



Assessment of Student Outcomes 2007-08

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Fall 2008

INTRODUCTION

College For Every Student (CFES) has established itself as a leading organization in the U.S. at helping underserved students move toward college success. A tradition of comprehensive and independent evaluation is one important dimension of CFES's distinguished leadership. Careful assessment of the impact of its work enables the organization to continually improve its service to underserved students and their schools, and to offer practical insight to educators nationwide. This report is intended to extend this tradition.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

In their November 1994 Phi Delta Kappa article, *The Transition to School: Why the First Few Years Matter for a Lifetime*, Ramey and Ramey argue convincingly for the existence of an inverse relationship between family socioeconomic status (SES) and educational aspirations and achievement. The authors describe and document the relationship of family socioeconomic status 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. 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."

Educational scholars and practitioners universally corroborate Ramey and Ramey's proposition (Choy, 2007; Fertig, 2005; Finn, 2006; Fox, et al., 2007; Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Jager-Hyman, 2007; Sokatch, 2007). Many, indeed, offer extensions and elaborations (Antonio, 2007). For example, a recent National Center for Education Statistics report (Rooney, et al., 2006) indicates that aspirations of low-SES students are decidedly lower than those of their more affluent peers.

Making matters worse, the current economic downturn is exacerbating an already chronic problem for low-income students who are the targets of CFES programs in schools nationwide.

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 over 155,000 underserved students achieve measurable gains in academic performance, graduate from high school, and pursue higher education.

In 2007-08 CFES served 15,000 K-12 students in 120 schools partnered with 210 colleges throughout the U.S. CFES has an annual operating budget of \$2.5 million.

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: **In order to achieve its goal of helping undeserved students succeed in college, CFES programs engage students in three core practices:**

1. *Pathways to College* is a practice in which CFES creates partnerships for its K-12 schools with colleges that allow CFES Scholars, most of whom would be first-

generation college students, to visit college campuses, interact with college students and faculty, and gain exposure to admissions, financial aid, and other higher education components.

2. *Mentoring* fosters academic and personal growth among CFES Scholars by providing them an opportunity to build a supportive relationship with an older, more experienced individual who can serve as a role model. All CFES schools have mentoring programs for their CFES Scholars that utilize peers (including other Scholars), adults, teachers, and/or college students as mentors. CFES mentoring programs often integrate other core practices by incorporating *Pathways to College* and *Leadership through Service* activities. In particular, *peer mentoring* has emerged as a vital form of this practice, which is embraced by almost every CFES school.
3. *Leadership through Service* activities are designed to help CFES Scholars identify and express their leadership potential to improve their school, neighborhood, and/or the global community. CFES schools create meaningful opportunities for CFES Scholars to provide student leadership in service activities. Gaining leadership skills and taking responsibility for others contribute to Scholars' self-confidence, stimulating greater personal aspirations.

The core practices are the primary avenue for enabling students to move toward college. Implementation of the three core practices has a significant impact on three key indicators of student success:

1. *Student Engagement* – the degree to which students participate in core practices.
2. *Heightened Aspirations* – the degree to which students raise awareness and motivation to pursue and succeed in college.
3. *Improved Performance* – the degree to which students improve in grade point average (GPA), attendance, and citizenship.

ASSESSMENT DESIGN

As in previous years, 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.

Question

The *2007-08 Assessment of Student Outcomes* strives to answer the question: 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.

Data

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

1. *2008 CFES Aspirations Survey* – This survey of CFES Scholar aspirations, conducted in the spring of 2008, involved non-probability sampling of students in grades 6 through 12 from 33 CFES schools throughout the U.S. Schools were selected on a quota basis to achieve a high likelihood of a representative sample. Respondents in each school were selected on a convenience basis, as there was relatively little

variation in the population within each school. A total of 1,690 responses were collected. Students were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree with 12 statements grouped into three categories: college awareness, leadership, and mentoring.

