



New school year begins, families should look ahead to 2014-15

While the 2012-13 school year brought more growth for Step Up For Students with 51,075 students reaping the benefits of the scholarship program, the momentum of growing by more than 21 percent annually continues with the new school year.

About 60,000 students are expected to use the Step Up scholarship this year, and by mid-August, more than 50,000 students had already enrolled in the school of their choice from the 1,500 participating schools across the state, said Anne White, Step Up's vice president of human resources and organizational development. The scholarship for the 2013-14 school year is worth up to \$4,880 per child for private school, or a \$500 transportation scholarship for those who choose an out-of-county public school.

"Scholarship families who have not enrolled their children at their chosen private school or a public school in another county should do so soon," White said.

"If you have had trouble searching for a participating school, the best place to start is by using our website, which will allow you to search by school name, city, county and ZIP code."

The search tool can be found at

www.StepUpForStudents.org under the "How it Works" section. Click on "For Parents & Guardians" on the drop-down menu, then, "Participating Schools" on the next drop-down menu.

Once a school is selected, parents and guardians are required to present their Step Up award letter to the chosen school.

"Awarded families can download their award letters right from our website and they can take it to the participating private school of their choice," White said.

Once students are enrolled, parents and guardians should prepare to visit their child's school in September after the first scholarship checks are distributed. Step Up and the schools will notify families that the checks have arrived and are ready for endorsement. This happens four times per year, White said.

While most families had already received their award letters by July, many eligible families were placed on a waiting list, and Step Up staff is currently working through that list as scholarships become available. The funding remains the same, but for various reasons families sometimes decline the scholarship, which opens up space for another family, White said. These families are also awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

"If you have received a scholarship, but have decided not to use it, please notify us right away so we can give other deserving students this opportunity," White said.

The 2013-14 school year is just getting underway, but Step Up families need to start thinking about the 2014-15 school year. Step Up will open applications for the next school year in the fall for renewal families only. It will be open for a shorter period of time and then close, said White, but we will open it back up during our usual time frame of February for renewals, and March for new families.

"We're trying something new this year," said White. "We did this for several reasons, and one of them is to be consistent with most private schools that open enrollment in January for the following school year. The online application process will remain the same. We are doing this primarily in an effort to better serve our families."

Potential new families can sign up for Step Up's interest list by going to www.StepUpForStudents.org to be notified about applications for the 2014-15 school year. Families with questions about the scholarship program can contact the Step Up Call Center at 1-877-7FL-SUFS (1-877-735-7837).



Sister Regina Ozuzu, principal of Bishop Larkin Catholic School in Port Richey, works through an exercise with Principal Tiffany McNealy of Bethel Elementary School of Seventh-day Adventist in Florida City, during a Success Partners Institute in Parrish in July.

Step Up For Students Success Partners expands

From Homestead to Jacksonville, and everywhere in between, Step Up's Office of Student Learning continues to provide a comprehensive program to build strong parent-school partnerships.

Over the summer, school administrators and teacher leaders from 115 schools attended in-depth training at three locations across the state. At these overnight institutes participants received training and resources designed to guide their school staff in the interactive study of creating relationships between the school and home.

The institutes are part of Step Up's Success Partners program, which is a two-year professional development program offered for free to Step Up scholarship partner schools. The program is rooted in research that states students' success, regardless of economic, racial-ethnic and education backgrounds, is dependent on parent involvement, said Carol Thomas, vice president of Student Learning.

This year's Success Partners Institute

sessions kicked off July 23 at DaySpring Episcopal Conference Center in Parrish, Fla., about nine miles northwest of Bradenton, with 70 participants from 31 schools from Miami to Deltona. The other sessions were held at retreat centers in Orlando and Jacksonville.

Schools will come together again in the winter for a second institute and receive the remaining modules.

Lucille Benjamin, a teacher from Mount Moriah Christian Fundamental Academy in St. Petersburg, didn't have high expectations for the institute at DaySpring, but was pleasantly surprised.

"My original reservations about attending the workshop were quickly dismissed after the first five minutes," she wrote on a feedback form. "The attention to detail with regards to the modules, delivery of instruction, and interaction with like-minded educators let me know that these two days will be worth my time away from home."

