



Jacksonville, Florida

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# Step Up Provides Help for Struggling Students

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In a time when government budgets are tight, the private sector is stepping in to help struggling students with a Florida program called Step Up.

Christina Long says it changed her life. She just graduated high school and plans to get a teaching degree, but three years ago it was a different story.

"I hated math. I hated science. I hated everything," she said.

Step Up paid for Christina to switch from her Duval County public school to smaller, private school. There, she got more one on one time with teachers.

"I seen a change 180- where she was the first one up in the morning. That was

quite a blessing there to have her so interested in school," said Christina's dad Michael Long.

Long is a single father and recently disabled.

"There's no way that I could have taken care of three children and paid any kind of tuition," said Michael Long.

2,500 Duval county kids are in Step Up at 85 private and charter schools.

The program gives scholarships to low-income students for out of district public schools or private schools. Its all funded by private companies. Monday two Jacksonville companies presented checks to the program. Fidelity donated \$2.3 million and PSS World Medical gave a \$1 million check.

Step Up doesn't just cover tuition. It also pays for things like uniforms, school supplies, tutors and textbooks.

Monday Governor Charlie Crist stopped by one of those schools, The Potters House Christian School, to support the program.

"To give children the opportunity to have a great education is critical and important," said Crist.

"If i hadn't gotten that opportunity through the scholarship I probably would have wound up dropping out," said Christina Long.

There's no better success story to go from a want-a-be drop out to a girl pursuing her masters degree.

**Video available at:**

<http://www.news4jax.com/video/17952471/index.html>