2. *Outside Evaluator Site Visits* – In April 2008 David Erdmann and Bart Morrison visited seven schools to assess CFES effectiveness in moving students toward college. At each site, they 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 peer mentoring program.
3. *CFES Semiannual Progress Assessments* – Each of the 120 CFES schools reported twice annually on 1) student engagement with the three core practices, 2) school effectiveness at implementing the core practices, 3) school perception of CFES effectiveness, and 4) student progress on GPA, attendance, citizenship, and college enrollment.
4. *CFES Program Director Progress Reports* – Each of the 21 CFES program directors provided semiannual reports, detailing their perceptions of how each school progressed in meeting CFES expectations.

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. In 2007-08, 15,000 students participated in all CFES practices, while an additional 7,400 non-CFES Scholars participated in one or more CFES practices, thus demonstrating the sustained ability of CFES to infuse core practices throughout its schools.

The sample of seven schools that participated in site visits in 2007-08 is representative of all CFES schools. Each site-visit school demonstrated success in helping students perform at high levels due to high engagement, particularly with peer mentoring programs. The following examples are cited:

- Beginning with Children Charter School in Brooklyn, New York, exemplifies the high degree of engagement found in CFES schools. Here peer mentoring is the leverage point for introducing other core practices, where eighth graders mentor sixth graders who are entering middle school. Mentoring activities at this school are integrated with all aspects of the school, and all students are involved on a daily basis.

“This program has changed me dramatically because before peer mentoring I was influenced by the wrong people. I acted differently. I didn’t participate. Now I look to Ms. Margie. She is my role model. She gives and gives. Now I am more focused on school. I get involved. She made me see who I can really be and my potential. I would like for kids like me to have this opportunity so that they can change their ways like me.” (Student at Beginning with Children Charter School)

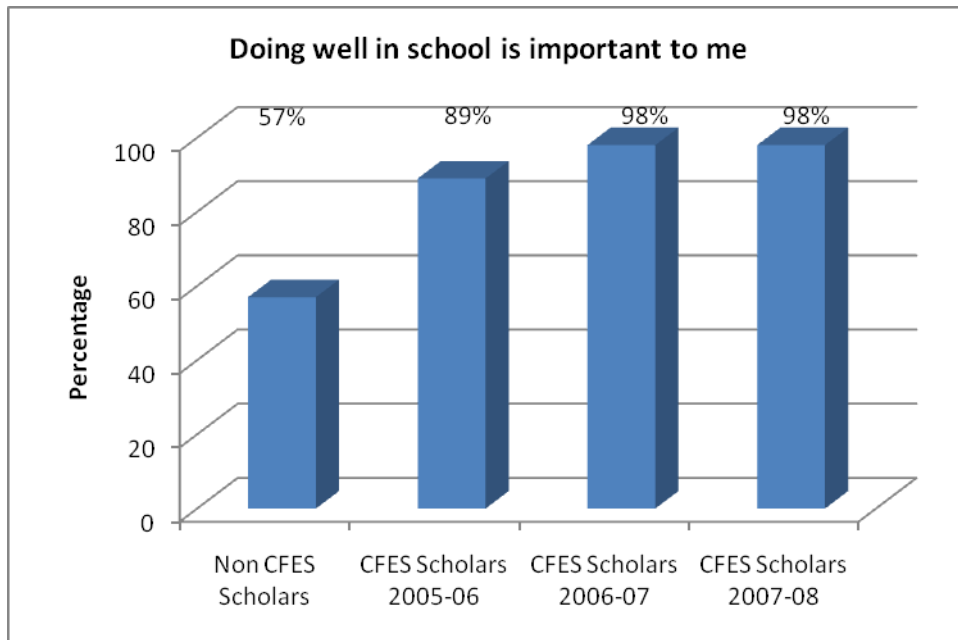
- At Schenevus High School in rural upstate New York, all 400 students are involved in CFES programs.
“Every single student in our building is affected positively by CFES in some way.” (Schenevus CFES Liaison)
- At East Boston High School in Massachusetts, tenth and eleventh grade mentors are paired with incoming ninth grade mentees to help ease the transition to high school. The program is organized by gender and features student success planning and learning, dress-for-success activities, regular college awareness events, and an outside speaker series. Participants act like “Pied Pipers,” attracting new recruits almost daily, thereby challenging faculty and administrators to keep up with the demand for CFES activities. Educators report that CFES programs produce exceptional buy-in, loyalty, and participation from the approximately 40 mentor-mentee pairs.

