

## Step Up For Students June 2008 Student Spotlight

### The Banks Family Shekinah Christian Academy Jacksonville, FL



*Pictured Above: Destiny Bronson, Brittney Woods and Tray'Von Banks*

Shelia and Donnell Banks are the proud parents of three children, Brittney Woods, Destiny Bronson, and Tray'Von Banks, all of whom have excelled at Shekinah Christian Academy in Jacksonville on the Step Up For Students Scholarship Program. The scholarship program gave each child the opportunity to achieve their personal best in an academic setting that could address their individual learning needs, including the oldest of the children, Brittney, who graduated with honors from Shekinah Christian Academy in 2007.

Shelia, a cashier at Publix, and Donnell, an employee for the City of Neptune Beach, are dedicated to making sure that their children's needs are met, and their education is a top priority. However, because of their limited financial resources, the educational options available for their children were limited and became an issue when the children began to struggle in their assigned public school.

Brittney, the oldest of the Banks children, began to have difficulties early in her elementary school years at the public school, mainly with math. Her struggles continued year after year. By the time she reached fourth grade, her grades had dwindled down to C's and D's and she was barely passing her classes.

Brittney's younger sister, Destiny, also had a difficult time in public school. From as early as Kindergarten, Destiny struggled with reading and it affected her performance in school. Her struggles continued into the next year as she entered first grade, where her difficulties with reading lead to failing grades across the board. To make matters worse, her failing grades greatly affected her self-esteem and she became frustrated and reluctant to go to school each day.

Realizing that their children's needs were not being met at their current school, Shelia and Donnell searched for an alternative. As a family with limited financial means, they could not afford to send their children to private school. However, they learned about the Step Up For Students program, which would help them afford the private school tuition. They immediately applied and received scholarships for Brittney, Destiny and their youngest child, Tray'Von, to attend a school of choice.

It took some time for the family to find a school that could meet the needs of all three children, but Shelia and Donnell finally found the perfect academic setting to address each child's needs at Shekinah Christian Academy in Jacksonville. Although the school is a quite a distance from the



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family's home in Atlantic Beach, Shelia acknowledges that the family's sacrifices of time and money (to cover travel costs, as well as any remaining school fees not covered by the scholarship) are worth the changes the children have demonstrated in their academic performance and self-esteem.

Since receiving the scholarships six years ago, all three children have made significant strides. The academic programs and teachers at Shekinah Christian Academy helped Brittney to overcome her learning difficulties and she was finally able to reach her full potential. Brittney graduated with honors from Shekinah Christian Academy in 2007 and has continued on to pursue higher education. She is currently attending Florida Community College of Jacksonville and plans to transfer to the University of North Florida after completing her associate's degree. She is working towards a career as a computer technician.

With Brittney as their inspiration, Destiny and Tray'Von have also excelled at their parent-selected school. Destiny just completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade and will be entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the fall. Once a student who struggled with reading, she is now making A's in her classes, and even brought her math grade up from an F to a C. Her self-esteem has also risen as a result of her improved grades.

Tray'Von, who just completed sixth grade and will be entering the seventh grade in the fall, has also been given the chance to build a solid educational foundation by attending Shekinah. He consistently brings home A's and B's and has even developed a love of sports. He plays baseball on a city league, and also is part of the school's track team.

Step Up For Students gave all three children an opportunity to thrive in an environment that could meet their individual learning needs, and as a result, they are each working towards a promising future. Shelia and Donnell Banks are extremely proud of their children and are happy to have a peace of mind knowing that their children are gaining the tools necessary to be successful adults. The family thanks the program and its donors for giving them the opportunity to step up and succeed.

### **About Shekinah Christian Academy**

Located in Jacksonville, Fla., Shekinah Christian Academy serves grades Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. For the 2007/2008 school year, the school had 97 students, 55 of which are Step Up For Students Scholarship recipients. The cost of tuition at Shekinah Christian is \$4,137 for grades Kindergarten through fifth grade; \$4,462.50 for grades sixth through eighth; and \$4,819.50 for grades ninth through 12<sup>th</sup>. The school annually administers the Stanford Achievement

### **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. Many 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](http://www.StepUpForStudents.com), or call 1-800 782-9140 for more information.