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J.J. Taylor sponsors "Going Green" event

Some students colored their hair for the day. Others painted their faces, while some did both. Most, at the very least, wore T-shirts in honor of the occasion. But one thing is certain: all of the participating students at New Jerusalem Christian Academy brought their "green" spirit to school for a "Going Green" event May 17.

The crowd of about 140 students, in kindergarten through eighth grade, was excited to hear the results of the school's recycling competition as well as the essay and art project contest, which kicked off on April 22, Earth Day, at the school in Seffner. As part of its partnership with Step Up For Students, J.J. Taylor Distributing sponsored the event to encourage sustainable habits, such as recycling. The company practices what it preaches, and recently installed a compressed natural gas fueling station at its Tampa facility and converted 43 delivery vehicles from diesel to compressed natural gas.

"Our company is dedicated to improving the communities where we do business," J.J. Taylor President Jay Martin said before the event. "We were happy to join our support of the Step Up program with our commitment to sustainability through an interactive and educational event for these students."

J.J. Taylor joined Step Up For Students as a corporate partner in 2011 and has since redirected a total of \$60 million to fund the scholarship program. The company is headquartered in Jupiter, Fla., and distributes import and malt beverages throughout Florida.

"We are truly honored to have the support of such a generous corporate partner in J.J. Taylor," said John Kirtley, Step Up founder and chairman. "Thanks to J.J. Taylor's contribution, more than 13,000 Florida students were able to choose the school that best fits their learning needs when they otherwise wouldn't have had that opportunity."

One of those students, Doris Aybar, now an eighth-grader at New Jerusalem, spoke at the event and thanked J.J. Taylor for its support of the scholarship program. She told of her mom's challenge raising her and her siblings alone and moving around from place to place while the family struggled financially. Then, Doris learned about Step Up through her church, New Jerusalem International Ministries, whose pastors founded the school she started attending during the 2012-13 school year.

"The first thing I noticed when I came to New Jerusalem was the sense of community here," Doris told the crowd. "It just felt like a big family. And that was exactly what I needed."

Florida Speaker of the House Will Weatherford attended the event as well and told students why he believes the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program is important, and why donors and supporters are critical to the program's success.

"The whole point of Step Up For Students, and the reason they go and raise all this money, and do all this work, is so that your parents can have a choice on where you go to school," he said. "And aren't you glad your parents have choice? Isn't that neat?"



Student Doris Aybar, a Step Up scholar, shared her story about finding New Jerusalem Christian Academy during an event on May 17. She also took first prize in a "Go Green" essay and art project competition.

The students cheered.

At the event, the first grade was named as the winner of the recycling competition and received a cupcake party as a prize, and three middle school students were also chosen as winners of the extra-credit essay and art project. The winners enjoyed rides in a natural gas truck and were given gift cards provided by J.J. Taylor. Doris, the student speaker, took first prize in the essay and art project competition.

DONOR UPDATE

The 2013-14 program cap of \$286.25 million was reached in June, merely six months into the fund-raising season. This tremendous accomplishment surpassed all previous records, with corporations filling the largest cap to date in the shortest time. It underscores the commitment the corporate community has for providing quality education to Florida's underprivileged children.

Step Up For Students is pleased to honor our partner corporations for their commitments made in 2013.

– Debbie Woerner, Step Up's executive vice president for development

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Donor Corner

While Florida Crystals' roots trace back five generations to Cuba, the company has been firmly planted in South Florida for more than 50 years. After the communist revolution in Cuba, the Fanjul family re-established its enterprise in the U.S. in 1960. Since that time, Florida Crystals, headquartered in Palm Beach County, has grown to become a fully integrated, multinational company. With its subsidiary ASR Group, it is the world's largest cane sugar refiner and marketer, producing more than 6.5 million tons of sugar per year through its refineries in Florida, California, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, Canada, Mexico, Dominican Republic, England and Portugal.

