



# Evaluation results 2003-2004

## Highlights

- Parents and teachers report that scholars are attending school, behaving in class, and putting effort into their work.
- Standardized test scores show large gains in reading and math, though some scholars continue to have difficulty doing well in their classes.
- Scholars continue to show good social skills, including positive behavior at home and at school and strong relationships with family and peers.
- Most scholars' parents are involved in their education, commonly by checking schoolwork at home and attending school events.
- Most scholars had positive relationships with unrelated adults, including their Big Brother/Big Sisters mentors and their Cargill Scholars coaches.
- Most scholars are involved in a range of extracurricular individual and group activities.
- Parents, scholars, and teachers express high satisfaction with the program.
- While the overall picture formed by these results is positive, several suggestions emerge for consideration by program staff.

## About the program

Cargill Scholars is a comprehensive, five-year program that aims to improve students' school performance by raising academic expectations, preventing high-risk behavior, and improving life skills. The program serves 50 socioeconomically disadvantaged children who attend school in Minneapolis or its northern and western suburbs. Beginning when the students were in the fourth grade, the program has provided the following services:

- Linking scholars and families with needed services
- Academic tutoring
- Field trips and other off-site opportunities
- Participation in organized group and individual out-of-school activities and music lessons
- Positive relationships with mentors and program coaches
- Working with parents on ways to be involved with their children's education

This report summarizes results obtained over the course of the program's third year. The information comes from interviews conducted with 49 scholars (98%) and 47 parents (94%) in late summer 2004. Surveys were also completed with 47 of the scholars' teachers (94%) in fall 2003 and spring 2004. Additional information was provided by Cargill Scholars staff and mentors, Change of Mind (the company providing tutoring), and the Minneapolis Public Schools.

## Description of the scholars

The Cargill Scholars in 2003-04 included 26 boys and 24 girls, all in the sixth grade. Almost half of the scholars were African American. Other racial and ethnic groups included Asian, American Indian, Latino, White, African Immigrant, and Multiracial.

## Services received by scholars in 2003-04

The wide array of services includes tutoring, music lessons, individual and group activities, family activities, mentoring, and meetings with Cargill Scholars coaches. On average, scholars received the following service in 2003-04:

- 74 hours of tutoring (a large increase from 55 hours in 2002-03).
- 16 music lessons (though 16 percent of the scholars did not receive any lessons).
- 49 hours of academic activities and 27 hours of sports activities (participation in other activities was relatively infrequent).
- Ongoing activities with mentors for the 48 scholars who had been matched.

In addition, all scholars attended at least one program activity and most of their families attended one or two events. Coaches had an average of 25 progress meetings for each scholar.

## Impact on students' school success

**Overall perceptions.** Most parents (83%) rated scholars as at least "good" in terms of maintaining satisfactory grades, although only half of the teachers (51%) rated scholars as having at least average academic competence. In summer 2004, parents were more likely than in earlier surveys to say that the program had improved scholars' academic skills.

**Effort and motivation.** Teachers and parents generally described scholars as demonstrating motivation and effort. Teachers rated half of the scholars as falling into the top 30 percent of the class in terms of their motivation. All parents and teachers said that scholars put at least a little effort into their work. Scholars' rating of their own enjoyment of school has increased significantly.

**Classroom and academic behaviors.** Scholars were typically described as demonstrating positive academic behaviors. Teachers were especially likely to describe scholars as being respectful. Mixed results emerged related to study skills. Scholars were likely to report that the program

Helped them improve these skills, but teachers gave relatively low ratings in this area.

**School attendance.** Most parents (96%) and teachers (86%) described scholars' attendance as "good" or better. However, the percentage rated as having "outstanding" attendance has declined. In summer 2004, 77 percent of the parents said that the program helped the scholar improve their school attendance; these ratings were significantly higher than previous results.

**Performance in academic areas.** Standardized test scores provided by Change of Mind reveal improvement in reading and math scores over the course of the third year. The percentage of scholars reading at grade level increased from 56 percent in fall 2003 to 78 percent in summer 2004. Notably, only 16 percent of the scholars were reading at grade level at the time the program began. The percentage of scholars performing at or above grade level in math also increased, from 40 percent in fall 2003 to 64 percent in spring 2004.

