



# Evaluation results

## 2005-2006

### Highlights

The program successfully retained almost all scholars across the five program years.

Scholars received an extensive array of services.

Most scholars are interested in school and apply themselves to their studies.

Standardized test scores show little difference between the Cargill Scholars and a matched comparison group of students.

Scholars continue to show strong social skills, including positive behavior at home and school, increasingly positive cooperation and responsibility, and strong relationships with family and peers.

Most parents are involved in scholars' education, both at home and by attending school events.

Most scholars had positive relationships with unrelated adults, including their Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentors and their Cargill Scholars coaches.

Most scholars are involved in both individual and group extracurricular activities.

Parents and scholars express very high satisfaction with the program.

Scholars would benefit from continued academic and other supports as they move through high school.

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. Students began the program in fourth grade, and were offered:

- Referrals to needed services for scholars and families
- Academic tutoring
- Field trips and other off-site opportunities
- Organized group and individual out-of-school activities and music lessons
- Positive relationships with mentors and program coaches
- Parent coaching or support to identify ways to be involved with their children's education

This report summarizes results of the program at the conclusion of its fifth year. The information comes from annual interviews conducted with scholars and parents and information provided by Cargill Scholars staff, Change of Mind (the company providing tutoring), and the Minneapolis Public Schools.

### Description of the scholars

The program began in 2001-02 with 50 scholars. In the first two years, four scholars left the program and were replaced by four new students. No scholars formally left the program over the last three years, though the program did lose contact with two students in the final year.

In 2005-06, the Cargill Scholars included 24 boys and 26 girls, all in the eighth 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

Scholars were selected for the program when they were in third grade, and received services between fourth grade and eighth grade. Cargill Scholars facilitated delivery of an array of services, including tutoring, music lessons, individual and group activities, program activities, family activities, mentoring, and meetings with coaches. The services provided to the scholars can be summarized as follows:

Tutoring increased over the first four years, reaching an average of 83 hours per scholar in 2004-05. Tutoring was reduced in 2005-06, with scholars receiving an average of 40 hours of service.

Participation in music lessons increased over the first several years, with four of five scholars receiving lessons in 2003-04. Participation declined in the last two years of the initiative. Academic activities were common, with scholars participating in an average of 50 to 60 hours of activities during each of the last three years. Many scholars also participated in sports. Fewer received music or arts programming. Each year, Cargill Scholars sponsored a number of activities, such as end-of-year trips, theater productions, and academic field trips. Scholars attended an average of three or four of these activities each year.

The Cargill Scholars program also provided family activities, such as educational sessions for parents, family gatherings, and end of year celebration events. Parents attended an average of one or two activities each year.

The two program coaches had frequent progress meetings with each scholar. On average, coaches had at least 20 meetings per scholar in each of the last three years.

Over the course of the fifth program year, the number of scholars with active Big Brothers/Big Sisters decreased from 49 to 32.

## Impact on students' school success

**Approximately three-quarters of the parents said that the program helped scholars improve school attendance.** Seventy-nine percent of the parents in 2006 felt that the program had helped the scholars improve their school attendance at least "a little." Almost all scholars (98%) were rated by parents as having "good" or better attendance.

**Scholars rated themselves positively in terms of their school behavior, especially trying their best, following rules, and following directions in class.** For all items, at least 93 percent of scholars said "sometimes" or "yes." Scholars' ratings of themselves as handing in homework on time and completing schoolwork without mistakes increased significantly over time. Ratings for participating in the classroom, liking school, enjoying learning, and asking for help when they do not understand something have decreased, however.

**Over time, scholars have needed to use resources other than their parents for homework help.** The percentage of scholars who ask their parents for help with schoolwork decreased significantly from 76 percent in 2002 to 29 percent in 2005 (before increasing slightly to 36% in 2006). Many scholars still turned to their family for support with work, while others used school staff, tutors, and after-school programs.

**Increases were seen in scholars' language skills, though many remained below average.** The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was administered each fall. When students entered Cargill Scholars, most demonstrated fairly low language skills. Steady improvements were seen in scholars' percentile rank for both expressive language (from 20 in 2001 to 35 in 2005) and receptive language (from 20 in 2001 to 42 in 2005). The percentage scoring at or above chronological age increased from 6 percent in 2003 to 29 percent in 2005 for expressive language and from 21 percent in 2002 to 46 percent in 2005 for receptive language.

