



# **Program Assessment**

## **2008-09**

*Prepared by*

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## OVERALL ASSESSMENT GOALS

*Balancing the imperative to “prove” with the need to “improve”*

The goal of College for Every Student (CFES) is to increase college access and success for underserved students throughout the U.S. CFES places high value on assessment and believes that it should be conducted not only to demonstrate that its projects work but also to improve the way they work. As such, CFES espouses an approach to evaluation that is *rigorous* in its efforts to determine the worth of the program and to guide current and future implementation and management of it, as well as *relevant* and useful to all practitioners in the field. The overall goals of assessing CFES programs have been and remain to (1) document its outcomes, (2) demonstrate accountability, and (3) produce effective programming, greater learning opportunities, and greater knowledge of what works for the sponsoring organization and the field at large.

## DATA

This year’s assessment examines a multi-year trend in student outcomes and initiates consideration of organizational accountability. The following data were considered:

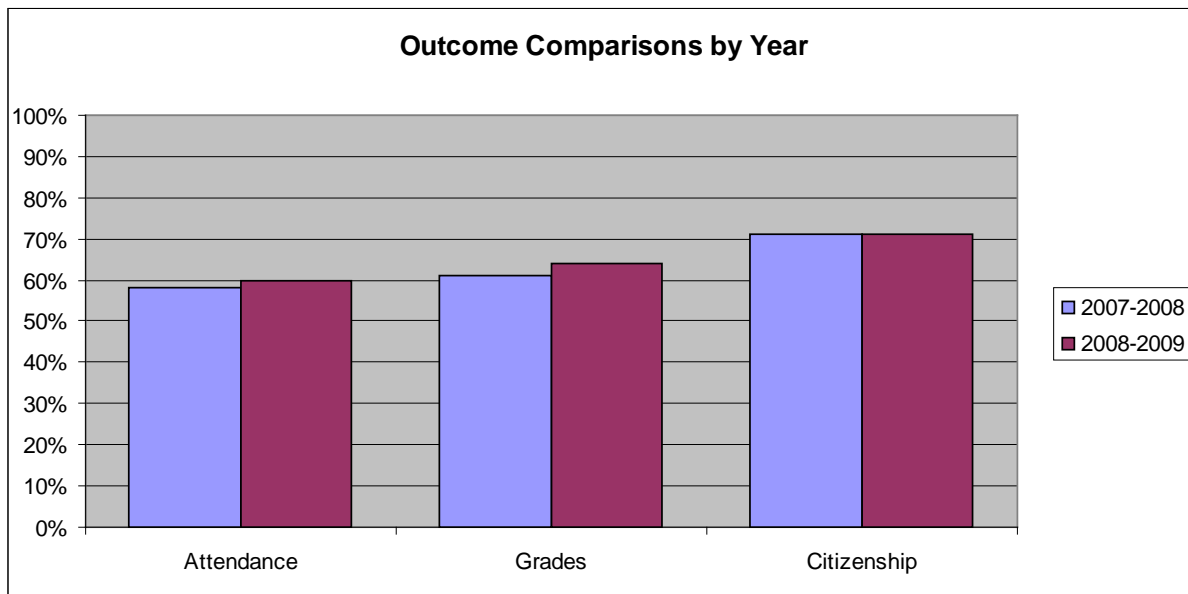
1. *CFES Aspirations Survey* – This survey of the aspirations of CFES Scholars (as targeted students are known) was conducted in the spring of 2009. It involved a random sample of CFES Scholars in grades 6 through 12 from 40 CFES schools throughout the U.S. A total of 1,958 responses were collected. 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 late May and early June, Bart Morrison conducted a series of telephonic focus groups with four CFES schools: Cloonan Middle School in suburban Connecticut, Fredrick Douglas Academy and MS 45/STARS Academy in NYC, and Olathe Middle/High School in rural Colorado. At each school, Morrison talked at length with faculty, staff, and CFES Scholars, thus learning from multiple perspectives about each school’s experience with the program and CFES accountability and responsiveness.
3. *CFES Semiannual Progress Assessment Surveys* – Each of the 110 CFES schools reported twice annually on 1) student engagement with the three core practices, 2) school effectiveness at implementing the core practices, and 3) school perception of CFES effectiveness. Each of the 18 CFES program directors also reported on their perceptions of how each school progressed.

