

A large, light blue graphic of a pencil is oriented diagonally across the page. The pencil is stylized with a thick body and a sharp, white eraser at the top right. The background is white with a large, faint, light blue watermark of the same pencil graphic.

# SCHOLARSHIP TAX CREDIT PROGRAMS: HELPING URBAN STUDENTS



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**F**ar too often, students in our nation's urban centers are trapped in schools that fail to meet their needs. In fact, in America today, more than five million kids, most of whom are low-income or minority, are attending more than 10,000 schools that are failing under the No Child Left Behind Act. The majority of these students attend urban schools.

Scholarship tax credit programs help low-income students in urban locations by providing them with scholarships to attend schools that meet their needs. These state programs are benefitting students in cities such as:

- Phoenix, AZ
- Jacksonville, FL
- Miami, FL
- Tampa, FL
- Atlanta, GA
- Des Moines, IA
- Philadelphia, PA
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Providence, RI

## Examples of urban students benefitting from scholarship tax credit programs

**In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, low-income students have benefitted from the state's scholarship tax credit program.**

A study by the Commonwealth Foundation in Pennsylvania found that the Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program has benefitted low-income students in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> Specifically the report found that students receiving scholarships from the scholarship organization Futuro Educacional, Inc., were primarily from families whose incomes were below the Philadelphia average. Their parents and guardians were highly satisfied with their children's private schools and rated them as superior to Philadelphia Public Schools.

**In Florida, there are numerous stories of how students have benefitted from the state's corporate scholarship tax credit program. The following are stories provided by Step Up for Students, the organization that helps to administer the state's Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program.**

### **Israel Mitchell Potter's House Christian Academy Jacksonville, FL**

Fourteen-year-old Israel Mitchell struggled at his public school and even failed sixth grade because he was not in an environment that could address his learning needs. However, through a second chance provided by the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program, Israel was able to attend Potter's House Christian Academy in Jacksonville, where he has been able to overcome his academic challenges and rise as an honor student.

By the time Israel entered the sixth grade at the local public middle school, his grades had dropped from A's, B's and C's to D's and F's. His attitude about school also changed, as he went from a cheerful and outgoing student to a discouraged and withdrawn student. His struggles in school continued and he eventually failed sixth grade.

Concerned about her son's future, Annette Mitchell sought advice from local resources. That is when she heard about the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program from one of her friends who served on the local school board. Thrilled to find a solution, Annette applied for a scholarship for Israel immediately. After Israel was accepted on the scholarship program, Annette chose to send him to Potter's House Christian Academy because she felt the academic programs and structured environment would be able to help him get back on track. She was right. After only a few months at Potter's House, Israel began to show improvements in every way. His attitude about school changed and he was once again eager to go to school. As a result of being placed in an educational environment tailored to his individual learning needs, his grades improved and he became more involved in his classes and extracurricular activities.

# Scholarship Tax Credit Programs: Helping Urban Students

## Melody Cherfils

### Miami Union Academy Graduate

Melody Cherfils is a 2006 graduate of Miami Union Academy, a school she was able to attend thanks to the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program. Melody's story is one of overcoming extreme difficulties in school and life to get on the right path to success.

Prior to receiving a Step Up For Students Scholarship, Melody faced many challenges in her public school classes. By the time she reached eighth grade, she was failing all of her classes and her grade point average (GPA) dropped below a 1.0. She did not foresee graduating and going to college seemed impossible. With no hope left in herself or her academic abilities, Melody thought her only option was to drop out of school.

Melody's mother, Mellie Prophete, cared too much about her daughter to allow her to continue down a destructive path. Mellie searched until she found a solution through the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program. The scholarship enabled her mother, a single parent with limited financial means, to send Melody to Miami Union Academy, a school that she felt could help her daughter rise above her academic challenges.

The teachers at Miami Union worked with Melody to address her learning needs and help her overcome the problems she had been facing at her previous school. As time passed, Melody progressed and was finally able to grasp the material in her classes. By the end of her first year at Miami Union, she was making A's, B's and C's – a big leap forward from the failing grades she was making at her previous school.

During the next few years at Miami Union Academy, Melody continued to strengthen her academic abilities and her GPA continued to rise. By her junior year, her GPA had increased to a 3.0. With better grades, Melody's self-esteem also improved and she was encouraged to try harder. She began to think about her future and longed to go to college.

Over the next year, Melody worked hard to make good grades and by the end of her senior year, her GPA had risen to a 3.5 for the year. In the spring of 2006, Melody received her high school diploma, an accomplishment that had once seemed unachievable.

**In Rhode Island, there are numerous stories of how students have benefitted from the state's corporate scholarship tax credit program. The following are excerpts of letters from parents or students to Governor Carcieri, provide by the Rhode Island Scholarship Alliance.**

"My son, Gregory Clifton, is a 7th grader at Community School in Providence. He has been a student at CP since the third grade. Losing the R.I. Scholarship Tax Credit would mean that CP would no longer be able to provide scholarships and tuition assistance for Gregory to continue to attend the school next year. We are asking that you please reconsider eliminating the tax credit. Gregory is receiving an education that will allow him to attend the high school of his choice and excel in his chosen career path. He absolutely will not receive the same comprehensive course work through our very sub-standard public school system." - Dawn Clifton, Providence, RI

"The Scholarship Tax Credit has given many students like myself opportunities I had only dreamed of. It all started by allowing me to attend Community Prep. School in Providence, where I was provided with an outstanding education tailored to my abilities. I am currently a senior at Brown University, and I am going to work for Goldman Sachs in New York next year. None of this would have been possible for me if it were not for the RI Corporate Scholarship Tax Credit." - Brendan Alper, Pawtucket, RI

"This credit has allowed my son to excel at Community Prep. The love he has for his school is unbelievable. He has learned so much and because the school is so small has not been lost in the system, for a child struggling with ADD this is very important. Without programs like this we could not afford to send him. Please Save this Tax Credit." - Melissa Nicholaus, Rumford, RI

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Robert Maranto, "Getting More, Paying Less: Children Taxpayers and Public Schools Benefit from the Educational Improvement Tax Credit," *Commonwealth Policy Brief, Vol. 03, No. 3*, The Commonwealth Foundation, March 2003.