**WRAT test results improved over the course of each school year.** A relatively consistent pattern was seen in the results of the Wide Range Achievement Test, Revision 3 (WRAT III) administered each fall

and spring. With the exception of math in 2004-05, the percentage of scholars meeting or exceeding their academic grade level increased between fall and spring. Between the spring of each academic year and the fall of the following year, scores declined due to increased grade level expectations. In spring 2006, 79 percent of the scholars performed at or above their grade level in reading. Fewer (59%) performed at or above their grade level in arithmetic.

**There were no significant differences between the Cargill Scholars and a matched comparison group on standardized academic tests.** Data from the Minneapolis Public Schools were collected annually to compare the academic status of Cargill Scholars to a matched comparison group. Northwest Achievement Levels Test (NALT) reading and math scores were available for the first four years. In eighth grade, students completed the EXPLORE test of English, mathematics, reading, and science. There were no statistically significant differences between the results for the scholars and those for the comparison group on either test.

**Parents and scholars felt that the program helped students improve academically.** Almost all parents (95% to 98%) felt that Cargill Scholars had helped youth improve academically at least “a little,” including grades, attendance, math skills, reading skills, writing skills, study skills, class involvement, understanding directions, completing assignments on time, and enjoying learning. Over time, parents became more likely to say that the program helped scholars improve their math, reading, and writing skills. Most scholars said that the program helped them enjoy learning new things (87% saying “yes”) and improve their study skills (80% saying “yes”).

**Parents and scholars are optimistic that scholars will attend college, though they will require support.** Throughout the five years of the Cargill Scholars program, parents and scholars felt that it was at least “somewhat likely” that scholars would attend some form of postsecondary education. Seventy-eight percent of the parents, and 96 percent of the scholars, said that scholars would definitely attend. Many parents felt that scholars would need financial assistance or support in order to attend, though most (85%) said that

the program helped them learn about ways to pay for college. Other parents said that scholars needed academic assistance and encouragement from family and others in order to attend.

**Cargill Scholars helped youth develop new ideas about future careers.** Most scholars can identify a specific career goal, such as medical professional and professional athlete. The percentage of parents who said that scholars had talked about new ideas regarding possible careers increased steadily and significantly from 50 percent in 2003 to 93 percent in 2005 (before declining to 81% in 2006).

In the final year of the program, all of the parents (100%) said that Cargill Scholars had helped their child learn at least “a little” about possible career interests. Scholars had less positive ratings, with just over one-third (38%) saying that they learned about new careers (a significant decline from 63% the previous year).

### **Impact on social skills**

While social skills were generally high when scholars entered the program, they still improved significantly over time. According to the Social Skills Rating Scale, most scholars entered the program with social skills that were average or better than others their age. Over the course of their five years in Cargill Scholars, scholars’ social skills remained high. In 2006, parents rated most of the scholars (75% to 90%) as having average or better skills in the areas of responsibility, cooperation, self-control, and assertion. Over time, scores on the cooperation and responsibility scales, as well as the total social skills score, improved significantly.

The Social Skills Rating Scale also assesses behavior problems. Relatively few scholars were described as exhibiting significant problems. In 2006, 87 to 100 percent of the scholars were rated as having “average” or “fewer” internalizing and externalizing problems. Over the five years of the program, parents’ ratings of scholars on the overall problem scale declined (improved) significantly.

Most scholars have positive relationships with family and peers, with some improvements seen over time. In 2006, most parents (at least 75%) rated their scholars as “good” or better in each of the social areas assessed, especially getting along with peers at school and getting along with parents. The percentage of scholars rated by parents as “good” or better increased for all items between 2005 and 2006, especially for getting along with peers at school (from 82% to 98%), getting along with parents (78% to 92%), and showing self-control when frustrated or angry (67% to 81%).

All scholars said that they get along with their parents, other family members, and kids at school at least “sometimes.” There were significant increases in scholars’ ratings of the extent to which they get along with other kids at school and in the neighborhood.

Most parents know at least some of their child’s friends and felt comfortable talking to scholars about issues. In 2006, almost all parents (95%) said that they were “very comfortable” talking to students about issues such as friends, school, peer pressure, or risky behavior; the remaining few felt “somewhat comfortable.” While almost one-quarter of the parents (23%) know all of their child’s friends; most (67%) knew some of their friends. The percentage of parents who felt that Cargill Scholars helped students make good decisions about friends increased from 88 percent in 2005 to 98 percent in 2006.