According to the Minneapolis Public Schools, there were no significant differences between the math and reading Northwest Achievement Level Test scores for Cargill Scholars and a matched comparison group. There were differences, however, in the percentage of students who showed at least one year's improvement on the test in the past year. Cargill Scholars were significantly more likely to show at least one year's improvement in reading (49% of scholars, 35% of the comparison group). However, they were significantly less likely to improve in math (27% of scholars, 48% of the comparison group).

Despite these positive results, some scholars were still struggling with their school performance. While teachers gave relatively high ratings to scholars' classroom behavior, they gave lower ratings in writing, math, reading, and study skills. Grades in these areas were relatively low, compared to areas such as physical education and music. Over time, scholars' rating of their ability to complete their schoolwork without mistakes has shown significant decline.

**Likelihood of post-secondary education.** All parents felt that it is at least “somewhat likely” that scholars will attend post-secondary education. Most scholars (94%) also said that they would attend. Parents felt that scholars need support or assistance in order to attend post-secondary education, including financial support, ongoing encouragement, and academic assistance.

**Career development.** Almost all parents (96) felt that the program helped scholars develop new career ideas. Ratings on this item have increased significantly over time. In summer 2004, 72 percent of the parents said that their child had talked about possible future careers (compared to 57% the previous year). Most scholars were able to identify a career goal, such as athlete, doctor, or lawyer.

## **Impact on social skills**

**Social skills ratings.** Overall, scholars continue to demonstrate positive social skills. Using the Social Skills Rating Scale, parents and teachers rated at least three-quarters of the scholars as having “average” or better social skills (such as responsibility, cooperation, self-control, and assertion). Similarly, fewer than 10 percent of the scholars were described as having greater behavior problems than expected at their age.

Ratings of social skills have improved somewhat. Parent ratings of total social skills and responsibility remained significantly higher in summer 2004 than they had been in 2002. Teacher ratings tended to improve over the course of the school year, especially in total social skills and assertion.

**Classroom behavior.** In spring 2004, about two-thirds of the scholars (66%) were rated by their teachers as falling into the top 30 percent of the class in terms of their classroom behavior. Similarly, most scholars (at least 66%) were rated by teachers as “good” or better in terms of classroom behaviors, such as showing self-control, accepting responsibility for their own behavior, and interacting well with other students. In the program’s second year (2002-03), there was significant decline in teachers’ ratings. In the third

year (2003-04), some improvement was seen, though it did not reach a significant level.

**Relationships with parents and peers.** According to parents, most scholars generally get along well with their parents (87%) and with their peers (91%). Similarly, almost all scholars said that they get along with their parents and with other kids.

Most scholars felt that the program had been helpful, with most saying that the program helped scholars improve relationships with peers (96%) and at home (83%). Parent ratings for both items were significantly higher in the summer of 2004 than they had been during previous surveys.

While most scholars said that they had positive relationships, fewer talked to people about their feelings. About one-third of the scholars said that they did not talk to their parents (27%) or to their friends (35%) about their feelings.

Despite having generally positive relationships with parents and peers, some scholars were experiencing difficulties. While most scholars (89%) said that they had close friends that they can depend on, results of the Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents showed a significant decline in their perceptions of their close friendships. Bullying was also a concern for some scholars, with about one in five saying that they were sometimes bullied and more than one in ten saying that they sometimes bullied others.

**Teamwork and fair competition.** In summer 2004, all parents said that the program helped scholars work as part of a team at least “a little.” While fewer parents felt that the program helped scholars compete fairly (83%), the rating on this item was significantly higher than in previous surveys. Scholars’ perceptions that the program helped them work as part of a team declined significantly in summer 2004. It should be noted, however, that their rating the previous years was significantly higher than in earlier surveys.

**Self-confidence.** Almost all parents (96%) felt that the program helped scholars increase their self-confidence. Similarly, most parents (92%) said that the scholars' confidence in trying new things had increased slightly or significantly since they entered the program. Parents' ratings for this item were significantly higher in summer 2004 than they had been during the previous surveys.

**Responsibility.** Parents gave relatively low ratings to the extent to which scholars carry out responsibilities at home (77% "good" or better). While lower than some other items, this rating was significantly higher in summer 2004 than it had been during previous surveys.

