



Assessment of Student Outcomes 2006-07

Prepared by

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Fall 2007

INTRODUCTION

College For Every Student (CFES), formerly Foundation for Excellent Schools (FES), is committed to becoming the preeminent organization in the U.S. at helping underserved students prepare for, gain access to, and succeed in college. To this end, CFES has established a tradition of comprehensive and independent evaluation of the impact of its work that enables the organization to continually improve its service to underserved students and their schools. Striving to carry on the tradition of careful evaluation of student impact, the aim of this report is to produce knowledge that improves CFES programs and practices and to offer practical insight to educators nationwide.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

In recent years researchers have documented the inverse relationship between family socioeconomic status and educational aspirations and achievement. Ramey and Ramey (Ramey, S.L., & Ramey, C. T. (1994, November). **The Transition to School: Why the First Few Years Matter for a Lifetime.** *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(30), 194-198) describe the relationship of family socioeconomic status (SES) to children's readiness for school: "Across all socioeconomic groups, parents face major challenges when it comes to providing optimal care and education for their children. For families in poverty, these challenges can be formidable (p. 195). This shortfall in education readiness follows students through their high school years, resulting in low performance, low graduation rates, and low post-high school educational aspirations."

Furthermore, college aspirations of low-SES students are decidedly lower than those of their more affluent peers. "In 2004, 51 percent of low-SES twelfth graders expected to earn a bachelor's degree or attend graduate school, compared with 66 percent of middle-SES seniors and 87 percent of high-SES seniors," according to the National Center for Education Statistics (Rooney). For many low-SES students, college may not even be a choice. Seventy-one percent of the lowest SES students do not obtain the academic qualifications necessary to support college enrollment (Cabrera). The underserved students described above are the targets of CFES programs in schools across the country.

CFES TODAY

CFES, a national nonprofit organization based in Cornwall, Vermont, helps underserved students take steps to prepare for, gain access to, and succeed in college. Since 1991, CFES has helped 140,000 underserved students take the extra step, achieving measurable gains in academic performance, graduating from high school, and pursuing higher education, by helping educators develop innovative partnerships among schools and between schools and colleges.

In 2006-07 CFES worked with 111 schools in four programs: 19 schools in the Adirondack Scholars program, 70 schools in The Century Program (TCP), 11 schools in the Leatherstocking Consortium, and 11 schools in the Vermont Scholars program.

CFES has an annual operating budget of \$2.3 million and employs eight full-time executive, development, and program staff in its home office with an additional 20 part-time program directors throughout the U.S.

THEORY OF CHANGE

CFES programs are designed around a shared theory of change that has evolved since the inception of the organization. This theory can be summarized as follows:

1. In order to achieve its goal of helping undeserved students succeed in college, CFES programs engage educators and students in five core practices:
 - ♦ Mentoring
 - ♦ Goal setting
 - ♦ Pathways to college
 - ♦ Leadership through service
 - ♦ Families as partners
2. The core practices are the primary avenue for enabling students to move toward college. Implementation of the five core practices has a significant impact on three key indicators of student success:
 - ♦ Student engagement – the degree to which students participate in core practices.
 - ♦ Heightened aspirations – the degree to which students raise awareness and motivation to pursue and succeed in college.
 - ♦ Improved performance – the degree to which students improve in GPA, attendance, and citizenship.

ASSESSMENT DESIGN

This assessment considers the power and efficacy of the CFES theory of change by examining how students did in respect to the key indicators: level of student *engagement*, heightened *aspirations*, and change in student *performance*. In addition, the report examines student experiences with peer mentoring.

Questions

The *2006-07 Assessment of Student Outcomes* strives to answer two questions:

1. What has been the impact on CFES Scholars in respect to becoming prepared to access and succeed in college? This means examining elements of engagement, aspirations, and performance.
2. What is the experience of CFES Scholars in respect to peer mentoring?

Data

The assessment considered the following sources of quantitative and qualitative data:

1. *2007 CFES Aspirations Survey* – This survey of CFES Scholar aspirations was conducted in the spring of 2007. It involved a random sample of 35 CFES schools with a total of 1,206 responses. Students were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree with 12 statements grouped into four categories: college awareness, goal setting, leadership, and mentoring.
2. *Outside Evaluation* – In April 2007 David Erdmann visited 10 schools to assess CFES's effectiveness in moving students toward college. At each site, he conducted focus groups with teams of educators, mentors, and mentees and observed programs in

action. A part of this assessment focused on how schools are implementing the MetLife Peer Mentoring Program.

