a member of the Wyndham Worldwide family of companies and the world's largest vacation ownership business. This Orlando-based organization partnered with Step Up For Students earlier this year with a \$500,000 contribution to fund K-12 scholarships for low-income children in Florida.

Through its contribution, Wyndham Vacation Ownership will provide nearly 120 much-needed scholarships so children can attend the school that best suits their individual learning needs through Step Up.

"At Wyndham Vacation Ownership, we feel strongly that it is our responsibility to do what we can to improve the world around us," said Sarah King, executive vice president, human resources, Wyndham Vacation Ownership. "Step Up For Students aligns with our corporate philanthropic efforts — allowing us the opportunity to respond to the educational needs of underprivileged students in Florida, understanding that children have unique learning needs and helping to deliver learning options for those less fortunate." Wyndham Vacation Ownership has a great reputation for community service, and over the years its involvement has ranged from grassroots employee fundraisers to corporate donations of cash and in-kind services.

A Wyndham Worldwide initiative, Wishes by Wyndham, was created in 2008 as a way for associates around the world to collaborate on the mission of giving back to the community while delivering service locally to the neighborhoods where they live, work and play. Wishes by Wyndham strives to enrich the lives of disadvantaged children, so partnering with Step Up For Students was a natural fit.

Wyndham Vacation Ownership also has more than 160 ownership resorts throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and the South Pacific. More than 800,000 owner families worldwide utilize its flexible, points-based ownership products that create an extensive and diverse portfolio of resorts. While Wyndham Vacation Ownership is headquartered in Orlando, it's supported by approximately 13,300 employees globally. For more information, visit www.wyndhamworldwide.com/about-wyndham-worldwide/wyndham-vacation-ownership.

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▪ The students had modestly better gains in reading and math than similar low-income students in public schools: "The estimated effects of program participation on math performance are statistically significantly positive at conventional levels ... and the estimated effects on reading performance are significantly positive in the case of reading." Figlio added: "These differences, while not large in magnitude, are larger and more statistically significant than in the past year's results, suggesting that successive cohorts of participating students may be gaining ground over time."

▪ The students kept pace against national competition. Their ranking was at the 45th percentile in reading and 46th percentile in math. Their mean gain in reading was -1.2 percentile points and in math was -1.7 percentile points. "In other words," Figlio wrote, "the typical student participating in the program tended to maintain his or her relative position in comparison with others nationwide. It is important to note that these national comparisons pertain to all students nationally, and not just low-income students."

▪ The scholarship continues to attract students who are having significant academic problems in public schools, a trend that "is becoming stronger over time." Wrote Figlio: "Scholarship participants have significantly poorer test performance in the year prior to starting the scholarship program than do non-participants. ... These differences are large in magnitude."

Northwestern University economist David Figlio says that scholarship students 'may be gaining ground over time'



Governor Showcases Step Up



Florida Gov. Rick Scott visited St. Petersburg Christian School this summer to sign legislation enhancing several school choice programs, including the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship. One measure enables corporations to redirect up to 100 percent of their corporate income or insurance premium tax liability annually in the form of contributions to Step Up For Students.

Kirtley, Step Up provide boost to unique public schools

Step Up For Students chairman John Kirtley made headlines this summer for a donation he made to the Hillsborough County school district, giving a boost to



JOHN KIRTLEY

a couple of single-gender preparatory academies opening this fall and strengthening a partnership with the public school system.

Kirtley's gift of \$100,000 helps the district convert one middle school into a boys preparatory academy and another middle school into a girls preparatory academy. Step Up matched Kirtley's donation dollar-for-dollar through a grant paid for by the Walton Family Foundation, bringing the total gift to \$200,000.

Hillsborough schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia celebrated the donation at a

conference during which several school board members surrounded Kirtley as he praised the innovation of the school district.

"In Hillsborough County, we believe all parents should have real choices about where their children attend school," Elia said. "I applaud John for his gift and share his belief that a high-quality education and school choice take many forms."



MARY ELLEN ELIA

It's not the first time the school district has teamed with Step Up. Two years ago, Step Up joined with the district and the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association to enhance professional development opportunities for educators at schools that enroll children who receive the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship.

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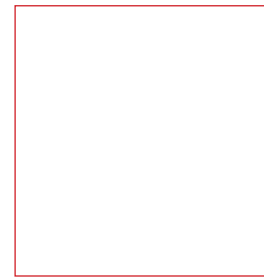
In the first year under the new law, 2010-2011, the \$140 million tax credit cap was reached halfway through the fiscal year. In the second year, 2011-12, Step Up is on track to raise the full \$175 million cap. Ninety percent of the cap already has been reached, increasing the cap for 2012-2013 to \$218.7 million.

That also would increase the scholarship

amount to 68 percent of the state's per-student funding formula for public schools.

The changes in the law make it easier to put the scholarship within reach of more students, Tuthill said.