The company's sugar is marketed through leading brand names, including Domino®, C&H®, Florida Crystals®, Redpath®, Tate & Lyle®, Lyle's® and Sidul®. Although it is a global company, Florida is still its home, and the company's commitment to enrich the communities it serves remains strong.

Vivian Nobles never got past her first term of 10th grade. None of her four children received a high school diploma either.

And now Vivian and Martin, her husband of 37 years, are raising two of their 12 grandchildren, and they couldn't be happier.

"I didn't do it right the first time, so I was given a second chance," she said.

When Robin Phillips, the oldest of the granddaughters living with them, failed the sixth grade at her neighborhood school, Vivian knew she needed to search for help. She turned to Point of Grace Christian in their hometown of Perry and learned about the Step Up For Students Scholarship. She applied and once accepted, enrolled Robin to repeat sixth grade and enrolled her younger sister Emily Lawson as well. Emily was doing well at their neighborhood school, but Vivian said it was easier to have the girls at the same school because she had to drive them both.

She knew the family, who mostly lives on Martin's income as a carpenter and preacher, would have trouble scraping together money for uniforms and more, but it was a struggle worth having, the 55-year-old grandmother said.

"I didn't get the education I needed, and my children didn't get the education they should have," Vivian said. "I wanted more for my grandchildren."

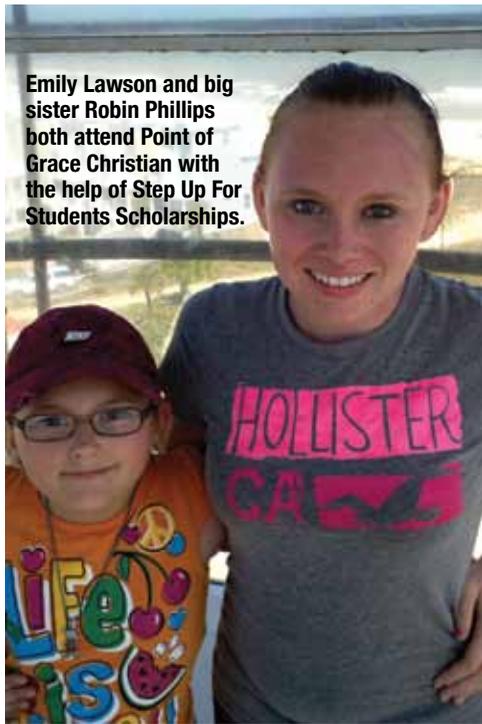
When Vivian noticed Robin having trouble at her old school, she felt helpless.

"I don't have a good education, so I couldn't explain it (the assignments) to her," she said.

Robin couldn't get the extra help she needed at school either, her grandmother added, and it affected the young girl at home, too.

"She just didn't care," Vivian said. "She wouldn't do her homework. She would just come home from school and go in her room."

But once she started at Point of Grace,



Emily Lawson and big sister Robin Phillips both attend Point of Grace Christian with the help of Step Up For Students Scholarships.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Robin Phillips /
Point of Grace Christian

everything started turning around. Shortly after she started at the private school in 2012, Robin wrote to Step Up For Students thanking the organization for the scholarship.

"I am seeing a big jump in my education," she wrote. "I am learning stuff I didn't know before."

Now, she is starting her eighth-grade year at the school and recently reflected on her first year at the school.

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SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT Holy Rosary Catholic School

Dianne Rumschlag describes working at Holy Rosary Catholic School for 16 years as a labor of love.

"I love the mission of our school. We are working with students for whom a good education can really make a big difference in their lives," said Rumschlag, who now serves as principal and is known to many in the inner-city community as Sister Dianne. "To me, it's worth all of the hard work."

Holy Rosary Catholic School is one of two sister Catholic schools in north Jacksonville that are known as The Guardian Catholic Schools. St. Pius V School is the other sister school. Combined, the two schools educated more than 350 students in pre-K through eighth grade during the 2012-13 school year, and are known to many in Jacksonville for their top-notch pre-K programs.

But there was a time when the success of The Guardian Schools was threatened.

The schools weren't linked together until 1995 when both were on the verge of closing due to high-operating costs and low enrollment. Formerly known as the Guardian of Dreams, The Guardian Catholic Schools was formed by Jacksonville community business leaders to keep the schools' doors from closing.

