

# TAMPA BAY BUSINESS JOURNAL

June 9, 2017

## Nonprofit of the Year 2017: Step Up for Students (Education)

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Step Up for Students is a K-12 scholarship program that gives children from low-income families and children with disabilities the opportunity to attend private schools to better meet their academic needs and achieve learning goals.

The non-profit was formed in 2000 and gives nearly 99 percent of its proceeds back to programs it facilitates.

“We employ typical business practices such as preparing and closely managing budgets and forecasts, cash management, strategic planning, risk management, business intelligence and continuous process improvement,” said Step Up for Students Chief Financial Officer Joe Pfountz. “We have also developed very reliable models matching our forecasted donations to the number of scholarship awards to help us maximize the number of students we can serve while maintaining adequate reserves.”

The agency is also only allotted a 3 percent operating allowance, far less than other nonprofit organizations, forcing them to maintain a lean budget.

The organization’s tight budgeting practices and constant search for efficiencies through technology and process automation has earned Step Up for Students

Charity Navigator’s 4-star rating for six years in a row.

The agency has awarded 575,000 scholarships to disadvantaged Florida students since its inception through the close of the 2016-17 school year through two scholarship programs – the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program for low-income families and the Gardiner scholarship for special needs students. It also offers online learning management software for teachers and families, a tool to help identify and track learning progress and a pilot project to help educators better teach science, technology, engineering and math. Step Up for Students enacted these programs to help families better identify



and enroll in schools that best meet the needs of students and offer high-quality educational programs beyond the classroom.