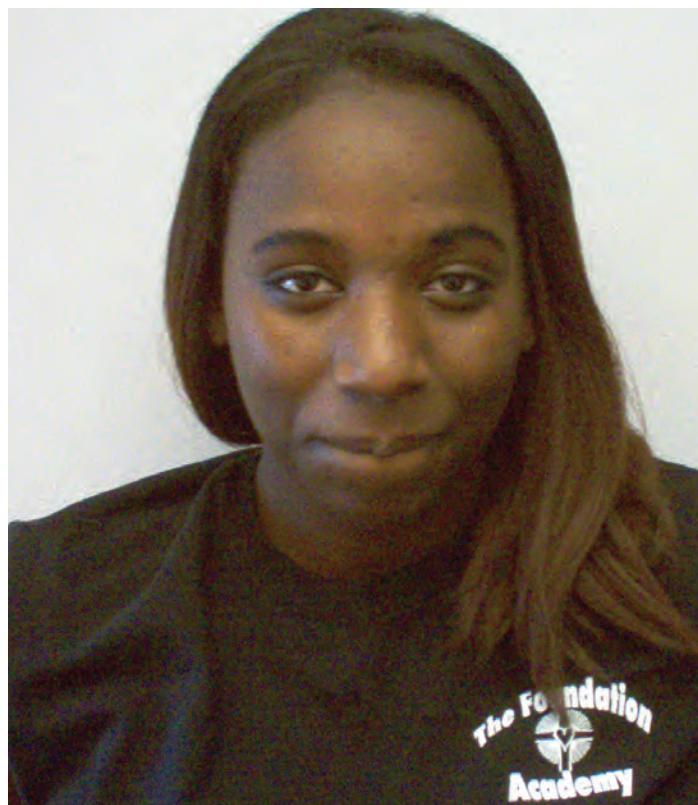
"The importance of the 2010 law is clearer than ever," Tuthill says. "I would hate to think how long the waiting list would be without it."



INFORMATION ON STUDENT TEST GAINS IN THIS ISSUE

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Jodesha Jordan /The Foundation Academy /Jacksonville]



Jodesha Jordan is on a fast track to success at The Foundation Academy. This fall, the motivated teenager will start her second – and final – year at the Jacksonville school, where she’s a hard-working student who tutors elementary students and occasionally teaches poetry to her peers. But Jodesha, 16, may have to scale back some of her extra duties this school year as she simultaneously completes her junior year and her senior year at Foundation.

Finishing both grade levels at the same time will require Jodesha to take junior-level classes that Foundation offers online and attend senior-level classes at the school. Jodesha’s eagerness to graduate high school early is rooted in fulfilling her dream of attending college. The University of North Florida is her top choice.

The years ahead look bright for Jodesha. But when Jodesha entered her neighborhood high school as a freshman three years ago, the future seemed uncertain. Jodesha faced frequent hospitalizations because of illness and missed many days of school. When she was well enough to regularly attend class, she found it difficult to adjust to the setting. Student fights were common and teachers were too overwhelmed to provide the guidance Jodesha desired.

Jodesha did well in her coursework but soon realized that her public school wasn’t right for her. She decided to follow in the footsteps of her older brother and sister and attend Foundation, where she is now one of the school’s 81 Step Up For Students scholars.

Transferring to The Foundation Academy proved to be the right move for Jodesha, although the sacrifice is great. She rises at 4:30 a.m. and rides two buses to get to school. Thanks to The Foundation Academy’s strong focus on project-based learning, Jodesha said she has less homework and is able to devote time after school solely to online assignments before heading to bed.

Principal Nadia Hionides said Jodesha’s love for school is exemplary and she often dishes out tough advice for other students who aren’t giving their best.

Jodesha’s commitment to learning and strong work ethic comes naturally.

“Nobody makes her do it,” Hionides said. “She does it because she wants to.”

Jodesha credits Hionides and her teachers for keeping her grounded and on track academically. In those rare instances when Jodesha wasn’t giving school her all – like the quarter when her grades slipped – it was the tough encouragement from the Foundation staff that pushed her to do her best.

Jodesha is certain that she would not be on the right path had it not been for The Foundation Academy and Step Up For Students. She’s anxious to begin the next phase of her education.

“I’m ready to go to college,” she said.

About The Foundation Academy

The Foundation Academy is a Jacksonville-based private college preparatory school founded in 1988. With more than 260 students enrolled in grades preK-12, The Foundation Academy offers a personalized art-centered education that utilizes project-based learning, exhibition presentations, and portfolio assessments. The Foundation Academy is accredited by the National Independent Private School Association and The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) through its Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI) and the Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA). Annual tuition for grades K-6 is \$5,000; \$6,000 for grades 7 and 8; \$7,000 for grades 9-12. Annual registration fee is \$100 and annual fee is \$500. It administers the Stanford Achievement Test.

This is the official newsletter for Step Up For Students, published four times a year.



About Step Up For Students:

Our mission is to help alleviate the enormous educational challenges faced by children from low-income and working class families.

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