### **Impact on parents' involvement**

**Overall involvement.** Scholars' parents were generally involved with, and supportive of, their child's academics. In summer 2005, 60 percent of the scholars were rated as falling into the top 30 percent of their class in terms of parental encouragement.

Fifty-six percent of the parents reported that their level of school involvement has increased since they became involved with Cargill Scholars. This increased in summer 2004, after previously declining to 40 percent at the end of the second year.

**Involvement in educational activities at home.** Two-thirds of the parents (64%) reported spending between 1 and 6 hours a week involved with scholar's education, doing things like discussing school activities or helping with homework. Parents were most likely to talk to their children about school-related topics and to check homework. Overall, about three-quarters of the parents (73%) said that it was not too difficult to help the scholars with homework.

Parents' level of involvement in most educational activities at home has remained consistent over the past three years. The frequency with which they check scholars' homework has increased significantly, while time spent reading to their children has decreased.

**Attendance at school events.** Most parents (77%) did not find it too difficult to attend activities at the scholars' schools. According to both parents and teachers, most parents attended meetings or conferences with the teacher and Cargill Scholars events. They were less likely to attend athletic events or volunteer time at school.

Teachers' ratings of the frequency of parent involvement have fluctuated over time, possibly due to variation in the frequency of school events (such as conferences). Parents' ratings of their attendance at some school events increased significantly in 2004, especially open houses at school, parent-teacher conferences, and Cargill Scholars events.

**Knowledge and use of resources.** Sixty-seven percent of the parents felt that the program helped increase their understanding of school policies and procedures. About half (49%) said that they learned about school or community resources to help their child with school, and 61 percent said that they had used these resources. Others said that they did not need them. Fewer parents (36%) learned about parenting resources. However, more than half of these parents used the resources, compared to none the previous year.

### **Impact on scholars' relationships with adults**

In summer 2004, most scholars (92%) said that they had unrelated adults that they could depend on, including relatives, teachers, friends' parents, and neighbors (an increase from 83% the previous year). Almost all parents (96%) and scholars (92%) felt that the program had helped scholars improve relationships with unrelated adults.

**Relationships with mentors.** Almost all parents (96%) said that scholars had at least a "somewhat positive" relationship with the mentor; 79 percent said it was "very positive." Scholars were also positive in their perceptions, saying that they enjoyed spending time with their mentors. They described mentors as being nice, fun to be with, and respectful.

Most scholars (71%) and parents (84%) felt that the mentors had made a difference in the scholars, including sharing activities and developing positive

relationships. Some scholars mentioned places they had gone together or things they had learned. Compared to last year, scholars were more likely to say that their mentors had provided them with emotional or practical support.

While all scholars enjoyed time with mentors and felt that their mentors listen to them, fewer (37%) talked to their mentors about their feelings. More than half of the mentors (52%) reported that scholars have shown improved levels of trust towards them in the past year.

**Relationships with coaches.** Most scholars enjoyed the time spent with coaches and felt that the coaches listened to them. The percentage of scholars who talked to coaches about their feelings increased over the past year (from 52% to 62%). When asked how the coaches had helped them, some scholars said that the coaches helped them increase their academic performance or skills. Others said that they provided support and encouragement in reaching their goals. Some scholars said that the coaches had helped connect them with other activities or resources, such as sports camps or tutoring.

### **Impact on students' pursuit of interests**

According to parents, most scholars (94%) have developed new skills, interests, or hobbies since becoming involved with Cargill Scholars. In summer 2004, two-thirds of the scholars (65%) said that they were involved in activities outside of school, especially sports or music. More than two-thirds (69%) of the scholars were interested in trying new activities, especially sports.

One area of particular emphasis is musical skills. Almost all parents (96%) and scholars (98%) felt that Cargill Scholars helped scholars develop musical skills. In summer 2004, parent ratings to this item increased significantly. Most parents (91%) said that scholars practiced their musical instruments, typically one to four times a week.

### **Other information about the scholars**

Other questions were included in the survey to learn more about the scholars and their families. There are no formal program goals in these areas.

**Parenting behaviors.** About one-third of the parents (36%) said that they had seen changes in their behavior with the scholar, including improved interactions and increased involvement. About one-quarter of the parents also reported similar changes in their behavior with other children in the family.