Most parents and scholars felt that the program helped youth develop positive social relationships and behaviors. Almost all parents (at least 95%) said Cargill Scholars had helped scholars improve relationships with peers, be more responsible, increase self-confidence, learn to compete fairly, and work as part of a team at least “a little.” Slightly fewer (86%) said that the program helped scholars improve relationships at home. Similarly, most scholars (91% to 98%) said that the program helped them with friendships, team work, responsibility, and fair play at least “sometimes.”

While the percentage of scholars who feel safe at school has increased, some experience bullying. Nine percent of the scholars said that they sometimes bully or pick on other kids at school or in the neighborhood. Similarly, nine percent of the scholars said that they

are sometimes bullied or picked on by other kids. All scholars (100%) felt safe at school at least sometimes, with most (82%) feeling safe “all or most of the time.”

## **Impact on parents’ involvement**

**Many parents are involved with scholars’ education, though they have become less likely over time to help with homework.** In 2006, 90 percent of the parents said that it was “not too difficult” or “not difficult at all” to help the scholar with schoolwork or talk about school-related matters (compared to 69% the previous year). Ninety-five percent of the parents found it “not too difficult” or “not difficult at all” to attend activities at school, such as meeting with teachers or attending a school play (compared to 76% the previous year).

Two-thirds of the parents (67%) reported spending between one and six hours a week directly involved in their child’s education, doing things like discussing school activities or helping with homework. The frequency with which parents checked scholars’ homework increased significantly in the first few years of the initiative, but declined between 2004 and 2006.

**Two-thirds of the parents felt that their level of school involvement increased since their child began participating in Cargill Scholars.** In 2006, 67 percent of parents felt that their level of involvement had increased slightly or significantly since beginning the program, an increase from 58 percent the previous year. Thirty percent said that there was no change in their level of involvement.

**Most parents attended some school events, with increased attendance over time.** In 2006, parents were most likely to report that they had attended parent-teacher conferences, with almost all (98%) attending at least once in the previous three months. Most parents (72% to 88%) also attended meetings with teachers or principals, an open house at school, and extracurricular events at school. For four items (attending an open house at school, attending a parent-teacher conference, attending a meeting with the child’s teacher or principal, and volunteering time at a school event), there was an overall trend towards increased

involvement. Involvement varied, however, with declines seen in the first several years.

**Most parents learned about resources to help scholars with school; fewer learned about parenting resources.** In 2006, two-thirds of the parents (66%) said that they had learned about school- or community-based resources to help their children with school, such as tutoring, after-school programs, and libraries. This percentage has increased steadily since 2002, when one-third of the parents (31%) said that they had learned about resources. The percentage of parents who used these resources increased steadily from 48 percent in 2003 to 89 percent in 2006. Fewer parents (26%) learned about services to help them with parenting.

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

**Almost of the scholars were matched with a mentor while they were involved in Cargill Scholars.** One goal of Cargill Scholars is to provide scholars with Big Brother/Big Sister mentors. Almost all scholars (96%) had been matched with a mentor by the summer of 2005. In 2006, the percentage of scholars with a mentor decreased significantly.

**Scholars had positive relationships with their mentors.** At the conclusion of the fifth program year, most parents (90%) said that scholars had a "very positive" relationship with their mentors; another 7 percent described the relationship as "somewhat positive." Most scholars enjoyed the time spent with their mentor (97%) and felt as though their mentor listened to them (91%). Most parents (89%) and scholars (74%) felt that the mentor had made a difference in the scholar's life, by exposing them to new activities or experiences or being a positive role model. Some scholars wished that they could spend more time with their mentors.

**Almost all scholars had positive relationships with adults; almost all parents felt that the program had helped them improve these relationships.** In 2006, almost all scholars (98%) said they had adults, other than their parents, who they can depend on (an increase from 82% at the beginning of the program). These adults included other relatives (such as aunts, uncles,

cousins, grandparents, and siblings) and unrelated adults (such as parents of friends, mentors, and Cargill Scholars staff). Almost all parents (98%) and scholars (97%) felt that Cargill Scholars helped scholars improve their relationships with unrelated adults at least "somewhat."

**Scholars enjoyed the time spent with the program coaches and felt supported by them.** At the conclusion of the program, almost all scholars said that they enjoyed the time spent with their coach (98%) and felt that their coach listened to them (96%). Over time, scholars became more comfortable talking to coaches, with the percentage who said that they talk about their feelings at least "sometimes" increasing from 52 percent in 2003 to 84 percent in 2006. Many scholars said that coaches helped them increase their academic skills or performance, while others said that they listened to their issues and provided support.

