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mother, then divorced, decided to switch him

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The scholarship law makes historic change

Florida legislation have put the Step Up For Students scholarship on a path for historic growth and accountability. The bill that Gov. Charlie Crist signed into law on April 22 allows the scholarship over the next six years to grow by more than $5,000 and the number of stu-

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The Step Up For Students scholarship amount will reach more than $4,106 by 2015-16.

Douglas Tuthill

President

INSIDE: STEP UP GRADUATES TAKE HOME HONORS
Step Up For Students Newsletter

Get a raise and keep the scholarship

Parents who get a raise at work won’t have to worry about their child losing the entire Step Up For Students scholarship anymore. The new law allows renewing families to keep a portion of the scholarship as their income increases.

“This has been one of the most breathtaking parts of the program in the past,” said John LeHockey, executive director of scholarships for Step Up For Students. “A student who was attached to his school would not get to return because his family’s income increased literally one dollar over the guideline.”

The eligibility to receive a scholarship remains at 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, which computes currently to $3,400 a month for a household of four. What changes is the income threshold for families who want to keep the scholarship in future years. They can keep the full scholarship for their student if the household income grows to less than 200 percent of poverty, and the new law adds two more categories.

If income rises to at least 200 percent but less than 215 percent, the renewing student is now eligible for 75 percent of the maximum scholarship. If income is at least 215 percent but not more than 230 percent, the student can get a 50 percent scholarship. Once income exceeds 230 percent, the scholarship ends.

Parents who get a raise and keep the scholarship

The new law

Scholarships:

Raises the maximum scholarship to $4,106 this fall and to 80 percent of the public school per-student operation formula over the next six years. (It should exceed $6,000 by 2015-16.)

Enrollment growth:

Raises the amount of allowed tax-credit contributions from $11 million to $14 million in 2010-11. Allows the cap to grow in future years by 25 percent each time $8 million is reached.

Scholarship renewals:

Protects renewing families who experience small income growth. Those with income of at least $230 but less than 215 percent of poverty receive a 75 percent scholarship. Those with at least 215 but not more than 230 percent get 50 percent.

Academic transparency:

Publicly discloses the standardized test score gains of schools with at least 30 scholarships and scores from same school.

Financial accountability:

Requires a financial report from a certified accountant for any school with at least $250,000 in scholarships funds for the previous year.

Tax credit sources:

Adds three new sources to the base of dollar-for-dollar state tax credits: alcoholic beverage excise tax, direct-pay self-accomplished tax, and the oil and gas severance tax. The existing two are the corporate income and insurance premium tax.

FACTS Management Company and Nelnet Business Solutions, serving many Florida private and faith-based K-12 schools, has contributed $600,000 to Florida’s Step Up For Students scholarship program enough to fund more than 150 scholarships for low-income students.

“The partnership with Step Up For Students helps us to fulfill our educational mission by reaching out to Florida’s most economically disadvantaged families with scholarships,” said Tim Towers, Nelnet Executive Director and FACTS President. “We have a responsibility as corporate custodians to invest in the education of our youth. Step Up For Students ensures that all students have access to the education that best meets their needs, regardless of financial circumstances. We are proud to be a part of that mission.”

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Nelnet Business Solutions

Graduation:

Step Up Scholars take home honors

In its eighth year under Florida law, the Step Up For Students scholarship graduated 472 students from 192 different private schools this spring. Two-hundred, thirty-nine were females and 233 were males. Forty-eight percent were black, 28 percent Hispanic, 16 percent were white. All of them deserve recognition for their accomplishment.

We share three of their stories here.

Clinton Andrade
The Pine School
Stuart

The kind of life that Clinton Andrade has led doesn’t lend itself to happy endings. But two years ago when he left a children’s shelter for a real home and a scholarship to a respected private school, he graduated as a Bright Futures Scholar, six hours college credit in dual enrollment at the University of North Florida.

His academic resume speaks for itself: 3.9 grade point average, National Honor Society, Bright Futures Scholar, six hours college credit through dual enrollment, acceptance at multiple universities.

As the Step Up For Students Scholarship completes its eighth year in Florida, Addison Simms is a reminder that success doesn’t happen overnight. He entered the program the first year it began and leaves as an hon-

Addison Simms
Trinity Christian Academy
Jacksonville

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Hefziba Alonso
Tampa Bay Christian Academy
Tampa

Hefziba Alonso left public school after fifth grade because her mother was worried about discipline in the local middle school. Seven years later, she has graduated as class valedictorian at Tampa Bay Christian Academy. Along the way, she has dazzled her parents, her classmates and the faculty.

“Hefziba is just a great, great student who works very hard at the goals she sets for herself,” says Ana Lopez, Tampa Bay’s admissions officer. “She is wonderfully academically and socially. Truly, everybody loves Hefziba.”

Her personal accomplishments could also fill a yearbook. Hefziba was junior class presid-

Donor Corner: Nelnet Business Solutions

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ADDISON SIMMS
Trinity Christian Academy
Jacksonville

As the Step Up For Students Scholarship completes its eighth year in Florida, Addison Simms is a reminder that success doesn’t happen overnight. He entered the program his first year and leaves it as a high school graduate on his way to the University of South Florida.