**Scholars emotional well-being.** Most scholars reported positive emotional well-being. About one-third reported occasional moodiness and just over half (51%) said that they experience at least a little nervousness. About four out of 10 scholars said that they experience at least a little sadness (43%) and stress or pressure (41%). In summer 2004, none of the scholars said that they had used alcohol or drugs in the last 30 days.

**Concerns about scholars' transition to seventh grade.** In the summer of 2004, most scholars looked forward to starting seventh grade. They were especially excited about meeting new people and learning new things. Most were not concerned about starting seventh grade, though some worried about their ability to do the harder work or about their relationships with other students or teachers.

### **Program accessibility**

Overall, parents were very satisfied with the accessibility of program services. On average, parents gave ratings of "very good" to items assessing the ease of arranging meetings, the amount of information received, the responsiveness of staff, and the convenience of service times and locations.

Most parents (91%) rated the amount of service received as at least "good." Most parents said that scholars were receiving the right amount (94%) and the right kinds of services (89%) to meet their needs and interests.

During previous surveys, parents gave relatively low ratings to their level of input in selecting activities. In summer 2003 and summer 2004, ratings improved but not significantly.

## Cultural competence

Parent ratings of the program's cultural competence were high. For all four items assessing cultural competence, 83 to 87 percent of the parents gave ratings of at least "good." At least two-thirds of the parents gave ratings of "very good" or "outstanding." There have been no significant trends in these ratings over time.

## How parents rate Cargill Scholars

**Ratings of the quality of activities.** Overall, parents were very satisfied with each program activity, with average ratings ranging from just below "very good" to between "very good" and "outstanding." At least 95 percent of the parents rated the music lessons, the time spent with mentors, the end-of-year trip, and the summer academy as "good" or better. The items with the lowest ratings were the events for parents and family meetings with the coaches, though these ratings still fell just below "very good."

Satisfaction with the quality of most activities has been stable. However, ratings of the quality of the science camp have fluctuated over the past several years, with a downward tendency. Ratings of the quality of the music lessons declined significantly between summer 2003 and summer 2004, though the average remained high.

Almost all parents (96%) attended at least one parent meeting, with 95 percent finding the information at least a little bit useful. Many parents said that they learned about issues facing teenagers, such as developmental changes and strategies to help scholars avoid behaviors such as drug use. Some parents learned strategies to help scholars succeed in school. Parents suggested additional information about careers and colleges and adolescent issues, such as dating and sexuality, for future meetings.

When asked to identify the most positive aspect of the services, many parents focused on specific activities, especially tutoring. Parents also mentioned the extra-curricular opportunities that the program provided, including music lessons.

**Ratings of program coaches and other staff.** Almost nine out of ten parents rated the staff as at least "good" in areas such as knowledge, ability to listen and understand, ability to communicate clearly, and respect for the scholars' rights. There have been no significant trends in these ratings over time, but parents' ratings of the friendliness and hospitality of the staff were significantly lower in summer 2004 than in summer 2002.

**Overall satisfaction.** Almost all parents (94%) rated their overall satisfaction with the program as at least "good," with more than half (47%) giving ratings of "outstanding." Seventy percent of the parents said their child has a very favorable response to the program; another 23 percent described their response as "favorable."

Most parents did not suggest program improvements. Others provided a range of responses, though no themes emerged. Several parents mentioned strategies for increasing their levels of participation, such as improving translation services or changing the hours that services are provided. Some parents wanted to expand the number of children who participate or have services available for other family members.

## How students rate Cargill Scholars

**Enjoyment of the program.** Almost all scholars (96%) said that they enjoy the program; the others said they enjoy it sometimes. When asked whether they enjoyed various activities, scholars' ratings fell between "agree" and "strongly agree" for each. Several changes emerged over time, including a significant increase in satisfaction with the end-of-the year trip. Satisfaction with trips to the Science Museum had improved between 2002 and 2003, but declined somewhat in 2004.

**Progress toward goals and incentives.** Almost all scholars (98%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they were satisfied with the progress they made toward their goals. In summer 2004, 79 percent of the scholars said they had earned incentives during the year (compared to 57% the previous year). Fifty-three percent of the scholars said earning incentives is "very important" (compared to 44% the previous year).

**Favorite things about the program and suggestions for change.** Many scholars said that the field trips were the best things about the program. They also enjoyed other activities and learning new things. Other scholars described other program benefits, including making new friends and receiving academic and other support from the staff. Many scholars said that they would not change anything about the program. The most frequent suggestion was for more activities, especially field trips.

