



## Christopher Jah

Lighthouse Christian Academy  
Deland, FL

Christopher Jah's middle school years were covered in a fog of frustration and failure, but his high school became a lighthouse in more ways than one. Now thriving as a senior at Lighthouse Christian Academy in Deland, he sees both college and promise in his future.

Christopher has come full circle in his schooling. In his elementary years, he attended a neighborhood public school where he was on the honor roll for three consecutive years starting in first grade. Despite his early success, Christopher struggled in his grammar courses throughout elementary school. His challenges seemed to be an uphill battle in overcrowded classrooms where teachers were overwhelmed with questions.

Christopher's mother, Terral Smith, can recall her son's gradual decline in achievement and said that he lost his push in middle school after the family relocated just eight miles away and Christopher attended a different public school with new teachers and classmates. As Terral recalls, it was this transition that proved to be the largest hurdle for her son.

Christopher failed the sixth grade after he lost his motivation and fell to the influence of peers who made it popular not to apply himself. After repeating the sixth grade, Christopher had a successful first semester in the seventh grade and gave his mother hope. Her hope didn't last long when Christopher's academics were slipping again throughout the second half of his seventh grade year and throughout eighth grade. As Christopher entered high school, Terral knew she needed to find a more suitable school to assist her son in regaining his momentum and dreams to achieve.

"I knew if I didn't find a better fit for my son, I would end up seeing him on the evening news," Terral said. "The more time I invest now means the better person he will come out to be."

Upon hearing of his great nephew's struggles, Alonzo Gaines informed Terral of Lighthouse Christian Academy and the opportunity for her son to attend on a Step Up For Students Scholarship, locally administered by Children First Florida. Gaines provides transportation to students who live within two miles of their public school and therefore aren't eligible for busing as well as those students who attend private schools. Through his exposure, he learned of Lighthouse Christian and grew interested for Christopher.

"I had heard about Lighthouse from my great uncle Alonzo for their great academics and basketball team," Christopher, 18, said. "The teachers and sports programs really helped me regain my focus."

Terral enrolled Christopher at Lighthouse Christian Academy just four years ago at no additional cost thanks to the scholarship and generosity of corporate donors who fund the scholarship program. Terral's employer, Burger King, has been a corporate donor since 2007 with a total contribution of \$2.2-million that has funded 570 scholarships.

Lighthouse Christian Academy opened its doors 29 years ago and currently serves 323 students from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The Academy uses the A Beka Bible-based curriculum in the elementary, middle and high school campuses.

"There are fewer students per classroom here and the teachers work with me individually," Christopher said. "It is also unique because everything is taught from the Christian perspective, so for example in English we study scriptures."

Christopher has been an active student at Lighthouse. He played on the basketball team in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades and on the football team for his 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade years. He also volunteers as a scorekeeper at the local gym and participates in the Police Athletic League.

In his time at Lighthouse Christian, Christopher has grown to be a leader. Just in January, he delivered a speech to the congregation at his

church on Martin Luther King, Jr. After graduation this spring, Christopher plans to attend college where he would like to major in telecommunications and become involved in sports television.

“I am so proud of Christopher and hope that he will continue on to greater things,” Terral said. “He sees the struggles I go through every day as a result of not having a college education, and I try to give my kids the best.”

### **About Lighthouse Christian Academy**

Lighthouse Christian Academy was founded in 1973 with a preschool and opened its elementary school in 1980 in Deland. It is currently serving 323 students in grades K-12, of which 98 attend on a Step Up For Students Scholarship. The annual tuition ranges from \$2,860 in elementary school up to \$3,070 for high school, and the school offers a wide selection of courses and activities that include cheerleading, basketball and softball for girls as well as football, basketball and baseball for boys. In addition, Lighthouse has a coed bowling team for its students.

### **About the Step Up For Students Scholarship Recipients**

The typical Step Up For Students scholarship family of four has an average income of \$25,320, and more than 60 percent of scholarship recipients come from single-parent homes. The typical scholarship student is an ethnic minority living with a single parent/caregiver. 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. They 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 Kerri Vaughan at (866) 344-9553.