



NEWSLETTER



Application season, higher scholarship on the horizon

Step Up For Students has reached a key milestone this school year that will allow it to serve more students and pay larger scholarships in the coming school year. But parents should be forewarned: Demand for the program is higher than ever, and they should apply as quickly as possible to reserve their spots.

Applications for the 2011-12 school year open for existing families in early March, and scholarship administrators advise parents to begin the renewal process as soon as they can. Renewal students receive preference for scholarships as long as their applications are submitted by May.

"Because we had to close the application season early the last two years, we can expect more of the same, and the number of scholarships may be limited," said John LeHockey, the executive director for scholarship operations at Step Up For Students.

The milestone that Step Up reached is in fundraising. In December, just halfway through the new fiscal year, it reached the higher \$140 million scholarship cap that was set into law last year. As a result, the law triggers

two important changes for 2011-12. First, the statewide fundraising cap is increased to \$175 million, which allows for thousands of additional students to receive scholarships. Second, the amount of the scholarship increases from \$4,106 to a projected \$4,400. (The actual amount won't be known until a state budget is passed in the spring.)

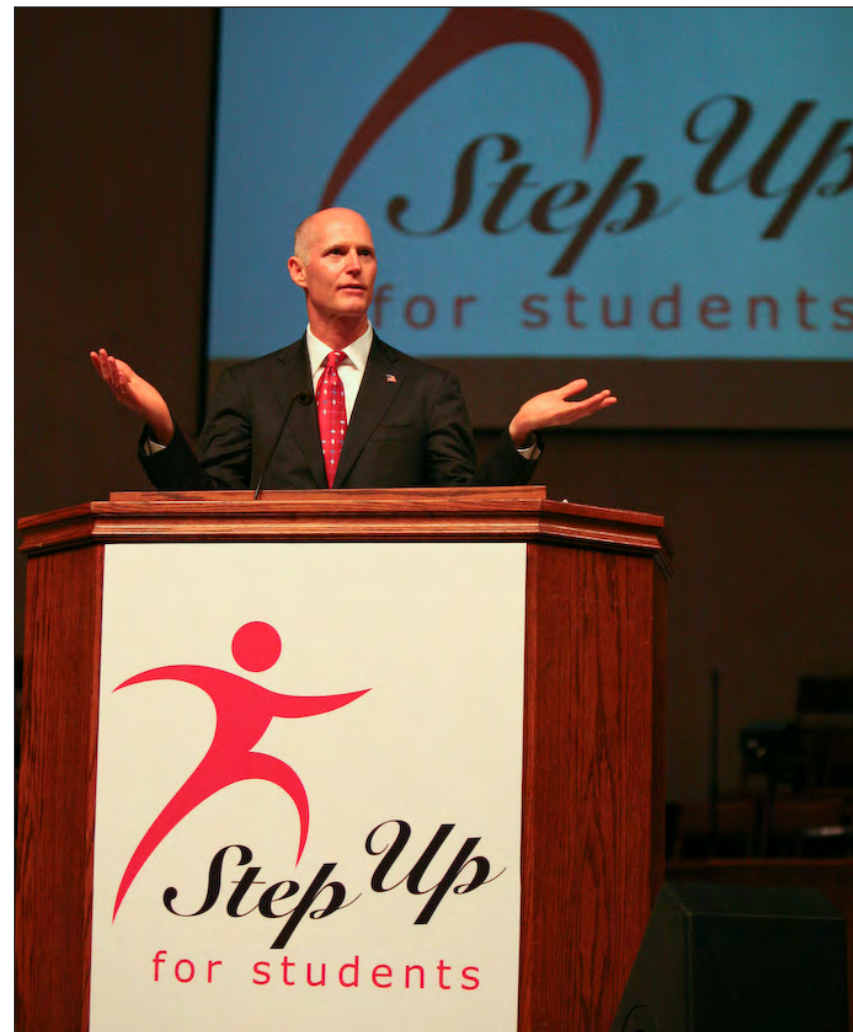
These changes will help to meet a growing demand among low-income families for this scholarship. As of the semester break, the scholarship was serving 33,000 students in 1,093 schools statewide. That is more than triple the number of students from just six years ago. The program stopped taking new applications for 2010-11 academic year barely three weeks after the school year began, something it's never done. Even after adding nearly 6,000 new students this year, the scholarship office still has a waiting list of 6,752 more.

Families renewing the scholarship will have priority when the new application season begins in early March. Only renewal families can apply during March and April. The season for new applicants is expected to begin in May.

What will be waiting for applicants?

Renewing parents will find some significant changes to the electronic application process, including a revamped SmartAp online application. Among the changes:

- An itemized listing of required documents
- The ability to submit supporting documentation by fax, e-mail or regular mail
- An enhanced log-in process
- More information about the application process behind the parent log-in
- E-mail alerts of important changes to the application status (for example, when more documentation is needed)
- The ability to print award letters
- The online address remains the same: www.stepupforstudents.org



Gov. Rick Scott addressed hundreds of students, educators and donors at the annual Step Up for Students donor appreciation rally at St. Petersburg Christian School. "A parent can always choose best," Scott said.

Florida governor addresses hundreds at donor rally

His message was clear. Mapping a student's education career begins with giving parents the power to choose the best learning environment for their child.

"A parent always can choose best," he said.

Gov.-elect Rick Scott spoke to hundreds in December about the critical role that parents have in their student's education at the annual celebration of Step Up For Students and the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship at Suncoast Cathedral in St. Petersburg. About 900 students from 27 schools attended the event.

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INSIDE: BIPARTISAN COALITION URGES CANDIDATES TO SUPPORT TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP.