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Governor Jeb Bush Thanks Corporate Scholarship Donors

Parents, school administrators rally to celebrate school choice and the achievements of Step Up For Students Scholarship recipients

TAMPA, Fla., Oct. 17, 2005 – Governor Jeb Bush and executives from Lowe’s Companies addressed 1,200 parents, students and teachers at a Step Up For Students rally at Tampa Baptist Academy today. Gathered to thank Tampa Bay corporations that fund scholarships for low-income students, participants also recognized the academic achievements of scholarship recipients. Tampa Bay, home to more than 1,300 scholarship students and over 200 participating schools, was chosen to host the event because of the generosity Bay Area corporations have demonstrated by their participation in the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program.

Tampa Bay area state legislators joined Gov. Bush for festivities that included song, dance and the personal story of Shannon Coates and her daughter, Taylor, 7, who is a Step Up For Students Scholarship recipient. Taylor was born prematurely with boundless energy and several health problems, but Ms. Coates knew she could thrive in the right educational setting. Thanks to her Step Up For Students Scholarship, she is now an excellent student and a dedicated dancer, cheerleader and singer.

“Going to school, working and raising a child is exhausting, but I’m not going to put Taylor’s life on hold because I haven’t finished my education yet. I very much want the best for her and we’ve been able to have that because of the Step Up For Students scholarship. This program, and all the participating companies, have made our dreams come true,” said Coates.

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Governor Jeb Bush told audience members that the support of Step Up For Students Scholarship donors empowers parents to find the best educational setting for their children. “In a growing community like Tampa Bay, we must provide a menu of educational options as diverse as our students. The commitment of Step Up For Students donors is building a strong economy and community for Tampa Bay’s future.”

Concluding the program, Lowe’s Companies presented an \$8 million check to Governor Bush and the Step Up For Students program. Kem Smith, regional vice president of operations for Lowe’s said, “Our participation in the Step Up For Students program is one of many ways that Lowe’s supports education in Tampa Bay and communities across the country. By supporting programs that help children gain access to a good education, we believe we are not only contributing to a cause that’s important to our customers and employees, but we’re also helping build a strong foundation for Tampa Bay area youth, and students across the state, who will become the employees, homeowners and community leaders of tomorrow.”

Representatives from event sponsors Lowe’s, Albertson’s, Chico’s, WCI Communities, WellCare, SDE, Verizon and Fifth Third Bank were pleased by the opportunity to interact with the students that receive the scholarships they fund. Following the rally, they distributed boxed lunches, provided by Albertson’s, to students as they boarded buses headed back to their schools.

The Corporate Tax Credit program – also known as “Step Up For Students Scholarships” – provides K-12 scholarships that allow over 14,000 low-income Florida students to attend a private school or out-of-district public school. One hundred percent of corporate contributions go directly to funding scholarships – not a single penny can be used for administrative costs. Florida companies continue to embrace the program, with year to date commitments up 100 percent over the same period last year.

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