

Step Up For Students March 2008 Student Spotlight

The Hibbs Family Escambia Christian School Pensacola, FL



Sharon Hibbs is the proud parent of three children attending Escambia Christian School in Pensacola on Step Up For Students Scholarships. The scholarship program gave Sharon the ability to choose the best school for her children, all three of whom required a specialized learning environment to meet their needs.

As a divorced, single mother, Sharon is the sole provider for her children and is dedicated to making sure that all of her children's needs are met, including their education. So when her children faced difficulties in their public school, Sharon became concerned for their wellbeing and their future.

Her youngest daughter, Shaniah, was born with a progressive hearing loss that had worsened over her lifetime, and she eventually became half deaf in her left ear. Shaniah required a more focused learning environment to allow her to pick up on the necessary academic fundamentals. Because she was not in an environment that could meet her needs, her grades suffered.

Sharon's son Timothy had another obstacle to overcome. He was born with a learning delay that affected his cognitive abilities, making it difficult for him to learn. Even though he was scoring a 4.5 out of 6 on the FCAT exams, his performance in his classes was below average, even to the point of failing.

Sharon's oldest daughter Tina also struggled due to a learning disability with speech and language. As a result, she was placed in an Individual Education Program (IEP) that would provide her with one-on-one attention to help address her learning problems. However, after she scored above average on the standardized tests, she was taken off the IEP. Unfortunately, this caused her even more problems as she entered middle school. By the second grading period in sixth grade, she was failing her classes, even though tests proved she was scoring at the high school level. She needed an academic setting that would allow her true capabilities to shine through.

Sharon tried everything to help her children – meeting with teachers, tutors and even intervention programs. She decided her only options were to either move to another school district or send her children to private school. But as a parent with limited financial means, she knew she could not afford the tuition at a private school. Thankfully, she found the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program and was given the opportunity to choose the best school for her children. Sharon chose to send Shaniah, Timothy and Tina to Escambia Christian School – a school she felt could address the specific learning needs of each one of her children. She was right.

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Hibbs Family/2

Since attending Escambia Christian, Shaniah, who once fell behind in school because of her hearing loss, has been able to focus and bring her grades up. Her improved academic performance and rise in confidence have encouraged her to pursue her dream of becoming a veterinarian.

Timothy has also had a complete turnaround after entering his parent-selected school. After just a few short months of attending Escambia Christian, Timothy went from failing to bringing home A's and B's. His stellar grades even landed him a spot on the Dean's List.

Escambia Christian was also the answer for Tina. Since attending the school, her grades have improved significantly and she has gained the confidence she needed to reach her full potential. The change in environment has made all the difference in the world.

Although Sharon Hibbs makes sacrifices for her children, including spending about \$4,000 per year to cover costs not covered by the scholarship (such as transportation, food and additional fees), she agrees that it is worth the differences she witnesses in her children's academic performance.

"Step Up For Students gave my children a ray of hope for their future and the opportunity to overcome tremendous challenges," Sharon says. "I am truly grateful for everyone that contributes to this program and those that work hard to make what was once a dream, now a reality."

About Escambia Christian School

Located in Pensacola, Escambia Christian Academy serves children in grades Pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade. The school currently serves 170 students, 54 of which are receiving Step Up For Students Scholarships. The standardized testing method used at Escambia is the Stanford 10. The cost of tuition at the school is \$2,500 for Pre-Kindergarten; \$2,600 for Kindergarten through fifth grade; and \$2,700 for grades sixth through eighth.

About the Step Up For Students Scholarship Recipients

The typical Step Up For Students scholarship family has an average income of \$24,489 for a family of four, and more than 60 percent of the scholarship recipients come from single-parent homes. The typical scholarship student is an ethnic minority living with a struggling single parent/caregiver in a high crime community. They are either below grade level, failing at their previous school or both when they receive a scholarship. Parents, who find their children in these circumstances and care about their future, look for viable options. Parents apply for Step Up For Students Scholarships so their children can attend the school best suited for their special needs, beliefs, and abilities, and to address negative trends in their child's learning skills and/or environment.

Step Up For Students Scholarships are funded by corporations that redirect up to 75 percent of their corporate state income tax liability to a qualified Scholarship Funding Organization in exchange for a dollar-for-dollar tax credit. For more information or to learn how your corporation can participate in the program, visit www.StepUpForStudents.com, or call 1-800 782-9140 for more information.

Other ways you can support Step Up For Students. Monetary donations and grants from individuals, foundations and other organizations are vital to the scholarship program. Because 100 percent of the CTC funds must be used for scholarships, there is no allowance in the law to cover program costs associated with administering and distributing the scholarships. Program costs are funded by generous individuals and foundations that believe in equipping all of Florida's children with the educational tools for a successful future. It only costs the Step Up For Students scholarship funding organizations \$50 to administer each scholarship. Because each donation is matched 100 percent by the Walton Family Foundation, a donation of only \$25 will provide \$3,750 scholarship to a low-income child. For more information, call 1 (866) 344-9553 or visit www.stepupforstudents.com/donors.htm.