3. *MetLife Peer Mentoring Program Survey* – In 2006-07 MetLife asked CFES to implement peer mentoring in 25 schools located in areas within which the company operates. This survey involved all MetLife schools with a total of approximately 1,000 respondents.
4. *CFES Semiannual Progress Reports* – Each of the 111 CFES schools reported twice annually on 1) student engagement with the five core practices, 2) school effectiveness at implementing the five core practices, 3) school perception of CFES effectiveness, and 4) student progress on grade point average, attendance, citizenship, and college enrollment. Each of the 20 CFES program directors also reported on their perceptions of how each school progressed.

FINDINGS

What has been the impact on CFES Scholars in respect to engagement, aspirations, and performance?

Engagement

Previous research established that student engagement in core CFES practices is correlated with higher aspirations and improved academic performance. Historically, CFES schools have demonstrated that their students are highly engaged in CFES activities. This trend continued in 2006-07. Last year nearly 15,000 students participated as TCP, Adirondack, or Vermont Scholars or as part of the Leatherstocking Consortium. Approximately 5,000 additional non-CFES Scholars participated in CFES-related activities and practices, thus demonstrating the ability of CFES programs to infuse core practices throughout its schools.

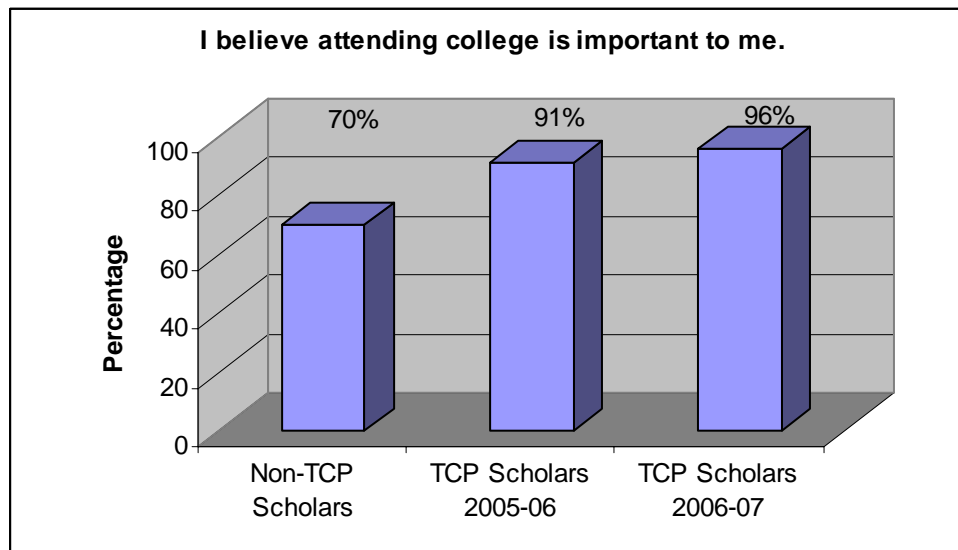
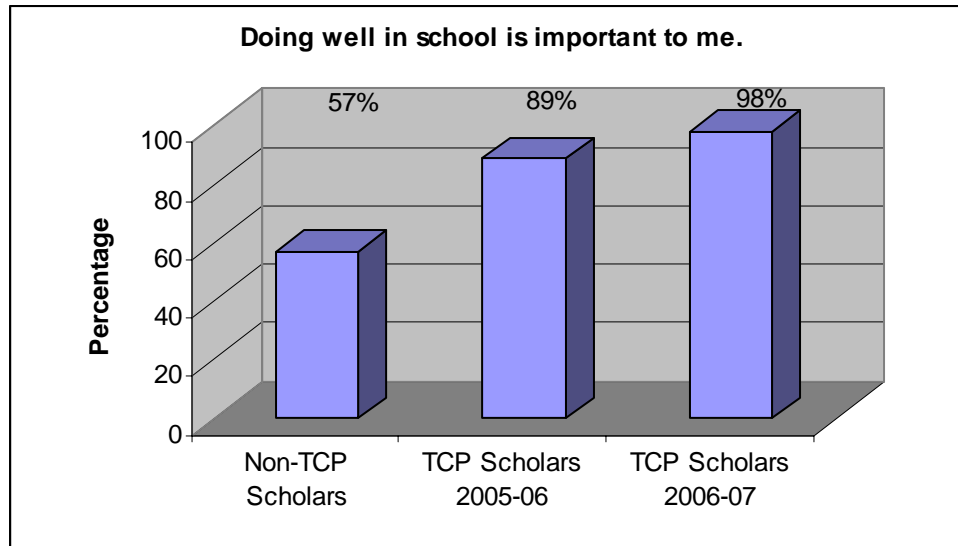
Aspirations