The Guardian Schools raised \$12,000 for tuition assistance in the first year, and through various fundraising efforts has since raised more than \$10 million to provide scholarships and fund daily operations and expansion projects according to Jim Selzer, former executive director. The schools have also been participating in the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program, which provided more than 175 scholarships to their students during the 2012-13 school year.

"Tuition assistance from Step Up For Students and its donors is essential, important and appreciated support," Selzer said. "It is a very critical element that allows us to be able to carry out our mission of providing a high-quality education to these students, regardless of their economic status or religious affiliation."

LaVetra Cooper is thankful her daughter is now a Step Up scholar. After being laid off from her long-time job in 2010, she thought her dreams of sending her daughter, Britney Cooper, to a private school would never become a reality.

But one day, LaVetra stopped by Holy Rosary and learned about Step Up. Britney is in the fourth grade and loves Holy Rosary, where her mother now works as an office manager. She has always maintained honor-roll grades. But it wasn't only the academics that drew LaVetra to the school.

"The values they are instilling into the children, the Catholic values, are something I was looking for," she said. "And the teachers really dedicate themselves to education. For them, it's clearly about more than just getting a paycheck."

With the continued support of the scholarship programs, The Guardian Schools supporters say they no longer fear the schools' doors will close, and more students like Britney will benefit.



Holy Rosary Catholic School Principal Dianne Rumschlag has dedicated 16 years to the school and says Step Up For Students has helped keep the Jacksonville private school going.

"Through annual contributions and personal time commitments of executives and employees, Florida Crystals is striving to add value to the lives of children and families in the communities, especially through educational and scholarship programs," said Pepe Fanjul, Jr., executive vice president of Florida Crystals.

A large part of this outreach benefits Florida students. The Fanjul family founded two charter schools in Palm Beach County, and Florida Crystals heavily supports Take Stock in Children, which is a college scholarship and mentor program. The company also partners with the National Campaign to Stop Violence each year, and brought the "Do The Write Thing" program to Palm Beach County, which encourages middle school students to examine the impact of youth violence and bullying through classroom discussions and writing. They are also involved in the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition, and Volunteer USA Foundation's "Love.Read.Learn!" program.

Through the years, Florida Crystals has redirected \$1.8 million in tax dollars to Step Up For Students, including its largest contribution of \$1 million this year. Its total contribution is providing nearly 430 scholarships to help give low-income students the opportunity to choose the school that best meets their needs.

"At Florida Crystals, we direct the majority of our philanthropic giving to educational initiatives, because our founders have taught us that while someone can take all your belongings, a good education is something that is yours forever," added Fanjul. "We want to help children have the best education possible."



STEP UP PARENTS JOIN FLORIDA PTA

Twenty parents with children who benefit from a Step Up For Students Scholarship became members of the Florida PTA during its annual Leader Convention held at Innisbrook Resort and Golf Club in Palm Harbor on July 12-14. With more than 300,000 members, the Florida PTA is the largest statewide volunteer organization working on behalf of children to unite education, community and family issues.

As part of Step Up's Parent Empowerment Network (PEN), Catherine Durkin Robinson, assistant director of outreach, who heads up that initiative, encouraged Step Up parents to join the organization so they can gain access to tools that will allow them to better advocate for their children so they have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

"Bringing private school and scholarship parents into a PTA convention was a real opportunity for low-income moms and dads to participate and learn from parental advocates from all over the state," said Robinson. "It was also an opportunity for PTA members to meet people who participate in a program they are

getting to know in a whole new way."

During the convention, Robinson facilitated a meeting between PTA leadership and Step Up scholarship parents to begin a conversation about private school parents and their need for choices when it comes to their children's education.

Eileen Segal, outgoing president of the Florida PTA, and Mindy Haas, incoming president, welcomed Step Up parents to the convention.

"We are thrilled to have you here," Segal said, adding this was the first step in what she hopes is an ongoing dialogue with Step Up parents.

Mutual respect and understanding was a theme carried throughout the convention.

