Legislation Would Help Thousands More Students

Florida lawmakers will decide over the next two months whether to let thousands more low-income students receive Step Up For Students scholarships this fall. Bills filed by Sen. Linda B. tween and Rep. Richard Corcoran would provide a one-time $25.5 million, extra increase to the capitation-based contribution, allowing the state to serve 6,000 more students in the 2012-13 school year. That increase would come on top of $437.9 million from the current law, setting a tax cap in 2012-13 of $425.0 million.

“This is a simple issue for me,” says Sen. Bennis. “We have economically disadvantaged students who are struggling in school. Their parents are clamoring for this investing option. And it actually saves the state money at a time when finances are tight. Why wouldn’t I want to make sure this scholarship is readily available?”

Scholarship enrollment has been surging. About 18,000 students are attending nearly 1,200 private schools statewide this school year, an amount that would rank the program as the state’s 22nd largest school district. That is four or five times the number of students who were served just seven years ago, and the program has experienced waiting lists in the past two years that each exceeded more than 6,000 students.

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Florida governor celebrates Step Up donors

Gov. Rick Scott joined business and community leaders, along with Republican and Democratic lawmakers, in October at the Governor’s Mansion in Tallahassee to thank the corporate donors of Step Up For Students.

More than 100 supported helped Step Up celebrate and honor corporations for collectively contributing more than $900 million to the scholarship program since 2002. Thanks to the generous contributions from this year’s Step Up donors, more than 38,000 low-income children are afforded the chance to attend nearly 2,000 private schools throughout Florida.

Gov. Scott praised the program and its donors and noted the importance of the continued success.

“For 15 years, the corporate community has help turn around the lives of many children in need by helping to make scholarships available,” Scott said. “The tax credit scholarship program is one of the many ways that we can work to make sure our state has the best educated workforce.”

Step Up is a “true Blair School model,” North Florida Christian School in Tallahassee, shared his story at the reception. Blair, who graduated in December and is committed to play football at St. Stephen’s Episcopal University, credited the scholarship for putting him on the path to college.

“My dreams are becoming a reality through Step Up scholarships,” Blair said. “This program has helped me overcome some challenges, and I want to give back to others who may be in similar situations.”

The event featured special announcements from J.J. Taylor Distributing Florida Inc., Walgreens, and Winn-Dixie Stores Inc. representatives, all of which presented checks to the Step Up For Students program.

In 2002, the Florida Legislature’s vision extended the tax credit scholarships to non-profit organizations so that Step Up For Students could take on an expanded role of providing educational opportunities for low-income children in Florida. — Opportunity that Progress Energy enthusiastically pursued and became one of the founding donors of Step Up For Students.

Step Up For Students is committed to helping low-income children and their families find the right school and make the most of their education. Step Up for Students is the largest private school scholarship program in the United States. The program allows low-income Florida students to attend more than 2,500 private schools, including a broad cross-section of educational offerings, from preschool through high school.

The program has grown rapidly, from serving 23 students in its first year to serving more than 83,000 students in the 2016-2017 school year. In 2016-2017, Step Up For Students awarded more than 87,000 scholarships totaling nearly $2 billion.

The program has also evolved over the years to serve a broader range of students, including those who are at-risk or homeless, or those who have special needs.

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Step Up For Students was created by the Florida nonprofit charter school organization, Step Up For Students, to provide scholarships to low-income students to attend nonpublic schools. The program allows students to choose a school from a variety of educational options, including religious schools, magnet schools, and online schools. The program is funded by tax credits claimed by donors who contribute to a scholarship organization, such as Step Up For Students.

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Step Up for Students Newsletter

DONOR CORNER

Progress Energy

Contrary to page 1

"Our hope is that this kind of increase in the number of scholarships will allow us to reduce and maybe eliminate the waiting list," says Doug Tuthill, president of Step Up For Students. "Our goal is that the scholarships are available to the students who need them the most. What we think it can help is to reduce and maybe eliminate the waiting list.

Under Florida’s Tax Credit Scholarship law that governs the program, new scholarships are only available to students whose household income qualifies them for four years of reduced price lunch. Any student entering the program in grades K-12 also must have attended a public school the prior year, but if the student's household income qualifies for scholarships under the program, he or she may be eligible for scholarships at least until the student is in deputy governor. Under his bill, students who meet the income threshold could renew the program at any grade level on a calendar year to which they attend school the previous year. This requirement is to prevent the year attendance requirement.

