

## Cargill Scholars Evaluation results 2008-09

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 receive services from the Cargill Scholars academic coaches. The Destination 2010 initiative is evaluated separately from Cargill Scholars.

This report summarizes the evaluation results collected for Cargill Scholars in the summer of 2009, following their junior year of high school. Thirty-seven of the 38 active Cargill Scholars completed a survey focusing on their preparation to graduate and their plans for attending school after high school. The eight students who attended the PEOPLE program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison completed a survey about their experiences with that program. Additionally, the Cargill Scholars coaches completed surveys for 38 scholars to share

their perspective of the scholars' readiness for graduation and post-secondary education. The coaches also collected responses to six open-ended questions from 31 parents or other adults associated with Cargill Scholars to solicit feedback about the program and their child's needs. Additional information was provided by the Minneapolis school district for the 22 scholars who attend school in Minneapolis and 15 students who were part of the initial matched comparison group for Cargill Scholars.

Half of the current Cargill Scholars are female, the majority are 17 years old and two-thirds of the families speak English at home. Half of the scholars identified themselves as African American; others were identified as African immigrant, Caucasian, Hmong, Native American, and Somali. Eighteen percent were Hispanic.

In 2008-09, scholars attended 20 different high schools, seven of which are Minneapolis Public Schools. According to district data, 9 out of 10 scholars and students in the comparison group remained in one school through the entire academic year. One-fifth of the scholars (20%) enrolled in Minneapolis are eligible for gifted education services and two scholars are enrolled in special education.

### *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:

- By the end of their junior year, two-thirds of the Cargill Scholars had passed their eleventh grade courses in English, social studies, math, and

science. A higher percentage of students had passed their ninth grade courses in these subjects: English 90%, social studies 95%, science 90%, and algebra 79% and tenth grade courses in these subjects: English 87%, social studies 90%, science 82%, and algebra 84%.

- According to Minneapolis School District data, one-quarter of the Cargill Scholars (27%) had passed at least one advanced level course.
- Seventeen percent of the Cargill Scholars enrolled in Minneapolis schools had passed the GRAD math test.
- According to coaches, 21 percent of the active scholars passed the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment in math. More scholars had passed the assessment in reading (53%) and writing (92%).
- Almost all of the scholars in the Minneapolis Public Schools had passed the writing basic skills test (96%). Fewer had passed the reading basic skills test (58%) or the math basic skills test (12%).
- Of the scholars enrolled in the Minneapolis schools, 54 percent had a grade point average of 2.0 or lower.

Based on the combination of their standardized test scores and credits earned, the Minneapolis School District considers only 12 percent of the scholars to be “on track for graduation.” However, the academic data do not account for the opportunities to retake required tests or complete credits. In contrast, all of the scholars said they would (78%) or might (22%) graduate on time. Coaches felt that 75 percent of the scholars were likely to graduate on time, with another 22 percent expected to graduate by 2012.

#### **Preparation for school and work after high school**

Despite their academic challenges, coaches and scholars remain optimistic about post-secondary enrollment. Coaches predicted that most scholars would (67%) or might (28%) enroll in school after high school. Most of the scholars said they would attend (89%) or might attend (8%) school after high school. In addition, scholars were asked for ideas about their future career goals. Twenty-

nine of the 37 scholars had ideas about what they would like to pursue as a career. Over half said their future career would require either an undergraduate or graduate degree.

Half of the scholars and coaches felt the scholars are ready to apply to post-secondary education. Sixty percent of the scholars have created an education and career plan and two-thirds of the scholars said they are taking the classes to prepare them for school. However, less than half (46%) said they have enough credits completed to graduate on time. One-third of the scholars were involved in a college preparation program.

To help prepare for college, 63 percent of the Cargill Scholars had taken the SAT or ACT by the end of their junior year and 92 percent planned to take the tests during their senior year. Fewer scholars had started putting the pieces together for post-secondary applications such as starting their personal essays, identifying who would write reference letters, and documenting extra-curricular activities. Thirty percent of the students received tutoring services during their junior year.

