

## **Cargill Scholars**

### **Evaluation results**

Cargill Scholars was a comprehensive, five-year program that aimed to improve students' scholastic performance by raising academic expectations, preventing high-risk behavior, and improving life skills. The program served 50 socio-economically-disadvantaged children who attended school in Minneapolis or its northern and western suburbs. The program provided an array of services, such as academic tutoring, off-site opportunities, participation in organized group and individual out-of-school activities and musical instruction, parental exposure to ways of being involved with education, and positive relationships with mentors and program coaches.

In July 2006, the Cargill Scholars transitioned to Destination 2010, a college incentive program sponsored by the Minneapolis Foundation. This program also aims to help students graduate on time and attend post-secondary education. While Cargill Scholars offered individualized services to scholars, Destination 2010 hosts activities that will help a large number of students and families take advantage of opportunities available through their partner agencies. Scholars now access opportunities offered by Destination 2010, as well as receiving services from the Cargill Scholars academic coaches.

This report summarizes the evaluation results collected for Cargill Scholars in the summer of 2008, following their sophomore year of high school. (An evaluation of the Destination 2010 initiative is conducted separately.) All 39 of the active Cargill Scholars completed a survey focusing on their preparation to graduate and their plans for attending school after high school. The coaches also completed a survey about each student to share their perspective of the scholars' readiness for graduation and post-secondary education. Additional information was provided by the Minneapolis school district for the 22 scholars who attend school in Minneapolis and 16 students who were part of the initial matched comparison group for Cargill Scholars.

Half of the current Cargill Scholars are male, the majority are 16 years old and most families speak English at home. Four out of 10 scholars identified themselves as African American; others were identified as African immigrant, Caucasian, Hmong, Native American, and Somali. Eighteen percent were Hispanic.

In 2007-08, scholars attended 20 different high schools, seven of which are in Minneapolis. According to district data, all of the comparison group students, but only 82 percent of the scholars, remained in one school through the entire academic year. One-quarter of the scholars (23%) enrolled in Minneapolis are eligible for gifted education services and two scholars are enrolled in special education. Cargill coaches reported that the three scholars identified by their district as needing special education services are receiving them. They suggested that two other scholars should qualify for services.

### ***Key findings***

#### **Academic performance**

Academic results were mixed. While some scholars are excelling academically, a significant percentage of the students continue to struggle with their coursework and performance on standardized tests. Based on Minneapolis district data, which includes 22 of the Cargill Scholars, and coach reports:

- Approximately one-quarter of the scholars had not yet passed tenth grade English, biology, and social studies. Four in ten had not passed geometry. Half of the scholars (51%) were behind on their elective credits.
- According to Minneapolis School District data, one-third of the scholars (32%) failed at least one math course in 2007-08.
- Of the scholars enrolled in the Minneapolis schools, 43 percent had a grade point average of 2.0 or lower.

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- While most scholars in the Minneapolis public schools (91%) have passed the Graduation-Required Assessment for Diploma (GRAD) writing test (after their second attempt), only 41 percent have passed the reading test.
- More than half of the Cargill Scholars in Minneapolis schools (55%) have not met the proficiency standards on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment reading test.
- Five to forty percent of the scholars in Minneapolis met the “college ready benchmarks” in the areas of math, reading, and science on the PLAN, a college-readiness assessment.

Based on the combination of their standardized test scores and credits earned, the Minneapolis School District considers only one-third of the scholars to be “on track for graduation.” In contrast, all of the scholars said they would (85%) or might (15%) graduate on time. Coaches felt that 69 percent of the scholars were likely to graduate on time, with another 23 percent expected to graduate by 2012.

### **Preparation for post-secondary enrollment**

Despite their academic challenges, coaches and scholars remain optimistic about post-secondary enrollment. Coaches predicted that most scholars would (62%) or might (36%) enroll in school after high school. All of the scholars said they would attend (92%) or might attend (8%) school after high school.

