



The Learning Curve

February 04

Cargill Scholars® is an educational, social and economic development program for socio-economically disadvantaged children who attend school in Minneapolis or its northern and western suburbs. The program is designed to improve the academic achievement of 50 children who joined the program in the fourth grade (they are now in the sixth grade), with the goal being their successful completion of high school and admission into a post-secondary institution. The Cargill Foundation has committed up to \$5 million over five years to Cargill Scholars.

Welcome

It may be a cliché to say we're learning almost as much as the students, but it's true. Several times a year, this newsletter will share what we're learning about some aspect of Cargill Scholars – its design, results, challenges, and course adjustments.

Some upcoming topics:

- Pick your partners well (collaborating with community organizations)
- Take one giant step (the middle school transition)
- Doing it all (the challenge of comprehensiveness)
- Hey, coach! (the pivotal role of the program managers)
- Music in the mix (what music lessons have to do with school success)
- How do we know if it's working? (evaluation design and early results)
- The view from the classroom (what teachers are saying)
- The home connection (parent involvement)
- Can my brother come? (how siblings fit into the picture)

Please don't hesitate to contact us with your questions or reactions (contact information is on the back page). We've also provided a folder in case you'd like to keep the series.

Toni Green
Senior Program Officer, Cargill Foundation



Greg Page, president of Cargill, with the Cargill Scholars in 2003.

How Cargill Scholars got off the ground

About five years ago, the Cargill Foundation chose to focus on educational success. After a few years' experience working in this area, the Cargill Foundation board asked Foundation staff to develop a program where "dollars follow children."

The easy answer was scholarships for private school, but we decided to think more broadly. We knew that many kids who have good potential, but who are not excelling in school, can fall through the cracks. Helping these students excel seemed like a good investment.

After talking with community and educational leaders, we formed a small working group to hammer out a plan. A few months later, the board approved the concept of Cargill Scholars, with a price tag of \$5 million over five to six years.

And then, as they say, the real work began.

We chose the Neighborhood Involvement Program to handle day-to-day operations. We hired two program managers to work with 25 students each. After about six months of planning, we were ready for students.

Choosing the students

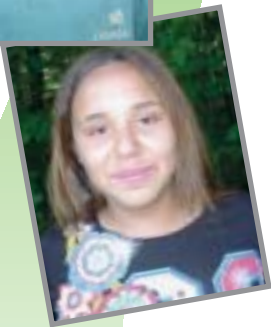
Applications went out to teachers, principals, and social workers in Minneapolis and in nearby suburban schools where at least 40 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. We invited each school to nominate two students whose reading and math scores on standardized tests were in the lowest 25 percent of their class, but who otherwise seemed to be in a fairly stable situation. We provided specific criteria to guide the selection of students.

With roughly 100 applications for 50 openings, Cargill employees interviewed and selected about two-thirds of the group. The Cargill Scholars program team selected the remaining one-third, with an eye to the overall mix of genders and cultural backgrounds.

Two years into the program, we're miles from where we started. The Scholars are now sixth-graders. The program has been doing its own homework, getting to know the students and learning what works. We'll be sharing those lessons with you as we go.

About the students

Almost equal numbers of boys and girls make up the Cargill Scholars. About half are African American, and others identify themselves as Asian, Latino, American Indian, White,



African immigrant, and multiracial. They attend 36 different schools, primarily in Minneapolis.

About half live with only one parent. About one-third of the families have serious trouble making ends meet. In general, the Scholars do not have pervasive personal or family difficulties, and they tend to have strong connections with their immediate and extended families and positive ties to other adults and a faith community.

Fundamentals - Why we do what we do

Private academic tutoring

Why: Not only common sense, but research tells us that one-on-one tutoring has a strong influence on improving students' academic performance.

How: Change of Mind Learning Systems provides professional tutors. To avoid transportation difficulties, the tutoring takes place at school during the school day.

Out-of-school learning opportunities

Why: Enrichment activities are important for young students to blossom and see new things outside their usual surroundings. Shared activities also help the Scholars to bond as a group – since they don't attend the same school.

How: A curriculum specialist selects and designs activities to strengthen four basic abilities: music, science, math, and writing.

Examples: Science camp, museum trips, arts events, college campus visits.

Organized out-of-school activities

Why: Research shows it's important to keep kids involved and busy – but not overextended – in positive, structured activities that provide both growth and enjoyment.

How: Each student can select at least one activity that's purely his or her choice. The Cargill Scholars coaches sometimes recommend a specific activity to help a student grow in a certain area. An individual spending account covers the cost.

Examples: Dance, sports, art classes, martial arts, scouting.

Music lessons

Why: Research shows that learning music stimulates the development of the mind. It also develops discipline and commitment; and some students discover a special talent. Performance in public is an important experience for the students and their families.



continued



The Learning Curve
Issue 1, February 2004

For more information about
Cargill Scholars, visit
www.cargill.com.

For more copies of this
briefing, or to subscribe or
unsubscribe, contact Bonnie
Blue at the Cargill Foundation,
Bonnie_L_Blue@cargill.com,
952-742-6247.

Research reports on Cargill
Scholars are available at
www.wilder.org/research.

How: MacPhail Center for Music provides individual and group lessons; a few students have other arrangements, such as their school band.

Examples: Voice, piano, other instruments.

Parent involvement

Why: Research shows that parents' active participation in their child's learning, both at home and at school, has a big impact on academic success.

How: The initial plan was for the two program managers to work individually with parents. That remains very important, but we also quickly discovered a need for gatherings where parents can meet each other and learn about topics that help them support their children's school success.

Examples: How to work with your child's teacher; what to expect in middle school; program results and updates.

Mentoring

Why: Research shows the importance of a consistent, positive relationship with someone outside the immediate family.

How: Big Brothers / Big Sisters of the Greater Twin Cities recruits and trains mentors, matches them with Cargill Scholars, and stays involved to ensure things go well. Most of the mentors are Cargill employees.

Coaches (program managers)

Why: The two coaches play a central coordinating role with students, families, partner organizations, and the Cargill team.

How: Each coach works with 25 Scholars, building personal relationships and supervising all aspects of the program for those students. The coach drafts an individual development plan for each Scholar annually; talks it over with the student, parents, and teachers; and follows up on the plan throughout the year.

Examples: School visits, home visits, attending activities like students' sporting events and music recitals.

Coming in April:

Picking our partners – How we built the team that would make Cargill Scholars a reality