## STUDENT OUTCOMES

### Sustaining Positive Trend in CFES Scholar Outcomes

Assessment conducted over the previous several years has emphasized the first of the above mentioned assessment goals: to document outcomes. Student outcomes along the multiple dimensions of *student engagement*, *heightened aspirations*, and *improved performance* have been documented and affirmed over multiple years. There has been clear and ample evidence across CFES schools and over time that the program is sustaining powerful and positive impact on students. Educators, as well as students, report that transitioning CFES Scholars adjust more quickly and successfully and their academic achievement and aspirations remain at a higher level than their classmates. CFES Scholars reap the intended benefits of serving as mentors. They gain acceptance and plan to attend college at a higher rate than their peers and demonstrate growth in leadership skills and a desire to engage in community service far more readily than non-participants. CFES continues to achieve high positive student impact by eschewing the “one size fits all” approach while at the same time offering expert advice on effective practices. CFES demonstrates impressive “staying power” through judicious adaptation in how it works with schools and applies core practices. Moreover, CFES successfully facilitates personal, professional and culture transformation in its schools.

CFES Scholar outcomes in 2008-09 continue this trend in respect to measures of citizenship, as well as improved performance in behavior, attendance, and grades.



Additionally, the following achievements of graduating Scholars in 2009 provide evidence of sustained positive impact on students:

- 97 percent of all twelfth grade CFES Scholars are going to college as compared to 73 percent of the total twelfth grade population of all CFES schools.
- Of the CFES Scholars going to college, 70 percent are going to four-year colleges, while 30 percent are going to two-year colleges as compared to 60 percent and 40 percent, respectively, for all college-bound graduates of CFES schools.

### **Solidifying and Validating a Theory of Change**

In addition to documenting student outcomes, previous assessment has specified the theory of change through which CFES produces sustained, positive impact on students. 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 educators and students in three core practices:

1. *Pathways to College* is a practice in which CFES creates partnerships for its K-12 schools with participating colleges. These partnerships 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 components that help Scholars move toward college.
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. Mentors call upon their own life experiences to provide guidance and support for mentees. CFES mentoring programs integrate with other core practices by incorporating *Pathways to College* and *Leadership through Service* activities.
3. *Leadership through Service* activities are designed to help CFES Scholars identify and express their leadership potential to improve their school or neighborhood or the global community. CFES schools create meaningful opportunities for CFES Scholars to provide student leadership in ambitious community service activities. Gaining leadership skills and taking responsibility for others contributes to Scholars' self-confidence, stimulating greater personal aspirations.

This theory of change emerged from multiple years of creative program development, implementation, and adjustment, and represents CFES's conceptual core at this time in its organizational life. Having a steady, commonly understood, and easily expressed conceptual core is a very important positive achievement that bodes well for program sustainability.

### **EXTENDING ASSESSMENT IN 2008-09: ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

In addition to examining outcome trends, this year's assessment initiates consideration of the second assessment goal: to demonstrate organizational accountability.

#### **Key Accountability Questions for 2008-09**

A focus of the *2008-09 Program Assessment* is to answer the questions:

1. To what degree have CFES program directors, professional staff, and the central office been accountable to the schools and students they serve?

2. How can CFES program directors, professional staff, and the central office change to produce more effective implementation of the program?

This has meant examining elements of support and responsiveness.

## **FINDINGS ASSOCIATED WITH ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **Outside Evaluation** (*Interviews at four representative schools*)

This year's focus groups focused on constituents' reported perceptions of their experiences with the program, especially in relation to issues of accountability and program implementation. Cross-cutting themes emerge from these data that represent how the CFES program in general and the peer mentoring program in particular have achieved accountability over the past year. The following is a summary of these themes:

- Each school examined is an example of how integrating, institutionalizing, or "regularizing" CFES activities and practices into the core curricular design serves to leverage the already significant positive impact of these practices on all students and the school culture at large. As reported by multiple stakeholders at each school, students thrive as CFES practices achieve "centrality" in the eyes of school leaders, students, and parents. However, we also hear that even these exemplar schools struggle to maintain and extend "centrality" of CFES practices, especially in the face of budget cuts and a continuing emphasis on meeting externally imposed standards that often do not attend to CFES associated practices.

