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U.S. Steel gives \$60,000 to scholarship program to help Mon-Yough area schools



Patrick Cloonan | Trib Total Media

As Serra Catholic High School development director Lauren Wiater listens, (from left) Serra junior Tristan Samples, his sophomore brother Chris and junior Nate Andrews express their appreciation for scholarships from Bridge Educational Foundation, provided with donations from U.S. Steel and other businesses. Those businesses utilize a state tax credit program.

By [Patrick Cloonan](#)

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Five Mon-Yough area parochial schools will benefit from \$60,000 that U.S. Steel donated to the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit program conducted by Bridge Educational Foundation.

"This program has the ability to change lives," said Chris Samples, a Serra Catholic High School sophomore who is getting a scholarship through Bridge's efforts.

Chris and brother Tristan joined nearly 100 other students in welcoming government, Bridge and U.S. Steel representatives to the McKeesport high school Thursday.

"Your company has made a difference in the lives of many Serra students," Serra development director Lauren Wiater told a U.S. Steel executive at the event.

"Thank you for helping us," Serra junior Nate Andrews said.

Bridge is a nonprofit that partners families and schools with businesses that can get tax credits of 75 percent for one year or 90 percent for two years by donating up to \$750,000 a year toward opportunity scholarships. Such scholarships help families living in the state's lowest performing public school districts. U.S. Steel's donation will aid students going to Serra and elementary schools Mon Yough (soon to be Mary of Nazareth) in White Oak, East Catholic in Forest Hills, St. Agnes in West Mifflin and St. Therese in Munhall.

"Each of our partners are crucial to the success and to the future success of this tax credit program," said Jennifer Kessler of Monroeville, a Bridge board member.

Bridge executive director Natalie Nutt said state OSTC and Educational Improvement Tax Credit programs have helped more than 14,000 families through Bridge alone since 2005.

"To ensure the continued growth of the EITC and OSTC it's important to bring together the stakeholders and celebrate the success of the public-private partnerships," Nutt said.

U.S. Steel vice president Christopher Masciantonio said his company is "playing a small but important role in education in the Mon Valley."

His remarks were heard by Serra juniors, sophomores and freshmen, as well as representatives of other recipient schools.

Asked about it in a question-and-answer period by Serra junior Jason Cerniglia, Masciantonio said an educated workforce is a No. 1 priority for U.S. Steel.

Seniors at Serra have finished their studies and await graduation ceremonies at 7 p.m. Thursday at St. Paul Cathedral in Oakland.

State Senate Minority Leader Jay Costa Jr., D-Forest Hills, hailed U.S. Steel's contribution as proof "they have not forgotten where they come from."

Both Masciantonio and Costa hailed the role of Catholic schools in their development.

Masciantonio attended Sacred Heart School in [Jeannette](#) and Greensburg Central Catholic High School, while Costa went to St. Maurice School in Forest Hills (now East Catholic).

Costa said his own children have attended parochial schools including Pittsburgh Central Catholic and Oakland Catholic high schools.

Kessler said her family could not afford parochial school when she was growing up in Johnstown but now she sends one son to North American Martyrs School and soon plans to send her daughter Katie there. Katie joined her mother for the Serra event.

Three state House members had aides at the Serra gathering. Tom Maglicco was there for Rep. Marc Gergely, D-White Oak; Jennifer Halaszynski expressed apologies from Serra graduate and Rep. Bill Kortz, D-Dravosburg; and Bill Pfoff was there for Rep. Paul Costa, D-Wilkins.

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