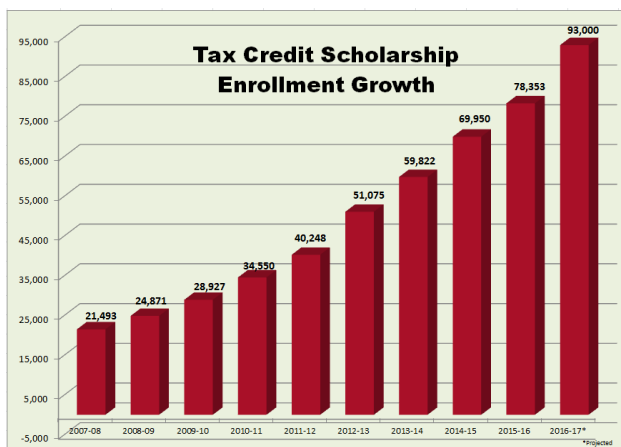


TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP:

Fall scholarship enrollment surges, students making academic gains

- A projected 93,000 economically disadvantaged students will be awarded Florida Tax Credit Scholarships this fall. Interest is so great this year that 145,663 students had begun applications by June 19.
- The scholarship, now in its 15th year, continues to serve the state's neediest schoolchildren. The average household income is about 7 percent above poverty, more than two-thirds of the students are black or Hispanic and more than half live with one parent.
- The latest state-issued academic report shows that the scholarship students were the lowest performers in the public schools they left behind and that, as a whole, they are now achieving the same standardized test score gains as students nationally. Wrote researchers: "The typical FTC student tends to maintain his or her relative position in comparison with all students nationally both in mathematics and reading. It is important to note that these national comparisons pertain to all students nationally, and not just students from low-income families."



GARDINER SCHOLARSHIP:

Enrollment increases as Gardiner heads toward third year

- The Gardiner Scholarship for students with severe special needs continues to grow in enrollment, serving roughly 5,000 students in 2015-16. The scholarship allows families to customize educational needs, and Step Up this year has issued more than 32,000 reimbursements from student accounts worth nearly \$26 million since September.
- Step Up For Students is projecting that it will serve roughly 6,500 students on the Gardiner Scholarship for 2016-17.

The latest news from Step Up For Students

- In April, Step Up was awarded the coveted Four-Star rating by national watchdog Charity Navigator for the fifth consecutive year and for the 10th year overall. It scored 99.92 on the navigator's scale of 100, ranking it as ranked fifth best "top-notch" charity in the United States. In state-mandated financial oversight, Step Up has received clean audits for 12 consecutive years.
- Of the eight nonprofits approved as scholarship funding organizations when the program was enacted in 2001, Step Up is the only one that remains. A new nonprofit, AAA Scholarship Foundation, joined the program in 2014.
- Step Up has raised more than \$17 million in private contributions since 2003, money that has helped it to better serve students in Florida. In October, Step Up eliminated the application fee altogether for students on the tax credit scholarship. It has never charged an application fee for the Gardiner Scholarship.

Leon judge dismisses scholarship lawsuit, union's appeal heard



- In May 2015, Leon Circuit Judge George Reynolds dismissed on standing a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the tax credit scholarship, saying the plaintiffs could not prove the programs harms public education. The Florida Education Association appealed to the First District Court of Appeal, and a three-judge panel heard oral arguments case on May 10. The court is expected to rule sometime later this summer or fall.
- The U.S. Supreme Court and three state supreme courts have all found in favor of tax-credit scholarships, and no state high courts have rejected them. The primary distinction is that tax-credited contributions are not the same as vouchers drawn directly from the state treasury. In Arizona, the state Supreme Court approved of tax-credited scholarships on the one hand and outlawed publicly funded

vouchers on the other. Of the former, it wrote: "This tax credit is not an appropriation of public money."

- Two of the original plaintiffs – the Florida School Boards Association and the Florida Association of School Administrators – have withdrawn from the lawsuit.