



**BUILDING  
FUTURES**  
Bridging  
Gaps

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Governor Charlie Crist Thanks Corporate Sponsors**

*More than 500 Parents, Teachers and Students rally to celebrate educational options and achievements of Step Up For Students scholarship recipients*

MIAMI, Fla., Dec. 10, 2007—Governor Charlie Crist was joined by Rep. Ronald Brisé, Former Congresswoman Carrie Meek as well as other dignitaries on Dec. 10 to thank corporate sponsors for their donations to fund K-12 scholarships for low-income families at the “Building Futures, Bridging Gaps” rally at Miami Union Academy.

The fourth annual Step Up For Students Donor Appreciation Rally was held in South Florida, where more than 4,500 children are attending a school of their parents’ choice on Step Up For Students Scholarships.

More than 500 attendees celebrated the past six years of scholarship success by thanking donors like Wachovia, CVS Caremark and Waste Management. The generosity of national corporations allows over 20,000 children to be served statewide.

Gov. Crist commended the corporations who have made this program a success and whose donations have empowered thousands of disadvantaged parents to find the school that best suits their child’s educational needs.

“These scholarships are an example of how we can adapt public education to a new century,” Governor Crist said. “Step Up for Students is one way that we are diversifying our approach to public education and school choice initiatives. By giving parents the ability to choose the education that best meets their child’s learning needs means that all students are given access to the world-class education Florida has to offer.”

Festivities included a personal story from Melody Cherfils, a graduate from Miami Union Academy and former Step Up For Students Scholarship recipient. Before receiving the scholarship, Melody had a GPA of less than 1.0 and was considering dropping out.

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Miami Union Academy successfully graduates 98 percent of its students and 90 percent continue on to higher education. Cherfils was among the success of her classmates and graduated in 2006. She currently attends Oakwood College in Huntsville, Ala.

“The generous donors have given me a second chance at an excellent education and more importantly, a future,” Cherfils said. “Due to my academic struggles, I never imagined graduating high school let alone pursuing college. The scholarship allowed me to find a school that met my educational needs and helped me realize my full potential.”

This event celebrated donors, like Wachovia, who has been a part of this innovative program since its inception and has generously donated \$12.5 million over the past six years.

“Florida’s children deserve a quality education and Wachovia is pleased to contribute to a program that helps children succeed,” said Jorge Gonzalez, Wachovia Regional President for Miami-Dade, Monroe and Broward Counties.

During the event, executives from CVS Caremark and Waste Management, Inc. announced that their companies have signed on to be the newest corporate donors to the Step Up For Students program.

Scott Wasikowski, the South Florida Regional Sales Manager for CVS/pharmacy, the retail division of CVS Caremark, and Michael J. Ayotte, the Director of Government Affairs for CVS Caremark, presented an oversized check in the amount of \$750,000 to Governor Crist for the Step Up For Students program. The generous donation will fund 200 scholarships for low-income children in Florida.

“Children need to be challenged in an environment that provides the most suitable education for their individual needs,” Scott Wasikowski said. “Educational options encourage creativity and student achievement and stimulate competition that drives innovation and success.”

Waste Management also announced their new partnership with Step Up For Students and celebrated building futures through the success of the scholarship program by donating \$1 million to Step Up For Students, which will provide funding for more than 265 scholarships.

“As a corporate custodian, it is our responsibility to address the needs of our communities, including the education of our youth,” said Jeff Sabin, Government Affairs Manager for Waste Management, Inc. of Florida. .  
“Waste Management has a strong commitment to making a positive difference in our environment and our communities”

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Rep. Brisé, D-Miami, was the Master of Ceremonies at the Rally and is an alumnus of Miami Union Academy where he is a member of the board of directors. Brisé continuously pledges his support of the scholarship program and honors his promise of representing his constituents' best interest.

"Parental choice is a bold and powerful idea that I will continue to support," Rep. Brisé said. "I am here today to celebrate the generous donations from corporations and illustrate the bipartisan support of the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program."

Former Congresswoman Carrie Meek was presented with an appreciation banner from students as a thank you for supporting educational options and congratulating The Carrie Meek Foundation for partnering with Step Up For Students in distributing K-12 scholarships to economically disadvantaged students in North Miami-Dade.

"It is such an honor to be here today in the presence of all of these young, talented students who aspire to do great things with their lives," Meek said. "The Carrie Meek Foundation believes in providing a quality education for all of Florida's children, regardless of their socioeconomic status."

The audience also heard a heartwarming testimony by a mother, Marlenis Costa, whose two children are Step Up For Students Scholarship recipients and her older daughter benefits from the McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities. All three of Costa's children attend Champagnat Catholic School of Hialeah.

In addition, the Rally attendees enjoyed a student solo by Clenol Jean, 14, who sang *Hero*. Clenol is a member of the Miami Union Academy Choir and has been a scholarship recipient for two and a half years.

Representatives from event sponsors Albertson's, Chico's Charities, Florida Crystals, Lowe's, Tarmac, Burger King, SDE and Wachovia were pleased by the opportunity to interact with the students who receive the scholarships that the corporations are funding.

### **About Miami Union Academy**

Miami Union Academy has its roots firmly embedded in the Bethany SDA Church. The school was founded in 1917. In spite of a history checkered by challenges at every level of its painful growth, MUA is presently an Early Childhood Center through twelfth grade school. This prestigious accomplishment became a reality in 1987 through the combined efforts of its administration, local school board, constituency, and the Southeastern Conference officials. Miami Union Academy stands today, a living testimony of the faith, insight and perseverance of its founding fathers.

Miami Union Academy is a K-12 school that serves more than 300 children, 100 of whom attend on the Step Up For Students scholarships. The school graduates 95 percent of its students, and 90 percent go on to college. Average tuition at the school is \$4,000 per year. For more information, visit [www.muasda.org](http://www.muasda.org)

### **About Step Up For Students**

The Florida Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program - also known as "Step Up For Students" - provides K-12 scholarships that allow roughly 20,000 low-income Florida students to attend a private school or out-of-district public school. Step Up For Students scholarships are funded by corporations that redirect up to 75 percent of their corporate state tax liability to a qualified Scholarship Funding Organization in exchange for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. One hundred percent of corporate contributions go directly to fund scholarships - not a single penny can be used for administrative costs. For more information, visit [www.stepupforstudents.com](http://www.stepupforstudents.com)

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