



May 2006 Student Spotlight:



Ja'Kel Young

Innovation Schools of Excellence, Tallahassee, FL

Brandi Green, mother of six-year-old Ja'Kel Young, knows how important a proper education is to her child's future. That is why she is thankful for the Step Up For Students Program and its donors who made it possible for her son to attend a school where he could begin to develop important educational skills and build the foundation for a successful future.

In August 2005, Ja'Kel began attending kindergarten class at his assigned public school in Tallahassee. However, during the first week of school, Brandi received several phone calls a day from the school telling her that her son was having disciplinary problems. This came as a shock to Brandi since Ja'Kel never had behavior problems at home. The school informed Brandi that they wanted to test Ja'Kel for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Brandi knew in her heart that there was nothing wrong with her son and that he only needed better structure in the classroom, but as a single parent who is also a fulltime student at Florida A&M University, Brandi knew she did not have the means to send Ja'Kel to a private school that could offer the environment her son needed. That is

where Step Up For Students helped her family. Through the use of a Step Up For Students Scholarship, Brandi was able to send Ja'Kel to Innovation Schools of Excellence in Tallahassee, where he has begun to develop and grow over the past school year.

Since attending Innovation Schools of Excellence, Ja'Kel has grown tremendously. Ja'Kel enjoys going to his new school, where he has developed a love for coloring and reading and made many new friends. Brandi credits his positive changes to Innovation's disciplined and structured environment.

At Innovation, Ja'Kel receives more one-on-one interaction with his teachers and has many positive male role models to provide guidance. Ja'Kel's teachers keep Brandi updated with Ja'Kel's progress through weekly reports and provide information and at-home activities for Brandi to help her son continue to excel. Brandi is very appreciative of the Step Up For Students program and the donors who have made it possible for her son to attend a school where he can develop the skills for a productive future.

About Innovation Schools of Excellence

Located in Tallahassee, Fla., Innovation Schools of Excellence promotes academic excellence for its students through spiritual, social, emotional, physical, intellectual and character development. Eighty-five percent of the school's 400 students qualify for the National Free or Reduced Lunch Program, subsidized childcare or the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program. Innovation has a vast history of struggles and triumphs on its pathway to becoming an institution of educational excellence.

Innovation Schools of Excellence was first organized under the name of Innovation Child Development Center in 1994, starting out with only eight children and three staff members. For the next four years, Innovation's enrollment increased significantly and the school grew. To meet the school's growing needs, a new director and more administrators joined the staff. Between 1998 and 2000, Innovation added a pre-kindergarten program for three- and four-year-olds and the facility was also remodeled to enhance the learning environment and licensed to hold a larger quantity of students.

By 2003, the school expanded its services to include grades 2-6, a social services division and a special needs program, offering specialists in speech-language, occupational and physical therapy. In 2004, Innovation opened its second location, the House of Praise, designated especially for four-year-old students. Innovation now serves over 400 students who learn, create and grow at this "safe haven" and "venue for the arts." Tuition is \$3,850 plus the cost of books.

Tragically, on September 5, 2005, a fire destroyed the school at 333 Ausley Road. However, leaders of the school are determined to continue their service to the community in alternate settings until a permanent site is found. The school is now housed in five different locations, with a separate administrative site. Despite the tragedy, excellence continues to be the standard for Innovation Schools of Excellence.

About the Step Up For Students Scholarship Recipients

The typical Step Up For Students scholarship family has an average income of \$22,074 for a family of four, and more than half of the scholarship families are 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 1-877-677-KIDS for more information.