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

**Scholars were involved with a wide range of recreational programs.** In summer 2006, two-thirds of the scholars (64%) were involved in activities outside of school, especially sports, religious activities, and arts/music programs. According to parents, most scholars (79%) developed new skills, interests, or hobbies since becoming involved with Cargill Scholars.

**Most scholars developed musical skills as a result of their involvement in the initiative.** Most parents (93%) and scholars (91%) felt that the program helped scholars develop musical skills at least "a little."

### **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.

**About one-third of the parents have seen changes in their parenting behavior with the scholar.** One-third of the parents (36%) said that they had seen changes in their parenting behaviors with the scholars, such as being more strict and giving them increased responsibility. About one in three parents also reported similar changes in their behavior with other children in the family.

**Scholars reported more positive well-being than other students their age.** Scholars were asked several questions from the Minnesota Student Survey about their mood and emotional well-being. Three-quarters of the scholars (73%) described their mood in the past 30 days as “excellent” or “very good.” Forty percent of the scholars felt sad at least “a little of the time” in the past 30 days, while 47 percent felt nervous, worried, or upset. More than half of the scholars experienced at least “a little” stress. Compared to students completing the 2004 Minnesota Student Survey, students involved in Cargill Scholars reported more positive emotional well-being on all items.

**One in five parents was concerned about scholars’ behavior or emotional well-being.** In 2006, 21 percent of the parents said that they had concerns about scholars’ behavior or emotional well-being. When asked to describe these concerns, parents provided a range of comments such as relationships with family, emotional well-being, and low self-esteem.

**Most scholars avoid risky behaviors and most parents felt that the program helped scholars make healthy decisions.** Almost all scholars felt that they live a healthy lifestyle (96%) and know how to avoid risky behaviors (98%). Almost all parents (95%) felt that Cargill Scholars helped their child make healthy lifestyle decisions and avoid risky behaviors, such as drugs or alcohol, criminal behavior, or sexual activity. Scholars reported low levels of involvement in these activities. None of the scholars reported using alcohol or other drugs and almost all (93%) were not sexually active.

**Most scholars and parents were not worried about scholars’ transition to high school, though some had concerns regarding peer relationships and academics.** One-third of the parents had concerns about their child entering ninth grade, including peer pressure and a lack of academic preparation. Many scholars said that they looked forward to meeting new friends and having different teachers. Some scholars worried about schoolwork and grades. When asked what skills they need to develop as they move into high school, most scholars said that they need to work on their academic skills, including study skills and organizational skills.

**Most parents were not concerned about scholars’ transition into Destination 2010.** At the conclusion of the 2005-06 academic year, the Cargill Scholars transitioned into the Destination 2010 initiative administered by The Minneapolis Foundation. In anticipation of this transition, parents were asked if they had any concerns about their child moving into the Destination 2010 initiative. Twelve percent of the parents expressed concern, saying that they did not know much about the program or that they were concerned about decreases in services.

**Parents and scholars hope to receive a range of academic supports from the guidance counselors.** Many scholars (62%) and parents (71%) were aware of the guidance counselor services that would be available following the transition to Destination 2010. Almost all of these parents (95%) and most of the scholars (79%) said that they would use these services; most of the remaining parents and scholars said that they would “maybe” use the services. Parents and scholars each identified services and supports that they would like the guidance counselor to provide, especially academic assistance and help with college planning.

## **How parents rate Cargill Scholars**

**Parents were very satisfied with the accessibility of services.** At least 87 percent of the parents gave ratings of at least “good” to each element of accessibility included in the survey, including ease of arranging meetings with coaches, their level of input in selecting activities for scholars, responsiveness of staff to phone calls, amount of information received from staff, and the convenience of activity times and locations.

**Most parents felt that scholars received the right amount and the right kind of services.** When asked to rate the overall amount of service received from Cargill Scholars, most parents (93%) said that it was at least “good.” Seventy percent rated the level of service received as either “very good” or “outstanding.” Most parents also said that scholars received the right amount (95%) and the right kinds (98%) of services to meet their needs and interests.

**Parents provided high ratings of the cultural competence of services.** Four items related to the

cultural competence of the program were included in the parent survey. For each item, 87 to 91 percent of the parents gave ratings of at least “good.”

**Parents were generally very satisfied with the quality of program activities.** In 2006, all parents rated the following activities as “good” or better: end-of-year trip, music lessons, group activities, and time spent with Big Brothers/Big Sisters. For all other activities, more than 88 percent of the parents provided ratings of “good” or better.

