



Scholarship brings hope to North Phila. child

Wilford Shamlin III Tribune Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, March 17, 2015 3:00 am

A series of unfortunate circumstances prompted North Philadelphia's Patrice Simmons to start searching for a new school for her daughter Mikell.

Mikell's fourth-grade teacher quit on the first day of school, putting her mother in the awkward position of trying to offer an explanation her daughter could understand. The Gen. George G. Meade School was short-staffed, making it more difficult to keep bullying and other disruptive behavior in check, she said.

Homework assignments offered little challenge for her daughter who used workbooks without supplemental instructions to work her way through worksheet exercises.

And then, out of the blue, help arrived.

Simmons received a phone call last week from Katie McGinty, chief of staff for Gov. Tom Wolf, informing her that her daughter would receive assistance from the Children's Scholarship Fund Philadelphia. It would pay as much as half of the tuition at a local private school. Since 1998, the CSFP has carved out a name for itself in Philadelphia, awarding need-based scholarships to elementary school students through eighth grade.

Simmons said she now has a solid chance for sending her daughter to a school with an educational setting more conducive to learning. Her daughter's name was selected in a computerized lottery drawing at Franklin Square Capital Partners at the Philadelphia Naval Yard. More than 100 volunteers participated in the lottery day event, making calls to scholarship award recipients.

"I was really excited, very appreciative and very happy," Simmons said. "I know the potential my child has."

Simmons said no decision has been made on a particular school but she said she plans to include Mikell in the decision-making. Her daughter now attends Maritime Academy Charter School.

“We are proud that over 95 percent of our alumni graduate high school [is] prepared and on time, and 90 percent go on to higher education institutions,” said Ina Lipman, executive director for the privately-funded program. A much brighter future is possible for all of our children and we are honored to play a role in getting them there.”

The average scholarship provides up to \$1,750, which would be paid directly to the school. Nearly 10,000 applications were screened before officials at CSFP agreed to award 2,000 new scholarships. Currently, students in 185 area schools are being helped by the CSFP scholarship award.

The scholarship money puts schools which charge \$4,000 in yearly tuition within reach for families on a limited household budget.

Under its “Campaign for 10,000 Children,” CSFP has set a goal of 10,000 local scholarship awards by 2016.