Scholars felt knowledgeable about some, but not all, aspects of college preparation. Over 80 percent of the scholars said they know “a lot” or “a little” about preparing for college entrance exams and classes or activities required for college admission. Fewer scholars (71% to 75%) had the same level of knowledge of college preparation programs, tests required for college admission, and how to choose the right school.

Scholars varied in the steps they were taking to prepare for post-secondary education. Seventy-two percent of the scholars said they are taking classes that will prepare them to attend school after college.

Fifty-six percent of the scholars said they had an academic plan and 68 percent said the plan will help them attend college. One-third of the scholars were involved in a college preparation program.

Many scholars (61%) will need financial aid to attend post-secondary school; however, their awareness of financial aid is limited. Most scholars know “a lot” or “a little” about the scholarship offered by Destination 2010 or from individual schools. They reported much less knowledge about scholarships from private sources, public and private loans, government grants, financial aid applications, or college savings accounts.

Many scholars have positive role models and support for attending post-secondary education. Over 80 percent of the scholars said their coaches, parents, program staff, other family members, and teachers encourage them to further their education. Scholars felt that at least some of their friends would go to college or another school after high school.

When asked about the scholars’ self-care, social, and academic assets that might prepare them for college, the coaches rated three-quarters of the assets significantly lower than the scholars did. The assets rated highest by scholars and coaches include the ability to compete fairly and the desire to attend school after high school. In addition, at least 97 percent of the scholars “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they try to do well in their personal life, attend class prepared, have goals for their education, set goals for their personal life, and have a family that supports their school success.

### **Feedback about the program**

The scholars have been helped by, and continue to draw support from, the program. They mentioned specific program elements, such as practice for the ACT or SAT, visits to college campuses, tutoring, and activities. They also mentioned the support of the coaches as they have provided motivation, monitored grades, and helped the scholars through tough times. Scholars said the coaches’ continued support and encouragement, as well as tutoring and assistance preparing for post-secondary education would be beneficial during their last years of high school.

During the summer of 2008, eight scholars attended the PEOPLE Program, a pre-college program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison designed to help students acquire the skills to succeed in college and give them a glimpse of campus life. The program offers summer programming to students following their first three years of high school. An eight-week session follows senior year for those students who are admitted to and elect to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Students participating in this program were asked to provide some feedback about their experiences.

All of the scholars said it was a good decision to attend the program and three-quarters plan to return after their junior year. The scholars said the program gave them exposure to college and other future opportunities and increased their independence. Most said that it helped them make friends, decide which high school classes to take, and understand what they need to accomplish to go to college. While scholars were positive about their experiences, some suggested changes such as allowing more free time, reducing class time, adding more international students, being more organized, and employing more responsible staff. One scholar suggested continuing the program services until after the participants graduate from college.

## **Recommendations**

The Cargill Scholars and staff remain optimistic that the majority of scholars will graduate from high school in 2010 and that they will continue their education beyond high school. However, many of the scholars may not yet have the skills and resources to apply for and attend post-secondary education. The following recommendations will help the Cargill Scholars staff prepare for the scholars' final high school years.

- Help scholars develop an accurate understanding of the skills and assets they need to succeed in high school and post-secondary education. Provide opportunities for them to develop these skills.
- Help scholars' increase the likelihood of achieving their graduation expectations by identifying the resources they need to complete classes and credits and pass standardized tests. Continue to support and encourage scholars and provide access to resources such as tutoring and academic advising as appropriate.
- Provide assistance for scholars to complete their "My Life Plan" or another comparable plan to map their high school and post-high school years. Use this to help students identify, enroll, and pass the classes they need to graduate on time.
- Assist scholars with the process of choosing and applying to appropriate schools or programs, including preparing and signing up for entrance exams (i.e., SAT, ACT), researching academic programs, and completing essays for applications.
- Provide scholars with information about the availability of financial aid. Help guide them through the application process as necessary.

## **Wilder Research**

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### **For more information**

This summary presents highlights of the *Cargill Scholars: Evaluation results report*. For more information about this report, contact Laura Martell Kelly at Wilder Research, 651-280-2667.

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