was miserable and depressed. She knew she could do better, but continued to follow the same patterns. Her results in school were common. She had a bad attitude with some of her classmates and paid little attention to her school work. Her teachers called home to report her bad behavior. As a result, the relationship between Claujemonde and her parents, Jean-Claude and Maymonde, was tense. Jean-Claude and Maymonde knew they had to move quickly to get their daughter on the right track and considered sending Claujemonde to an alternative school.

A family friend encouraged them to apply to Step Up For Students, they knew using the scholarship to send Claujemonde to a smaller school was the right decision.

Claujemonde received a scholarship and entered seventh grade as a Step Up scholar at West Palm Beach Junior Academy.

Claujemonde, too, was open to the idea. She desperately wanted something different. She had heard good things about West Palm Beach Junior Academy because many of her friends from church attended the school.

After a few months at her new school, Claujemonde noticed a change. She was no longer combative and defensive with classmates. Her relationship with her teachers was better. She was more focused and disciplined with her schoolwork. After years of dislike school, she looked forward to going. Claujemonde’s grades also began to improve. The once mediocrize student, who occasionally rested at her passing grade, was now a top student who earned A’s and B’s. Things were looking up.

Jean-Claude and Maymonde were pleased with her new attitude and academic performance. But no one was more surprised than Claujemonde.

“I thought this couldn’t be me,” she said.

But Claujemonde’s upswing was marred when another student accused Claujemonde of grabbing her neck. Claujemonde denied it, saying that the classmate’s injury was self-inflicted. When Claujemonde confronted the classmate and demanded an apology, the two began to argue.

The incident, however, didn’t prompt Claujemonde to turn back to her old ways. Instead, Claujemonde dug herself deeper into her schoolwork and continued to focus on making good decisions. Her hard work paid off when the results of the norm-referenced tests taken by scholarship students in 2012 indicated a 3 to 4 percentage points until it reaches 80 percent of the per-student spending. This fall, the scholarship is based on at least 50 percent.
The scholarship increase is only one part of the legislative news this year. Legislation sponsored by Rep. Richard Corcoran, R-Port Richey, and Sen. Lisa Biondi, R-Vero Beach, also expands the program to serve another 7,000 to 8,000 students in 2012-13 and removes the requirement that students entering grades 2-5 have attended a Florida public school the previous year.

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Claujemonde Masson / Ephesus Junior Academy / West Palm Beach

Without her step up for students scholarship, Claujemonde Masson, 14, in certain she wouldn’t be on a track to college.

“I didn’t have a future,” said the freshman, who now attends Ephesus Junior Academy. “I just played around all the time and got bad grades.”

Claujemonde’s troubles began in second grade, where she was constantly bullied by classmates at her neighborhood school. Because of the bullying, Claujemonde grew to dislike school and her academic performance was poor. By fifth grade, Claujemonde’s verbal sparring with classmates was common. She had a bad attitude with some of her teachers and paid little attention to her school work. Her report cards were filled with Cs and Ds.

As she moved through elementary school, Claujemonde was miserable and depressed. She knew she could do better, but continued to follow the same patterns. Even poor grades and an acrimonious relationship with some of her teachers. Claujemonde’s unruly behavior at school spilled into her home life as school administrators and teachers called home to report her bad behavior. As a result, the relationship between Claujemonde and her parents, Jean-Claude and Maymonde, was tense. Jean-Claude and Maymonde knew they had to move quickly to get their daughter on the right track and considered sending Claujemonde to an alternative school.

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Donor Event Spotlight

Island Christian School/Islamorada

Nearly 350 students, teachers and Step Up supporters excitedly gathered on March 14 at Temple Christian Academy in Jacksonville to celebrate the official groundbreaking ceremony for the school’s new garden, which was sponsored by BJ’s Wholesale Club. In collaboration with its Farm to Club Program, BJ’s Wholesale Club wanted to help Temple Christian find a sustainable way to harvest its own fruits and vegetables. BJ’s Wholesale Club sponsored the event to educate the students on the benefits of growing and consuming fresh local produce.

Last year, BJ’s launched the Farm to Club Initiative in select regions of its wholesale club business, which partners with local farms within the region.

“Through the garden project, not only do our students learn the science behind how plants grow, they now have access to fresh produce and will benefit from the nutrients in the vegetables,” said Principal Jackie Pitts. Temple Christian attempted to start a garden last year but didn’t have the funds to support the project.

“This garden is something that we’ve wanted to pursue for a while, and we are beyond thrilled to be able to have a garden of our own,” Pitt said. “It is an honor for our school to work with BJ’s Wholesale Club in the creation of this garden, and we are excited to share this journey with our students, who will be able to enjoy the fruits of their labor while learning about health and nutrition.”

Temple Christian senior Curtis Williams shared this inspiring story with the other students and representatives from BJ’s and Step Up.