Joselyn Saffore, a Step Up parent whose two children attend St. Peter Claver Catholic School in Tampa, enjoyed learning about procedures that would make her a better school leader, ideas for fundraising opportunities and how to agree to disagree.

She said she was thrilled to participate and bring these lessons back to her school.



APPLICATION ALERT:

2014-15 Applications Available Early: Beginning in early October, RENEWAL families can apply for the 2014-15 school year online. We anticipate a record number of applicants in the spring, so be sure to beat the rush.

PARENTS:

Don't forget to visit the new "Public Services for Parents" section of our website, where you can find community-partner organizations that may be helpful to you. This section is found in the green box on the right side of the home page under "For Parents".

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

"I learned a lot. More than I ever did," she said in a telephone interview. "I didn't know what an adjective was, or a pronoun. I was catching on faster and faster."

It only seemed like a couple of months before she felt up to speed with the other students. In the seventh grade, she said, it was her history and homeroom teacher, Randy Maubach, who motivated her even more and helped her maintain grades high enough to be on the A-B Honor Roll for two terms. The other two terms she missed the honor roll by a point each time.

As it turns out, she also helped Maubach, who started his teaching career just last year after retiring from the U.S. Air Force. He had been wondering if he had made a good career decision.

"I made the right choice," he said, realizing the impact he's had on Robin. "She's a determined student. She started out slow, but once we sat her down and said, 'You are capable of this. You can do this,' she realized she could. ... Once we got her past that hurdle, the rest of the year she did well."

Vivian is perhaps the proudest witness to Robin's success.

"Robin has really done a lot since she got in this school," said Vivian. "I don't know what we would have done without it. I just thank God for it."

It's clear Robin is proud of herself, too, and nearly sings when she talks about school because she is so excited. Now, she is looking toward the future of being the first in her family to graduate from high school.

"That will make me so happy," she said. "It will be like starting a new generation of school."



This is the official newsletter for Step Up For Students, published four times a year.

About Step Up For Students:

Step Up For Students provides legislatively authorized K-12 scholarships and related support to give economically disadvantaged families the freedom to choose the best learning options for their children.

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About Point of Grace Christian

Point of Grace Christian in Perry opened its doors for the first time during the 2010-11 school year and began participating in Step Up For Students the following year. The school provides students with a Christian-based education and uses a college preparatory curriculum. It has added grade levels each year, including 10th grade for the 2013-14 school year, with a goal to ultimately offer a K-12 education. During the 2012-13 school year, the school had 138 students enrolled in kindergarten through ninth grade, including 18 Step Up scholars. Tuition was \$3,000 annually per student. The school uses the Stanford 10 test to measure academic achievement and is accredited by the National Association of Private Schools.

SUCCESS PARTNERS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Rachel Bork, a history teacher from NorthRidge Christian Academy in Haines City, summed up the training this way: "This program will be a great tool to turn to for the age-old problem: How do we (educators) develop the young people and build a bridge between home and school?"

During the institute, participants engaged in hands-on learning: moving around the room and sharing educational quotes with other educators, reading and responding to articles related to parent engagement, and generally gaining an understanding of the ways individuals can work together in teams to accomplish goals. They also participated in an "anthropological dig" exercise, examining their school's physical layout and artifacts in the school through the eyes of an anthropologist, and discovered how "family friendly and welcoming" their school facility appeared.

"The teachers' passion for parent partnerships was contagious," Thomas said. "This energy continues at the school sites as modules are implemented, with the support of the coordinators from the Office of Student Learning."

Each school is assigned its own Office of Student Learning staff member, who will visit the school a minimum of four times during the year, as well as being available for planning, co-facilitating and troubleshooting throughout the school year.

The capstone of the Success Partners work is the web-based Learning Compact, which features the Common Core State Standards, instructional strategies, parent and student interventions, while at the same time addressing social and behavior issues.

As a result of engaging in these Success Partner modules, each school develops and implements an individualized parent partnership plan.

"In the end, it's all about student learning," said Thomas.

Schools interested in learning more about the Success Partners program, can contact Carol Thomas at cthomas@sufs.org.