**Most parents found information presented at parent meetings useful.** Almost all parents (95%) attended at least one parent meeting. The percentage of parents attending meetings increased significantly over time. Of those who attended, 78 percent found the information “very useful,” while 15 percent found it “a little bit useful.” Many parents said that they learned about behavioral issues facing teenagers, such as alcohol, drugs, and sexual activity. Others said that they learned about strategies for communicating with their child. Many parents did not have any suggestions for future meetings, while others requested more information about college and career planning, adolescent behavior, and school issues, such as curricula and safety.

**Parents provided positive feedback about program staff.** For each survey item about staff, at least 88 percent of the parents gave ratings of “good” or better. Ninety-five percent of the parents gave ratings of at least “good” to the friendliness and hospitality of the Cargill Scholars staff, the knowledge and skills of the Cargill staff, and the coaches’ ability to listen to their child’s problems.

**Almost all parents (98%) rated their overall satisfaction with the program as at least “good.”** More than half (56%) rated their overall satisfaction with the program as “outstanding.” Sixty-three percent of the parents said their child has a very favorable response to the program; another 33 percent described their child’s response as favorable.

**Most parents identified the activities, especially tutoring, as the most positive program feature.** Many parents identified specific activities that the

program had provided as the most positive feature of the program. More than half of the parents mentioned tutoring, while others mentioned the travel opportunities, educational assistance, and writing and music classes. Other parents highlighted behavioral changes in the scholars and opportunities for family involvement as the positive features. When asked to identify additional services that their child needed before transferring to high school, most parents requested continued tutoring support or additional emotional support, such as mentoring or counseling.

Many parents said that they would not change anything about the program. Others requested additional services or an expanded length of the program.

## **How students rate Cargill Scholars**

**Almost all scholars enjoyed the program, especially the end-of-year trip.** Almost all scholars (98%) said that they enjoyed being in the program. When asked to rate each activity, the item with the highest satisfaction ratings was the end-of-year trip, with 94 percent of the scholars “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” that they enjoyed it. Scholars were least likely to say that they enjoyed the tutoring sessions and the music lessons.

**Scholars found the academic services, including tutoring and classes, to be the most important features of the program.** When asked to identify the most important aspect of the program, most scholars mentioned the academic services (including tutoring and classes). Others mentioned the opportunities to meet people and learn new things. Scholars were also asked how the program had helped them. Scholars most often mentioned the program’s impact on their academic skills, such as improved grades, benefits of the tutoring, and extra classes that they received. Others mentioned behavior changes, such as being more responsible.

**While some scholars had difficulty meeting the requirements of Cargill Scholars, many wished that they could remain in the program longer.** Some scholars found it difficult following the program requirements, scheduling and participating in so many activities, and getting along with other participants. Others felt pressure from the program to maintain

positive grades and behavior. Despite these challenges, most scholars said that they would not change anything about the program or that they did not know what they would change. Some scholars suggested extending the program through high school or increasing the number of trips.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Cargill Scholars is a five-year initiative that ended at the conclusion of the 2005-06 academic year. The results collected to date suggest that Cargill Scholars has had a positive impact on scholars in each of the program's goal areas, including academic skills, social skills, parent involvement in education, relationships with unrelated adults, and involvement in community activities.

Despite these improvements, it is difficult to predict whether the scholars will meet their eventual goals of successfully completing high school and enrolling in post-secondary education. Academically, scholars remain similar to a matched comparison group, and some scholars and parents remain concerned about scholar's abilities to succeed academically.

The transition of the Cargill Scholars into the Destination 2010 initiative administered by The Minneapolis Foundation provides a unique opportunity to support the scholars as they move through high school. The Cargill Foundation will also continue to serve the scholars, by providing the services of guidance counselors to the students. The following recommendations are intended to guide the work of the guidance counselors and the Destination 2010 staff:

Monitor school attendance and performance, and provide services to scholars who begin to show decline.

Connect scholars with resources to assist them as needed with school work and home work, such as after-school programs or tutors.

Provide scholars and parents with additional resources regarding strategies for paying for post-secondary education.

Provide scholars with opportunities to explore a range of career options.

Provide age-appropriate information to scholars and parents about behavioral and emotional issues facing adolescents and strategies for successfully navigating challenges.

Link scholars with community programs, so that they can continue to remain involved in positive activities.

**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 Emily Robinson at the Cargill Foundation (952-742-6247; [Emily\\_Robinson@cargill.com](mailto:Emily_Robinson@cargill.com))