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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*

**ORLANDO, Fla., Oct. 20, 2006** – Governor Jeb Bush and executives from WellCare, Albertson's and Walgreens addressed more than 2,000 parents, students and teachers at a Step Up For Students rally at El Calvario Christian Academy today. Gathered to thank corporations that fund K-12 scholarships for low-income students, participants also recognized the academic achievements of scholarship recipients and celebrated the scholarship program's five years of growth and success. Orlando, which is home to about 2,400 scholarship students, was chosen to host the event because of the generosity the area corporations have demonstrated by their participation in the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program.

Orlando area state legislators joined Gov. Bush and corporate donors in celebration of the scholarship program's past and future success with the theme "Five Years Plus 100 Donors Equals 20,000 Children's Lives Saved" in recognition of all the many corporate donors that support the program and the thousands of children whose lives have been changed as a result. The Step Up For Students Corporate Tax Credit (CTC) Scholarship Program has grown tremendously over the past five years and as a result of over 100 generous CTC donors, up to 20,000 disadvantaged children throughout the state will be able to receive a Step Up For Students Scholarship.

During the rally, the Governor commended the corporate donors whose corporate tax dollars have enabled thousands of children find the education that fits their individual needs. "Thanks to the tremendous generosity of the participating corporations, up to 20,000 disadvantaged children throughout the state will receive a scholarship this year," said Governor Jeb Bush. "These donations will allow the Step Up For Students program to expand and offer thousands of children an education tailored to their individual needs."

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## **STEP UP FOR STUDENTS RALLY / Page 2**

Festivities included a personal story from Laquanda Fields, a junior from Teacher's Hands Academy who has benefited from the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program for the past five years. Laquanda gave a heartwarming testimony on how the scholarship program has changed her life.

"Step Up For Students and its generous donors have given me a second chance to make something of myself," said Laquanda Fields. "Thanks to the scholarship, I have been able to receive an excellent education, a second chance to achieve academically, and the hope for my future."

The audience also enjoyed a special performance by Karen Feliciano, an eleventh-grader attending Covenant Christian School in Palm Bay on a Step Up For Students Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship from the Children First Florida scholarship funding organization. Rally attendees watched in awe as Karen sang two of her own songs – one in Spanish and one in English – thanking Step Up For Students corporate donors, and honoring Gov. Jeb Bush for advocating for school choice.

Concluding the program, Walgreens presented an \$8 million check to Governor Bush and the Step Up For Students program. "We believe that by supporting Step Up For Students, we are not only contributing to a cause that's important to our customers and employees, but we're also helping to provide the educational foundation for students across the state who will become tomorrow's employees and community leaders," said Debbie Garza, Walgreens Director of Government and Community Relations.

Representatives from event sponsors WellCare, Albertson's, Lowe's, Progress Energy, Chico's, SDE, and Mercantile Bank were pleased by the opportunity to interact with the students that receive the scholarships they fund. "WellCare applauds Governor Bush for his tremendous leadership on educational reform and excellence throughout his tenure," said Imtiaz "MT" Sattaur, President of WellCare Florida, title sponsor of the event. "Thousands of children are achieving significant educational progress because of Governor Bush's passion for the successful and growing public-private Step Up for Students partnership. The parents in this program deserve great praise for their hard work, dedication and commitment in positioning their children for a brighter future. WellCare is committed to healthy bodies, minds and communities and is proud to be part of such a great program as Step Up for Students."

The Corporate Tax Credit program – also known as "Step Up For Students Scholarships" – provides K-12 scholarships that allow more than 15,000 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. For more information, visit [www.stepupforstudents.com](http://www.stepupforstudents.com).

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