

Step Up For Students  
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YES Opportunities, Inc.

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# MARCH '05 NEWSLETTER

The Official Newsletter of Step Up for Students

## Step Up Now To Qualify for Scholarships!

Complete your application now for your Step Up for Students Scholarship. Deadlines are fast approaching.

**April 30, 2005:**  
Deadline for Renewal Applications

**June 30, 2005:**  
Deadline for New Student Applications

If you need additional information on how to complete the application form, call your local Scholarship Funding Organization, or visit their website.

**Children First-Central Florida**  
407-702-2607  
[www.childrenfirstcf.org](http://www.childrenfirstcf.org)

**HEROES**  
1-866-266-0790  
[www.forheroes.com](http://www.forheroes.com)

**Florida PRIDE**  
813-318-0995  
[www.floridapride.org](http://www.floridapride.org)

**YES Opportunities, Inc.**  
1-866-297-7272  
[www.yesopportunities.org](http://www.yesopportunities.org)

## Governor Jeb Bush and Attorney General Charlie Crist: "Thanks Corporate Scholarship Donors!"



Governor Jeb Bush and Attorney General Charlie Crist addressed 2,200 parents, students and teachers at a Step Up For Students rally at The Potter's House Christian Fellowship on February 14, 2005. Gathered to thank Jacksonville-area corporations that fund H.E.R.O.E.S. scholarships, participants also recognized the academic achievements of Step Up For Students scholarship recipients. Duval County, home to more than 1,100 scholarship students and 77 participating schools, was chosen to host the event thanks to North Florida's strong support for school choice.

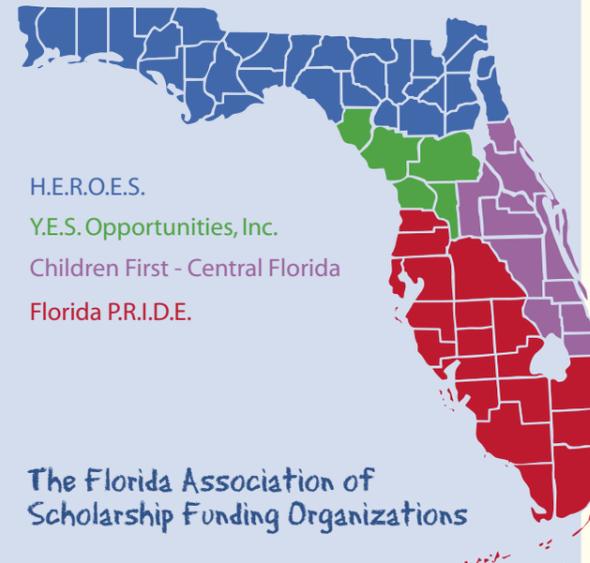
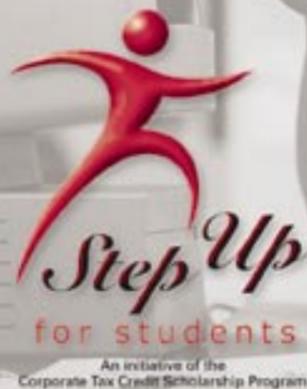
Governor Jeb Bush told audience members that he believes every parent, regardless of their income, should be empowered to find the best school for their children. "I commend the companies helping these families, and I commend the families themselves for their commitment to education."

Representatives from corporate sponsors FloridaRock, Albertson's, Mac Papers, Gate Petroleum, EverBank, Sysco and Marriott were pleased by the opportunity to interact with recipients of the scholarships they fund. Following the rally, Albertson's representatives distributed boxed lunches to students as they boarded buses and headed back to their schools.

T.R. "Mac" McGhee of Mac Papers and a member of the Board of Trustees of Florida Community College at Jacksonville said, "Being involved at Florida Community College instilled in me an appreciation for education at all levels. The Corporate Tax Credit program is a win-win situation for the community and students. When the community benefits, our company benefits."

Attorney General Charlie Crist echoed McGhee's support, saying, "Companies who support this program demonstrate their commitment to improving their communities and to helping Florida's low-income families benefit from the power of education."

## Important Updates on School Choice in Florida



H.E.R.O.E.S.  
Y.E.S. Opportunities, Inc.  
Children First - Central Florida  
Florida P.R.I.D.E.

The Florida Association of  
Scholarship Funding Organizations

The Official Newsletter of Step Up for Students

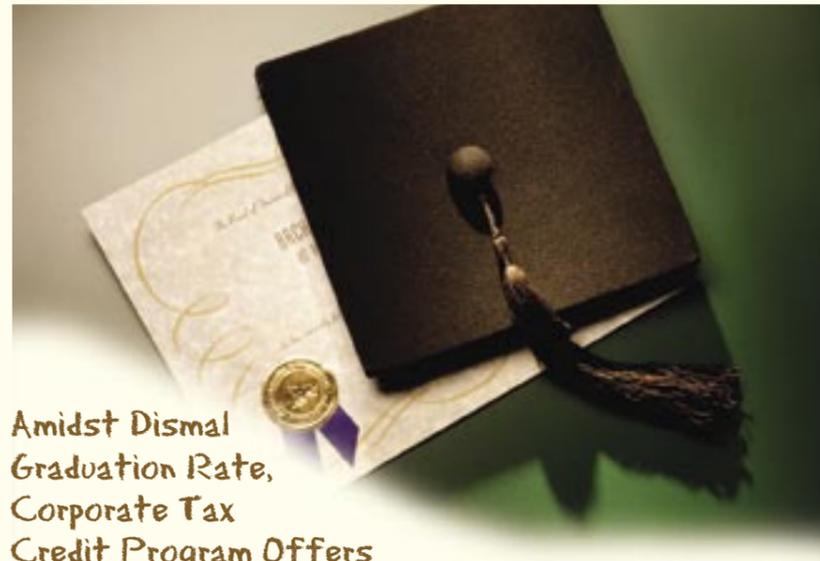
Inside: Rally '05 Information

## A Voice for School Choice ... Just a Click Away!

**FACE** This spring, Florida Alliance for Choices in Education (F.A.C.E.) will launch a website service that puts members and visitors in direct contact with their legislators. Supporters of school choice can enter their home address to:

- 1) Learn about current school choice bills;
- 2) Find out whether their senators' and representatives' support the bills; and,
- 3) Contact their legislators.