The *2007 CFES Aspirations Survey* provides useful insight into how CFES students did in respect to raising their aspirations. A highly salient finding from the survey is that more than 90 percent of students respond “Agree” to all statements concerning their raised state of college aspirations. Also, responses are largely consistent across subgroups including region, school size, student age, and gender.

The lowest “Agree” percentage (79 percent) is for the statement “CFES/TCP has helped me take steps toward college.” This may indicate an opportunity for CFES to improve its efforts to move students from the “awareness and/or aspiring stage” to an “informed action” stage of the college admission process. This insight is consistent with findings of the *MetLife Peer Mentoring Assessment* that reports that in some cases CFES/TCP membership is somewhat “abstract” and therefore may not always facilitate concrete action. In any case, even the lowest “agree” percentage at 79 percent is remarkably high.

The finding that CFES programs have a significant impact on student aspirations is supported by a comparison of this year’s results of survey questions associated with student aspirations to last year’s. Last year the scores of CFES Scholars were compared with scores from a national sample of more than 80,000 students with a similar socioeconomic status (SES). CFES Scholars scored significantly higher than the national sample on items that are critical to heightened aspirations. This year’s respondents scored even higher.

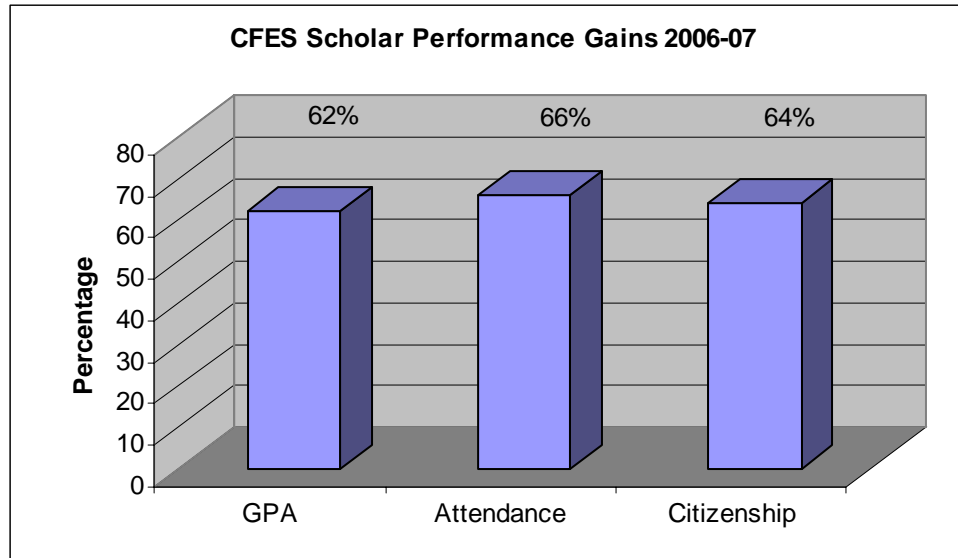
The following graphs illustrate the differences between 2005-06 Scholars, 2006-07 Scholars, and their peers in areas that define aspirations. It is reasonable to conclude that the trend is toward greater student impact.



The finding that CFES programs have an impact on the aspirations of students is further supported by the experience of senior Scholars. The number of senior Scholars has increased significantly from 450 in 2005-06 to 650 in 2006-07. As with last year's cohort of senior Scholars, virtually all (98 percent) expect to enroll in college this fall. This compares extremely favorably to the national average of 51 percent of low-SES seniors who expect to earn a bachelor's degree. Recent research indicates that only 40 of 100 students of color will graduate from high school, while only 20 of those will enroll in college. The fact that 98 of 100 CFES senior Scholars, two-thirds of whom are students of color, will enroll in college is perhaps the most remarkable finding of this report. It is clear that CFES efforts represent groundbreaking approaches to addressing the national problem of low aspirations among SES students, especially those of color.