Most scholars (76%) will need financial aid to attend post-secondary school; however, only 25 percent have identified sources of financial aid they will consider and 39 percent said they had not thought about it. Scholars’ knowledge of financial aid options is limited. Most scholars know “a lot” or “a little” about the scholarship offered by Destination 2010 or from individual schools and completing the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid. Fewer know about scholarships from private sources, public and private loans, government grants, financial aid applications, or college savings accounts. Parents indicated they would like more information about financial aid.

Over half the scholars said they were “very motivated” to do well in school and the rest said they were “somewhat motivated.” They also mentioned that coaches, parents, program staff, other adults or family members, and teachers encourage them to further

their education and that at least some of their friends would go to college or another school after high school. Another source of support for about half of the Cargill Scholars is their Big Brother or Big Sister.

When asked about the scholars' self-care, social, and academic assets that might prepare them for college, the coaches rated 27 of the 28 assets lower than the scholars did. Twenty-one of the assets were rated significantly lower. The assets rated highest by scholars and coaches include the ability to compete fairly, to do well in their personal life, and to have goals for their education.

### **Feedback about the program**

During high school, active Cargill Scholars have been assigned to one of two academic coaches who help facilitate services and guide the scholar through the maze of applying to post-secondary education. All of the students said their relationship with their Cargill coach was "very helpful" (65%) or "somewhat helpful" (35%). They further mentioned that the coaches understand them, care about them, and help motivate them. They also said the coaches provide advice and help the students stay on track. When asked which were the most helpful components of Cargill Scholars, students grouped their answers into the categories of coaches, college search assistance, home visits, school check-ins, and academic help.

When parents and adults were asked about the most beneficial part of Cargill Scholars academic advising program, respondents most frequently mentioned the support system offered by the coaches. Others mentioned the resources and information provided to the scholars and parents, or the academic support.

For their last year of high school, scholars said they would like the coaches to continue offering support and academic assistance as well as guidance to get into good colleges and look for scholarships. The adults requested the coaches stay involved with the scholars, encourage them to do well, provide resources, specifically academic assistance and tutoring, and monitor academics to keep the scholars on track for graduation.

### **PEOPLE program**

During the summer of 2009, 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 by offering summer programming and internships during high school summers. For those students who are admitted to and elect to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison, an eight-week summer session follows senior year. 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 that it gave them exposure to college and other future opportunities and increased their independence. Six of the eight students participated in the summer internship program which provided valuable experience meeting new people, learning from professionals, and gaining a new perspective on an issue. Most of the students said they will apply to the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and about half said they would definitely attend if they are accepted.

### ***Conclusions***

The Cargill Scholars and staff remain optimistic that the majority of scholars will graduate from high school in spring 2010. They see the students as working towards their goals, receiving encouragement from those around them, and clearly identifying what the scholars need to do in order to graduate. However, the academic data and scholars' responses indicate that many of the Cargill Scholars are struggling and may not graduate on time without significant effort. Furthermore, the data show that a percentage of scholars remain uncertain about what they need to do to graduate or prepare for post-secondary education.

As the Cargill Scholars program winds down, it is important to consider what has been learned about working with students as they navigate high school and prepare for post-secondary education. The following list presents some ideas of how programs can work with students with characteristics similar to Cargill Scholars.

- Help students understand the work and planning, especially highlighting specific steps, involved in graduating from high school on-time and preparing for post-secondary education.
- Encourage students to use tutoring and other academic assistance services to help them improve and maintain passing grades in their required classes.
- Provide opportunities to help students develop their motivation and other skills that will help them succeed in high school.
- Educate students and families about the realities of funding post-secondary education and guide them towards resources that can help them identify and apply for funding.
- 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.

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### For more information

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