



## Step Up For Students Renewed as Florida's Top SFO

**FEBRUARY 20, 2026** -- Step Up For Students, the nation's largest education choice scholarship funding organization, is pleased to announce it has been renewed as an SFO for the 2026-27 school year following a unanimous vote by the Florida Board of Education.

Step Up has served Florida for more than two decades, starting with the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program. The nonprofit currently administers five programs and one stipend with over 520,000 students, and processes 10 million financial transactions.

On Feb. 1, Step Up once again set the new national record in education choice: It received a record 200,000 applications in the first three days of Season Open, and by the 10th day it had received a record 300,000 applications. It is currently nearing 400,000 applications.

"Step Up For Students is grateful for the confidence the Board of Education has shown in our ability to manage the state's education choice programs," said Step Up CEO Gretchen Schoenhaar. "There is no initiative of this size, scope and complexity in the country, and we are honored to serve the parents, students, schools, providers and vendors as well as to partner with the DOE and legislature in Florida."

When Florida in 2023 made all K-12 students in the state eligible for a scholarship program and transformed the programs into education savings accounts (ESAs) that gave parents more flexibility in how they spend their children's scholarship funds, it unleashed unprecedented demand from families. Step Up has responded with technological innovations and process improvements that have defined the customer experience.

Central to that is Step Up's Education Market Assistant (EMA), an online platform to manage an ESA program from start to finish, including the onboarding of parents through the online application, the processing of those applications and the reporting features required by the state. EMA also serves as the platform for education service providers, vendors, and private schools to engage with parents.

EMA brings together parents and providers in an efficient marketplace and ensures all ESA funds are spent effectively and efficiently consistent with state law, including preventing fraud. The platform has influenced similar technologies across the nation.

For the second year in a row, Step Up has realized significant improvements in performance even as participation in the state's scholarship programs continues to grow:



- In the current school year (2025-26), it processed applications for nearly 650,000 students in an average of 3 days, down from 10 days the previous year.
- 99.9% of 727,811 tuition payments to nearly 2,500 schools were paid within 2.5 business days, down from 4.6 last year.
- 99.7% of 839,048 payments to product vendors and service providers paid within 2.1 days, down from 2.9 last year.
- Step Up is on track this school year to have 2.75 million transactions on MyScholarShop, its online marketplace, for over \$425 million. It does not charge fees for vendors or transactions in the marketplace, unlike other vendors across the country.
- Step Up has over 160 product vendors on MyScholarShop offering over 80,000 educational products, 9,500 businesses (not counting private schools) and 16,000 individual service providers on EMA.
- Step Up is on track to process over 4.5 million reimbursement requests, four times what it had just two years ago. Our active reimbursements are under 27 days, with a media age of 9 days.

Step Up welcomes continued collaboration with the DOE and the Legislature to find solutions to systemic challenges in the education choice scholarship programs.

**For more information, media requests, or interviews, please contact:**

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Step Up For Students ([stepupforstudents.org](http://stepupforstudents.org)) is a 501c3 nonprofit based in Jacksonville and St. Petersburg that administers the Florida education choice scholarship program. Since its inception in 2002, Step Up has awarded over 2 million scholarships, significantly impacting educational equity and access across Florida.