Performance

Data collected from each CFES school on students participating in CFES programs provides useful insight into how students did in respect to increasing their performance. Scholar performance gains remain extremely high in areas that indicate progress toward a high school diploma and readiness for college and compare favorably to those recorded last year: 62 percent showed gains in GPA, 66 percent in attendance, and 64 percent in citizenship. It is clear that CFES programs produce positive impact on students in respect to performance.



What is the experience of CFES Scholars in respect to peer mentoring?

Peer Mentoring

The *MetLife Peer Mentoring Program Assessment* provides keen insight into the experience of students with the core practice of mentoring. In April 2007 David Erdmann visited MetLife Peer Mentoring schools. At each site, he observed and heard conclusively from all sources that the peer mentoring programs are having a powerful and positive impact on both mentees and mentors. Mentees are adjusting more quickly and successfully, and their academic achievement and aspirations are at a higher level than their classmates. In respect to challenges faced by the mentoring programs, each demonstrated need for ongoing training, supervision, and scheduling support in order to sustain, extend, and leverage positive results for individuals and schools.

The story of Nicole and Madison, two students from the rural community of Wewahitchka in Florida, illuminates the general impact of mentoring. Located in one of Florida's poorest counties, Wewahitchka's elementary, middle, and high schools enroll approximately 700 students. The town is racially mixed, but Caucasian and African American families live in different areas and social interactions are infrequent.

As a part of the MetLife Peer Mentoring, high school seniors are paired with sixth graders and juniors are paired with fifth graders. Nicole is an eleventh grade African American student and her mentee, fifth grader Madison, is Caucasian. Madison says she wants to be a nurse, something she learned about on a CFES trip to Gulf Coast Community College.

Although Nicole drives to school, she makes an effort to see Madison almost every day at the school bus stop. And they see each other every Thursday when they take different dance classes at the same studio. Once a month Nicole goes over to the elementary school to have lunch with Madison. “She’s one of my really good friends and I can go to her and talk to her,” says Madison.

“I want to get out of Wewa and go to college when I graduate,” says Nicole. “I tell Madison that it’s important to get good grades, to let her know that she can be what she wants to be.... It makes me feel good to think that I’m helping someone who looks up to me as a friend and as a sister.” As they walked out of the room together, Nicole put her arm around Madison’s shoulder, and Madison in turn put her arm around Nicole’s waist.

CONCLUSIONS

It is possible to propose answers to the two questions posed at the outset of this assessment.

1. *What has been the impact on CFES Scholars in respect to engagement, aspirations, and performance?*

In each case, it is clear that the impact on students has been positive and significant. CFES Scholars continue to demonstrate high levels of engagement and performance as compared to the previous year. However, it is in the area of aspirations that Scholars are showing the greatest gains over already high levels from the previous year. In areas that define aspirations, CFES Scholars are increasing scores to reach into the high 90 percent range as compared to the 60 percent range for students with a similar SES profile. The practical outcome of these scores is seen in the high percentage of CFES Scholars enrolling in college. Nearly 100 percent college enrollment is remarkable for any cohort and is truly outstanding for this undeserved population.

CFES student outcomes, especially in respect to aspirations, can produce well-earned pride among Scholars and their teachers, inspiration to all aspiring underserved students and their teachers, and guidance to all those committed to serving them.

2. *What is the experience of CFES Scholars in respect to the core practice of mentoring?*

Data from hundreds of CFES students in dozens of schools consistently support the value of peer mentoring in raising student self-confidence and aspirations.

By selecting and featuring peer mentoring, CFES embraces one of the most effective methods for developing academic and social confidence and success. Recent quantitative and qualitative assessment of the MetLife Peer Mentoring Program indicates that this particular mentoring program is exemplary. The MetLife program models effective application of a concept that is widely accepted by educators. The program exhibits innovative design and excellent implementation. With the financial backing of MetLife Foundation, CFES has provided the training and support necessary to create highly effective and innovative peer mentoring programs in its schools.

CFES peer mentoring programs are highly effective and innovative but require ongoing training, support, supervision, and scheduling in order to sustain, leverage, and extend positive impact at current sites. An additional challenge for CFES is transporting these model practices to other schools and students across the country. The evidence is clear that these programs are well worth the cost and the commitment required to initiate and sustain them.