## **How teachers rate Cargill Scholars**

**Satisfaction with tutoring.** Teachers rated the frequency, quality, and benefits of the tutoring “good” to “very good,” on average, in both fall 2003 and spring 2004. In spring 2004, more than 95 percent rated the quality and frequency of the tutoring as “good” or better. Satisfaction was lowest with the frequency of communication with the tutor. Over the course of the school year, teachers’ satisfaction with all tutoring elements improved, especially related to the timing of the tutoring and the frequency of their communication with the tutor.

Teachers made a number of comments about the tutoring, most often saying that it had been helpful. Some teachers expressed concern that scholars were missing classroom instruction, since the tutoring was taking place during school.

**Interaction with the program coaches.** On average, teachers rated the quality of their relationship with the coaches and the frequency of their communication as “good” to “very good.” In spring 2004, 78 to 89 percent of the teachers rated these items as at least “good.”

**Perceived program benefits.** While a few teachers said that there had been changes in scholars’ academic skills, more teachers noted improved motivation and interest in education. In addition, teachers mentioned that scholars benefited from Cargill Scholars activities and services and from positive relationships with Cargill Scholars staff.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Overall, the results from the third year of the Cargill Scholars program indicate that scholars are generally doing well in all the program goal areas. Parents and scholars continue to express high satisfaction with the program, while teachers also report high satisfaction with the quality of the tutoring. The overall picture formed by these results is positive; however, the following suggestions warrant further consideration by program staff.

- Parents continue to express interest in learning about teen issues, such as drugs and dating. In addition to parent meetings, program staff could also consider meetings or activities for the scholars to allow them to discuss issues or receive support.
- While most scholars are close to friends and family, fewer talk with these individuals about their feelings. They were also relatively unlikely to talk to mentors or coaches about personal feelings. As these relationships continue to evolve and the scholars face increasingly complex issues, mentors and coaches should discuss strategies for providing emotional support to scholars.
- By the end of the third year, almost all scholars were matched with mentors. Because research has shown that the benefits of mentoring can grow over time, it will be important to monitor the matches and provide any needed support to the mentors.
- Most parents feel that scholars are likely to attend post-secondary education, though they are concerned about financial barriers. Staff should continue to help parents identify resources to support their children’s post-secondary education, including financial options.
- Scholars are increasingly talking to their parents about possible future careers. For most, their current goals reflect a relatively limited range of options. Program staff should consider strategies for exposing scholars to a wider variety of careers over the next several years.

- Scholars have shown improved math and reading test scores. However, many are still struggling with their classwork. Staff and tutors should consider strategies for helping scholars to do well in the classroom, such as improved study skills.
- Scholars have become more likely to say that they have difficulty completing schoolwork and fewer parents help scholars with their work. Staff should continue to consider resources available for homework support as scholars face increasingly difficult homework.
- In the first few years, teachers were concerned with their communication with tutors. In the third year, improvement was seen. Tutors are encouraged to continue their efforts to maintain communication.
- As scholars continue to move through middle school, their interests in extracurricular activities may shift. Staff may want to review the list of activities requested by scholars to identify future activities or services.
- Since the program's first year, parents' satisfaction with their level of input in selecting activities has improved. Staff are encouraged to continue this focus, as it may promote parents' active support for the program.
- The percentage of scholars who said that they earned incentives, and that earning incentives was important, increased in the third year. As noted in a previous report, it will be important to ensure that extrinsic incentives are replaced over time with more intrinsic forms of motivation to ensure that scholars' efforts continue after the conclusion of the Cargill Scholars program.

**For more information about this evaluation study**, please contact Cheryl Holm-Hansen, Ph.D., at Wilder Research (651-647-4624, or by email at [cah1@wilder.org](mailto:cah1@wilder.org)).

**For more information about the Cargill Scholars program**, please contact Toni Green at the Cargill Foundation (952-742-6290; [Tonid\\_Green@cargill.com](mailto:Tonid_Green@cargill.com)) or Dan Haugen at the Neighborhood Involvement Program (612-374-3125; [dhaugen@neighborhoodinvolve.org](mailto:dhaugen@neighborhoodinvolve.org)).