His academic resume speaks for itself: 3.9 grade point average, National Honor Society, Bright Futures Scholar, six hours college credit through dual enrollment, acceptance at multiple universities.

"Addison has always been a self-starter, and he is just such a welcoming school community," says his mother, Jennifer Simms. "They challenged him, and he is likely to be challenged."

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The transformation from foster child to college student has turned heads at The Pine School in Stuart, where history teacher William Haydins helped him blossom. “Clinton Andrade,” wrote Hudgins, “is a dynamic young man who has overcome more obstacles in his young life than any adult can possibly imagine. Since joining the student body, he has emerged as a student and a person of substance.”

STEP UP GRADUATES CONTINUED BACK PAGE

Step Up For Students Newsletter
www.StepUpForStudents.org

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 poverty by helping families keep a child in school. The Step Up For Students Scholarship program-enough to fund more than 150 scholarships for low-income families.

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Get the latest on Florida’s Step Up For Students Scholarship program by joining our donor newsletter. Please provide your name and email, and we’ll send you the latest news from FACTS Management and Nelnet Business Solutions.
Clinton Andrade was born in Hawaii to a mother with drug issues and a father in trouble with the law. He and his brothers were soon dispatched to live with foster homes split apart, and Clinton ended up in a children’s shelter for more than a year. That’s when Timothy Fiove and Pine School came into his life.

Rowe took in Clinton first as a foster child and later as his adopted son. “He was spiraling downward in his public school because he didn’t study, and no one paid attention,” Rowe says. “I concluded he needed more structure and higher academic expectations.”

Clinton entered Pine School as a junior with a Step Up For Students scholarship available in all foster children, and initially struggled to adapt to a new academic pace and a heavy homework load. By the second quarter, though, the Dutch he made in his previous school had become As and Bs. He established himself as an accomplished writer and orator, and he became quickly known for his artistry, oratory, and political science. He tutored other students in the school. He made lasting relationships – art and sign language. He has studied sign language since his early teen years, and wants to pursue a degree in international relations and diplomatic changes to the scholarship program. He received partial scholarship offers from schools like Marquette University and Regis University.

The scholarship law makes historic change

The scholarship has made it possible for students and making it more academically and fiscally accountable.

Clinton Andrade

Hefziba Alonso

Honor Society. Mu Alpha Theta honors math and science, and his goal is to become involved in Hispanic Caucus in support. Sen. Al Lawson, D- Tallahassee, was among the many who spoke in support. “I know in my community how these kids are doing and how much they have been able to benefit from this, and I will tell you that you should just embrace these kids and listen to these kids and what they tell you about how rewarding it has been.”

The scholarship goes to $4,106 with more coming

The law, which passed by a large bipartisan margin in the Senate and was signed by Gov. Charlie Crist on April 22, increased the student’s money to more than $6,000 over the next six years.

The bill that Gov. Charlie Crist signed into law on April 22 allows the scholarship to increase by more than $2,000 and the number of students to climb by at least 20,000. “This is a milestone in the empowerment of low-income families in Florida and for the personal choice movement nationwide,” said John Kirtley, chairman of Step Up For Students. “This bill will make the scholarship more accountable and more available, and I’m heartened that we saw such bipartisan support.”

The scholarship is 60 percent of the operating costs for the school that the student chooses to attend. Teachers and principals who participate in what is known by lawmakers as the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship. The scholarships are awarded to high school seniors through Step Up For Students Scholarship on a path to dollars once the state adopts it to more than $6,000 over the next six years.

The scholarship fund is a formula that is used to calculate the amount of money a student is entitled to receive. The formula is based on the student’s family income and the amount of money they spend on tuition, books, and other expenses. The formula is designed to help families who are unable to afford the full cost of college. The scholarship fund is a partnership between the state and private companies who contribute to the fund.

Florida legislators have put the Step Up For Students Scholarship on a path to historic growth and accountability. The bill was enacted by five major private school and sign language classes.

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Honor Society. Mu Alpha Theta honors math and science. She ended up as valedictorian with a 4.42 grade point average and 21 college credits through dual enrollment at Hillsborough Community College. Hefziba really does give it her best effort, but she doesn’t strive out,” says Alejandra Alonso, her mother. “What I like is that the teachers there are so motivating and make learning fun.”

Alejandra and her husband are missionaries, which is rewarding work that also leaves the family without the resources to afford the school that ended up serving their daughter so well. She turned to Step Up For Students, then known in Texas as Florida’s Bright Futures Scholarship, and the scholarship has made it possible for all seven years.

Hefziba thinks the school’s family atmosphere and caring teachers were ingredients to her success. “The teachers all knew me since I was little,” she says. “I think I always had the mindset of doing your best. If you want to see something happen, you just have to step up and get it done.”

Hefziba’s mother is from Mexico and her father from Cuba, and the entire family has always traveled on missions to places like Central America, the Philippines, Canada and across the United States. Hefziba speaks fluent Spanish herself, and is fascinated by other nations and cultures. After missionary work this summer in Mexico, she plans to finish her associate degree in one year at HCC and then pursue a degree in international relations at the University of Tennessee. She sees herself one day serving as an ambassador.

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