Corporate contributions also are critical to the program’s success. We had to have sports," he said. "We would have never been able to attract a number of students and its sports teams are key contributors in the area. In the first 15 years school was graduated in 2010. Of the 15 total students who have graduated from Beacon of Hope, many have gone on to attend college, including the University of Florida, Benedictine College, the University of West Florida and St. Johns College.

The school has received over 40 donations, however, the list of challenges some.

Step Up scholar Travis Blanks, a senior at North Florida Christian School in Tallahassee, talked about how a Step Up scholarship put him on the path to college.

"My dreams are becoming a reality thanks to dedicated donors like you, " he said.

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"Step Up For Students is a very critical component of my life," Blanks said. "Step Up has made college possible for me."

For more information or to make a contribution to Step Up For Students, visit www.StepUpForStudents.org.

M. Sandlin "Sandy" Grimm of Winn-Dixie Stores Inc, addresses guests at the donor appreciation event hosted by Gov. Rick Scott in October at the Governor's Mansion.  

Historic advocates for school choice join redefined

After a year of publication, the blog hosted by Step Up for Students Chairman John E. Coons and Stephen D. Sugarman has made major strides in realizing its goal to educate a broad audience about the positive outcomes of school choice.

The blog relaunched one year ago on the theory that a frank and civil discussion about the existing state of public education and its increasing area of opposition is a second level of support for the signatures needed to start the ballot initiative. The individual signatures are needed in order to ensure the redistricting agreement with the American Center for School Choice, the supporter organization that is enriching the lives of Florida’s less fortunate children.

The blog’s audience has grown and its reach has expanded significantly.

"Step Up For Students Newsletter

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Step Up taking applications earlier for 2012-13

Families who want to renew their Step Up For Students scholarship for the 2012-13 academic year can do so starting in early February.

From early February to early March, the scholarship program is dedicating its online application to renewal families only. Parents now to Step Up For Stud-

ents can apply for the scholarship after the first of March.

Step Up For Students is opening its application season earlier to better accommodate the spike in demand the program has seen for the last couple of years. By last May, just a few months after the program started taking applications for the current school year, about 12,000 students had joined a wait list. There are currently about 18,000 students en-

rolled in the program receiving scholar-

ships worth up to $4,011.

The earlier start also gives families more time to submit the required docu-

mentation that shows how much income they earn and how many people are in

their household. Step Up For Students also will hold bring-in hours for its Contact Center – from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, closing from 11 a.m. to noon every day.

The sooner families submit all the re-

quired documents the better, said John LeHockey, Step Up’s executive vice presi-

dent for scholarships. The scholarship

program has enhanced its procedures to more quickly notify parents with updates on the status of their applica-
tions, but applicants should still submit all their required documents showing income and household composition no later than April.

The bigger parents say, the bigger it will take to process their applications, LeHockey said.

The application fee is $30. The amount of the scholarship is expected to increase but won’t be determined until the state Legislature decides in March how much money will be spent in per-student operational funding. The Step Up schol-

arship is tied to that amount.

ABOUT THE POTTER’S HOUSE CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Founded in 1996, The Potter’s House Christian Academy is an extension of The Potter’s House Christian Fellowship. About 180 Step Up scholar students attend the school, which is accredited by the Florida Association of Christian Colleges and Schools and administers the Stanford Achievement Test.

Step Up scholar Tracis Blanks, a senior at North Florida Christian School in Tallahassee, greets Florida Gov. Rick Scott at the Governor’s Mansion last fall. Scott hosted more than 100 people to celebrate Step Up For Students and its corporate sponsors.

This is the official newsletter for The Potter’s House Christian Academy/Jacksonville

Kenzel Huggins/The Potter’s House Christian Academy/Jacksonville

While his peers may spend their spare time visiting websites or hanging out at the mall, the public library is Kenzel Huggins’ ideal place to hang out. A senior at The Potter’s House Christian Academy in Jacksonville, Kenzel visits the library at least three times a week to study and indulge in his favorite pastime: reading.

“You can’t just taking you to other places, but the way you see the world. Reading acts like a guide in my life.”

It’s a hobby that Kenzel took seriously early in his school career and that he believes has been critical in his development as a top scholar and in his recent selection as National Achievement semifinalist.

“Reading does open up new worlds,” he said. “Not just taking you to other places, but the way you see the world. Reading acts like a guide in my life. While his peers may spend their spare time visiting websites or hanging out at the mall, the public library is Kenzel Huggins’ ideal place to hang out. A senior at The Potter’s House Christian Academy in Jacksonville, Kenzel visits the library at least three times a week to study and indulge in his favorite pastime: reading.

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