



## School owner helps foster parents seek scholarships

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Private school owner Michele Wedemeyer has offered to help local parents — particularly foster parents and guardians — apply for free government scholarships to private schools, whether they want to attend her school or not.

Scholarships are available to children that qualify for the free or reduced-price school lunches under the National School Lunch Act, and meet one of four other criteria. Foster kids are automatically eligible.

“It is important to note that not only are all foster children eligible, but even kids that have been returned to their biological parents as well, or if grandparents have custody, etc. There is no out-of-pocket-expense for the foster parents or legal guardians to place the children in a private school through this scholarship,” Wedemeyer said.

“Also, any child entering kindergarten or first grade qualifies as well,” she continued. “The benefits to these children are astronomical - smaller class sizes, more one-on-one teaching to each child. The academic rewards are endless.”

She said she believes that a “bridge to knowledge” for these kids is being built through these kinds of scholarships, “But most of the public doesn’t even know they are out there for their kids.”

Wedemeyer is the owner of a private Christian school for kids K-12 called Agape Christian Academy located on Laurel Drive in North Fort Myers. She also owns the adjoining Love & Laughter Learning Center, a day care center.

Specifically the requirements for the

free scholarships are: A student is eligible for a scholarship through this program if the student qualifies for free or reduced-price school lunches under the National School Lunch Act and:

- 1) Was counted as a full-time student during the previous state fiscal year for purposes of state per-student funding; or
- 2) Received a scholarship from an eligible nonprofit scholarship funding organization or the state of Florida during the previous school year; or
- 3) Is eligible to enter kindergarten or first grade; or
- 4) Is currently placed, or during the previous fiscal year was placed, in foster care.

Gov. Charlie Crist was recently in the area, talking about the importance of adoption and foster care. This is a benefit for foster kids, said Wedemeyer, that could help them academically.

Foster parent Trish C. (who asked that her last name be withheld) said this is a tremendous opportunity.

“For foster kids, and any child, these scholarships could mean a smaller classroom, where they can catch up if needed, especially if they have a learning disorder,” she said. “A lot of these kids may be behind in their education due to their situation.”

She said some may have moved around or caught up in other personal circumstances that have gotten them behind.

“They can be caught up quicker with smaller classrooms and more one-on-one teaching or learning,” Trish continued. “Some of these kids are smart as tacks but just haven’t been given the opportunity.”

Wedemeyer said she welcomes any parent or guardian who wants to know more about the scholarships to call her at the center. Grandparents raising grandchildren are welcome, too, she said.

“In North Fort Myers, a lot of grandparents are raising or have guardianship of their grandchildren,” she said. “These students also qualify for private school scholarships. If they are on limited budget, some grandparents would still love to have their grandchildren in a private school but would never imagine they could afford it.”

Wedemeyer also is offering to help anyone with application packets.

“Applications can be confusing,” she said. “They would have to go through a school that accepts what’s called the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program.”

She said her school is one, and there are others.

Another free program she offers at her pre-school, Love & Laughter

Learning Center, is the Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Program for children ages 4 and 5. The daycare is part of the VPK or Voluntary Program licensed through the State of Florida.

“This is free to the parent,” said Wedemeyer.

Love & Laughter provides daycare for kids from infants to 13-year-olds, and has a before and after school program.

The school and the center is located at 1313 Laurel Drive in North Fort Myers. Wedemeyer noted that she would be happy to talk to anybody about the process and provide more information. You can call her at 656-6800.