This program is the easiest way to stay on top of laws that will affect school choice and let your voice be heard in Tallahassee. Your voice for school choice, plus a current newsletter, legislative updates, rallies and other current issues and events are at [www.face.org](http://www.face.org). This year, important legislation about your child's scholarship will be considered. Please come visit, join, and put your FACE on issues that affect the educational future of Florida's children.



## Amidst Dismal Graduation Rate, Corporate Tax Credit Program Offers Learning Alternative

### Study Confirms Declining Graduation Rate Among Florida Students: Step Up For Students Offers Educational Options

A study released by the Manhattan Institute in February reported that Florida's graduation rates dropped from 60% in 1991 to 59% in 2002, ranking this state 45th in the nation. Worse yet, only 33% of public high school students who did graduate had mastered the skills necessary to attend a four-year college.

Across the country, there is a significant difference between the graduation rates of white and minority students. In Florida, 67% of white students graduated, compared to only 49% of African-American students and 50% of Hispanic students.

The study also found that there is little difference between the number of students who graduate with the skills they will need in college and those who actually enroll. This finding indicates that students do not seek higher education because they are not prepared for college level courses, not because they cannot afford it.

Step Up For Students believes the solution to low graduation rates is to empower all families – regardless of income – to make choices about their children's educational setting. Not only are parents best qualified to guide their children's development, but allowing families to take control over their children's development encourages academic success. We have seen the positive results time after time, and we are sure you see it daily in your own children.

If you have a success story to tell, we want to hear about it for future newsletters and postings on the F.A.C.E. website. Email or call Denise Lasher at (813) 318-0995 or [dlasher@feff.org](mailto:dlasher@feff.org).

## Remember the Rally and Pencil Us In ...

Florida's Supreme Court is due to hear arguments later this year in the debate over the constitutionality of Opportunity Scholarships. While you are not an Opportunity Scholarships recipient, you should care about this ruling because it could affect you - especially if your child attends a faith-based school. Why? If the Florida Supreme Court rules that Opportunity Scholarships recipients cannot use their scholarships at religious schools, many other Florida scholarships could be in jeopardy, including McKay Scholarships, the Voluntary Pre-K program and Bright Futures Scholarship recipients.

As soon as the date is set for the oral arguments, SUFS will schedule the 2005 school choice rally in Tallahassee. In years past, we have gone to the state capitol to celebrate the success of the program and our right to choice, but this year we will go with grave concerns about the future of all scholarship programs.

If you are ready to fight for school choice, please plan to join SUFS at the capitol and pencil in a possible rally sometime in May or June. For immediate updates, contact Michael Benjamin at [mjbenjamin@face.org](mailto:mjbenjamin@face.org) with your school and contact information and put Rally 2005 in the subject line of the email.



## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: Vanessa Farnsworth

### The Road to Success

This month, Step Up For Students is spotlighting a very special Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship recipient, Vanessa Farnsworth, an 8th grader at Trinity Christian Academy in Deltona, Florida.

Problems began in the 6th grade when, as a public school student, she was failing three of the four major course areas. Desperate to help her child, her mother applied for a Children-First Central Florida scholarship under the Step Up for Students Scholarship program. Changes happened!

Vanessa is now in the eighth grade and shining! She has made the Principal's List and Honor Roll and was even awarded the Diligence Award by the faculty at Trinity. "I was going down the wrong path, but ever since I've been a part of the scholarship program, I've been doing well in school and I feel better about myself," said Vanessa.

It took a lot of hard work, perseverance, and the right kind of attention, but she has turned her F's into A's. "I'm so happy that Vanessa is a part of Step Up for Students. I'm now confident that she will go on to become a better citizen," said Barbara Farnsworth, Vanessa's grandmother.

With her renewed confidence, Vanessa has decided she wants to graduate high school and go on to college in hopes of becoming a plastic surgeon or a neurosurgeon.

We wish Vanessa the best of luck!



## Get Active in Voluntary Pre-K!

Do you have children that will be at least four years old by September 1? If so, you should get involved in the state's voter mandated Voluntary Pre-K program. In fact, the organization that will administer the program - Florida's Agency for Workforce Innovation - says that all parents and providers who even think they want to be involved should fill out a pre-application form. More than 18,824 parents and nearly 1,950 providers signed up at the launch of the program, but there are many more who did not. You may be one of them.

The pre-application process is incredibly important because it serves as a tool to connect Early Learning Coalitions with parents and providers, and it helps the Agency measure public interest.

### Who's Eligible?

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten was signed into law by Governor Bush on January 2. Every Florida child who is four years old by September 1, 2005 will be eligible to attend the program in the fall of this school year.

The Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program is designed to help Florida children develop the skills they need to become good readers and successful students. It includes high literacy standards, strict accountability, appropriate curricula, substantial instruction periods, manageable class sizes and qualified instructors. Early Learning Coalitions will administer the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program at the local level, register providers and provide applications and information to parents.

For more information and to pre-apply, contact Leah Cook at The Agency for Workforce Innovation at (850) 921-3169.