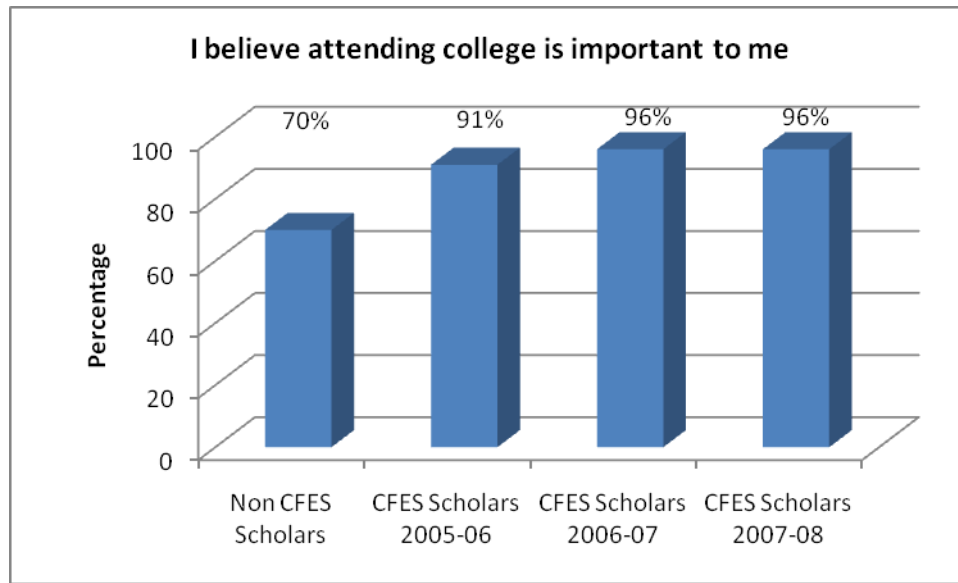
Aspirations

The 2008 CFES Aspirations Survey provides insight into how CFES students did in respect to raising their aspirations. A salient finding from the survey is that nearly 90 percent of students respond “Agree” to all statements concerning their raised state of college aspirations – equaling responses in the previous year.

The finding that CFES programs are sustaining significant impact on student aspirations is supported by a comparison of this year’s results of survey questions associated with student aspirations to those of the previous two years and to those from a national sample of more than 80,000 students with a similar socioeconomic status (SES). CFES Scholars continue to score significantly higher than the national sample on items that are critical to heightened aspirations.

The following graphs illustrate how CFES programs are sustaining significant student impact in areas that define aspirations.



