



Westside Edition

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Senate honors student for transformation

Scholarship program helped him get back on track



Anthony

Twelve - year old Anthony Hannon went to Tallahassee on Tuesday for the Florida Senate's opening ceremony. But the Clay County resident wasn't there as a spectator.

He was there to be recognized by Senate President Jim King of Jacksonville and his Senate colleagues.

The sixth grader, who attends Potter's House of Christian Fellowship on the Westside, was once labeled a special-needs student. Though always promoted, he had fallen at least a grade level behind in his work and lost confidence in his abilities.

At the public school he was attending, he would lash out in frustration, sometimes crying or yelling, said his mother, Tranine Hannon.

But it was a far different Anthony who was honored by the Senate. This Anthony has scored at or above grade level on his standardized tests. He gets along well with his teacher and classmates and says he's motivated to do his work.

Anthony was cited as exemplifying success in the state's corporate tax credit scholarship program, which now provides for nearly 12,000 students in more than 900 schools. After his troubles in his former school, his parents received a tax credit

Scholarship so they could send him to the private academy run by Potter's House of Christian Fellowship Church in 2002.

The corporate voucher program has been criticized because of its lack of state oversight, including not knowing which students or schools were receiving the vouchers. The program gives companies a dollar-for-dollar tax credit on their scholarship donations to organizations that give out vouchers for students to attend private schools.

There have since been several proposed measures by Education Commissioner Jim Horne and legislators to tighten the program.

In Anthony's case, his mother said she fought with public school officials for two years because they wanted to put him in special education classes, and she didn't think he qualified. The former teacher's assistant said his problems began in third grade when he became increasingly frustrated.

"He was slower than the rest of his class, but it wasn't because of his intelligence," she said. "It was because of his self esteem. His grades were low - C's and D's - but he wasn't failing."

For his part, Anthony said he got the boost he needed at Potter's House.

“It turned me around because they knew how to handle me and not deal with my anger,” he said. “I needed to be told to do better. If I needed extra help, they would pull me to the side if everybody else was working and didn’t need them then.”

Hannon said part of the change had to do with prayer and part with encouragement from his teachers.

“They are very positive yet firm,” she said. “They deal with him on the same level that I deal with him at home. That means

standing up to him and saying, ‘Yes, I understand you are frustrated, but this is not the way to act.’ ”

When Anthony entered fifth grade, his mother said she didn’t tell his teacher about Anthony’s problems. It wasn’t until the end of the year that the teacher checked his past record. When she did, she told Hannon she couldn’t believe it was the same student.

“He still is progressing so he’s not there yet,” Hannon said. “But he’s way beyond where he was.”