“Step Up for Students has changed my life, I would like to say thank you to BJ’s for supporting the program and for giving other students like me a chance,” said Williams. “BJ’s Wholesale Club has been a step-up for Students for over 15 years. We signed an agreement with Step Up for Students in 2009 and has contributed more than $1.6 million, an amount that has provided more than 323,000 scholarships.

“BJ’s Wholesale Club enthusiastically supports Step Up for Students and the mission of providing students with access to the education that best meets their individual needs,” said Arnie Hogue, BJ’s Wholesale Club regional operations manager. “It is exciting to be part of the process of providing education and our farm to Club initiative, in an effort to give back to the communities that we serve.”

Donor Update

It is with great appreciation that Step Up for Students recognizes those corporations that demonstrated new or renewed resolve to provide quality education to low-income children in Florida through a financial commitment made in the first quarter of 2012. Their combined contributions will provide thousands of scholarships for underprivileged children, significantly enhancing their education and laying out a road map for a successful future. If we’ve missed anyone from this quarter who has already reserved their credit, please let us know as we continue our gratitude to you all.

We sincerely thank:

Alibates Insurance Company
Brown & Brown
Capacity Insurance Company
Centennial Bank
Euler Harveys North America Insurance Company
Florida Doctors Insurance Company
 Ft. Lauderdale Hospital
GBECO
Gulf Coast Treatment Center Inc.
Haiti Red Cross
Home Security Company
Jamieson Company
Kemper Corporation
New York Life Insurance Company
Premier Behavioral Solutions, Inc.
Republic National Distributing Company
Rosen
St. Johns Insurance Company
Sunrise Life Insurance Corporation
Tamara Pedi North America, LLC
Universal Health Services, Inc.
Windom Healthcare of Pinellas Park, Inc.

SCHOOLS SPOTLIGHT

Donor Corner

Winn-Dixie

Ten years ago, the creation of the Step Up for Students program opened up the door of opportunity for Florida’s low-income families and gave corporations the ability to play an active role in the education of the state’s students. In celebration of our 10th anniversary, Step Up for Students would like to recognize one of our founding donors, Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc.

The Jacksonville-based supermarket chain was one of the very first corporate donors to the scholarship program in 2002 and continues its support today, including a recent contribution of $5 million to fund scholarships for more than 120,000 low-income children.

One of the largest food retailers in the nation, Winn Dixie currently operates 369 stores throughout Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia and Mississippi.

Winn-Dixie’s commitment to being a good neighbor extends beyond its support of Step Up for Students. For the past 60 years, the Winn-Dixie Foundation has invested in many programs that help foster healthy and thriving communities. The company also has a history of giving back to the community through its golf events, which include partnering with the PGA Tour to bring the national event to its hometown area. The 2011 Winn-Dixie Jacksonville Open generated $18 million for charities, raising the record-breaking $50 million the event raised in its inaugural year last year. Winn-Dixie golf events over the past six years have generated more than $96 million for charities throughout the regions in which Winn-Dixie operates.

Donor Event Spotlight

Left to right: Anne White, Step Up For Students’ vice president of operations, organizational development and human resources, and BJ’s Wholesale Club Regional Operations Manager Archie Hogue join Temple Christian Academy Principal Jackie Pitts for the garden ribbon cutting ceremony.

In the words of two Florida lawmakers

“If you’re a low-income student, your five-digit ZIP code could be the difference between you going to an F school or an A school – they are not doing anything different but are giving a future or none... This scholarship gives a choice... These students, year in and year out, are the lowest performing in our public school systems. And they’re going to schools on these scholarships at 88 percent of the cost, and they’re doing better in math and better in English.”

Rep. Richard Corcoran, R-New Port Richey

Reps. John Patrick Julien, D-North Miami Beach

“When you have more than 38,000 students who are benefiting from a program and 69 percent of them are black or Hispanic children, that says something. And for those of us who are either black or Hispanic, if we truly mean what we say, then sometimes we have to say that maybe what we have right now just doesn’t work... So if we have a program that has underprivileged, under-served children who are able to get an education because we are giving them a choice, the ability to choose what is right for his or her child, I say let’s do it.”

Rep. Benacquisto told her colleagues in the Senate.

The expansion takes the form of an increase in state tax credits for the scholarships. Companies that contribute to state-approved scholarship funding organizations receive a dollar-for-dollar credit against one of many different tax sources – corporate income, insurance premiums, alcoholic beverage excise, direct pay sales and use, and oil and gas severance. The legislation increases the state cap to $229 million.

Step Up scholars’ advocates say that the cap increase should allow the program to serve at least 7,000 to 8,000 students in the fall. For 2012, the scholarship has served more than 5,000 students across the state – students whose average household income is only 21 percent above poverty.

The other significant change for prospective scholarship students is that the scholarship will be available only to all income-eligible students who are entering grades K-5, no matter where they attended school the previous year. Under the old law, low-income eligible students entering grades 6-12 had a wait list to attend a Florida public school the previous year.

Under the new law that requirement is limited to grades 6-12, all new students must meet the income guidelines for free or reduced-price lunch.