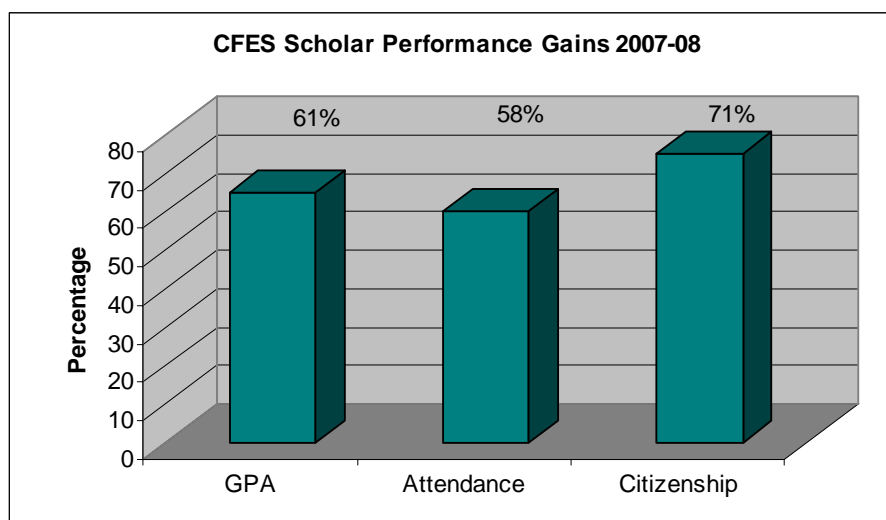


With one exception, responses continue to be largely consistent across subgroups including region, school size, student age, and gender. The most significant new finding from the data is the discrepancy between rural students and all others in the area of leadership. Nearly 90 percent of non-rural CFES Scholars responded “Agree” to the statement “I see myself as a leader” compared to only 78 percent of rural Scholars.

The finding that CFES programs have an impact on the aspirations of students is confirmed by the experience of high school seniors. The number of senior Scholars totaled 986 in 2007-08, compared to 450 in 2005-06 and 650 in 2006-07. Eight hundred seventy-five, or 89 percent, of the 2007-08 CFES high school seniors enrolled in college this fall. This compares favorably to the national average of less than 20 percent of low-income high school seniors who ultimately enroll in college.

Performance

Data collected from CFES schools on students participating in CFES programs provides insight into how Scholars perform in key performance areas that indicate progress toward college. Sixty-one percent showed gains in GPA, 58 percent gains in attendance, and 71 percent gains in citizenship.



CONCLUSIONS

The following cross-cutting themes emerge from our evaluation:

- **Sustaining powerful and positive impact in respect to college awareness**

CFES programs are sustaining powerful and positive impact on Scholars. Educators, as well as the students themselves, report that students continue to adjust more quickly and successfully, and their academic achievement and aspirations remain at a higher level than their classmates. Upperclassmen continue to reap the intended benefits of serving as mentors. Scholars are attending college at a significantly higher rate than their peers and demonstrate growth in leadership skills and a desire to engage in service far more readily than non-participants. *CFES is demonstrating impressive “staying power” through judicious adaptation – an attribute that could be exploited to the greater good of all through continued measured adaptation. One potentially advantageous adaptation could be placing an emphasis on rural communities.*

- **Extending impact beyond college awareness: self-efficacy, leadership, social responsibility**

A set of interrelated findings points to new, positive insights. CFES Scholars and educators report that their experience with CFES goes beyond the program’s emphasis on college awareness. Their involvement produces a heightened sense of self-efficacy, leadership capacity, and responsibility for others. They often emphasize how these three parts of their experience “make it possible” to actually go to college and succeed. They cite self-efficacy, leadership capacity, and caring for others as *transformative agents* for them in school. Aspiring to get to college is a *manifestation of this transformation*. Peer mentoring is cited by Scholars as the single most important activity that *facilitates their transformation*. The theme of personal transformation through development of self-efficacy, leadership capacity, and service ethic extends to the educators involved in the program, as well as to the schools themselves. Educators report that involvement in the program produces significant professional renewal, as well as positive impact on the school culture in general. *Facilitating personal, professional, and culture transformation in schools gets at the heart of the role and value of CFES programs.*

- **Succeeding through balancing generalized best practices with custom applications**

Though many CFES schools serve the same population of low-income families with a tradition of modest educational aspirations, they are organized differently and consist of different cultures. Each of these schools implements CFES and peer mentoring programs and other practices in unique ways according to their particular local circumstances. Administrators and faculty of each school visited cite flexibility in applying core CFES principles and practices as a key success factor. At the same time there is widespread appreciation for how CFES staff synthesize and share “best practices” across schools, as long as they can be applied judiciously according to local contingencies. CFES trainings, planning sessions, and regular conversations via phone and email are often cited as major factors for success. *These site visits underscore the critical importance of how CFES eschews the “one size fits all” approach while at the same time offers expert advice on effective practices. This is a very difficult balance to strike – one that CFES has achieved and should strive explicitly to maintain.*

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