In respect to this theme, an important paradox is observed. CFES has evolved its general approach such that today there is a focus on impacting the individual student rather than the whole school system. Paradoxically, the success of this shift from a system-centered to a student-centered approach appears nonetheless to be leading to a naturally occurring impact on systems at large. As individual students grow in respect to their aspirations and ability to attend college, a naturally occurring pressure on the system emerges. CFES practices of mentoring, pathways to college, and leadership through service (having been taken up by relatively few students who then become highly salient) naturally move incrementally towards a position of institutional centrality, thus impacting the whole system and facilitating sustainability and scalability of the program.

*These site conversations underscore the critical importance of achieving, maintaining, and extending "centrality" of CFES practices in school systems in order to sustain the program and bring it to scale – thus achieving broad accountability. Much can be gained by exploring how CFES can assist schools in achieving system "centrality" while at the same time holding fast to its highly focused student-centered approach. This will be a difficult but valuable balance to strike – one that may help CFES to realize its full promise in individual schools and on a national scale.*

- Findings indicate that carefully designed and implemented activities that take place outside of the school setting are factors that are increasingly important to success. We hear from each school how CFES practices break down artificially imposed barriers between school hours and non-school hours and school settings and non-school settings. For CFES Scholars, learning becomes "a way to be 24/7" rather than

something that you do “during” or “in” school. Learning is anchored in the school but extends beyond and returns back to school. Mentor-mentee pairs in particular benefit from access to college visitations, special events, social media, and other off-campus avenues. Off-campus experiences are reconnected to school experiences through various types of meetings where Scholars reflect on the experiences and integrate insight into school work much to their benefit in respect to academic performance and social and emotional well-being.

*These site conversations show how CFES practices that take place outside of the traditional school setting lead to development of a holistic, lifelong learning attitude among Scholars – an attitude that contributes to formation of aspirations to attend college and skills necessary to be successful once there. In respect to going forward, much can be gained by exploring in more detail how these off-campus activities produce this very positive outcome. In this way CFES can fortify and extend its accountability to schools in designing and implementing such activities.*

- CFES Scholars report that the interrelated attributes of celebration, affiliation, and affirmation are key elements to a positive experience with the CFES program.

*Scholars and others from each school report that the regular experience of celebrating achievement, receiving affirmation from school leaders (other than regular teachers), and visible membership in a special group contribute to a transformative experience – one that leads to academic achievement, social and emotional well-being, and formation of aspirations to go to college and the skill to do well once there.*

### **CFES Semiannual Progress Reports (Surveys of 110 schools)**

*Year-end Semiannual Progress Assessment Surveys* were submitted by 110 schools. Responses/ratings on nine items and responses to three open-ended questions indicate high levels of organizational accountability in respect to program directors, professional staff, and the central office.

#### **Section I: Responses/Ratings on Nine Items**

Table 1 (*see below*) indicates that according to the *2008-09 Year-end Semiannual Progress Assessment Survey*, schools are very satisfied with the performance and accountability of program directors, professional staff, and the central office. All ratings are 4.5 or higher with an average of 4.6 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 equals “Very Satisfied” and 1 equals “Not Satisfied.” It should be noted that a very small number of individual schools reported satisfaction levels lower than 4.5. Each of these schools and their program directors has been contacted in private to clarify and address these discrepancies.

- Instruction: Please rate your program director’s support of your team’s work:
  - #1 = Helping CFES Scholars take steps toward college
  - #2 = Helping your team build and strengthen college partnerships
  - #3 = Helping your team develop and strengthen your mentoring program
  - #4 = Helping your team implement its CFES plan
  - #5 = Offering direction, i.e., how to organize, coordinate, lead, etc.
  - #6 = Providing timely, frequent communication and feedback
  - #7 = Providing overall support

- Rating Scale = 1-5 where 5 = “Very Satisfied” and 1 = “Not Satisfied”
- Values = Mean response for each item
- N = Number of responses
- Avg = Average rating for program director across items 1 – 7
- PS = CFES professional staff rating
- CO = Central office response to team needs

**Table 1: Total Responses**

Total	N	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	Avg	PS	CO
	105	4.7	4.5	4.5	4.6	4.6	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.7

Section II: Responses to Open-ended Questions

Representative comments about CFES program directors:

- *We are very fortunate to have Mark\* as our program director. He is not only a CFES Scholar advocate; he is also a teacher advocate. His visits, email, and phone calls keep us informed and productive. We appreciate all he does to keep our CFES Scholars motivated. (\*Not the program director’s real name)*
- Frequently used descriptors when referring to program directors include *supportive, available, encouraging, guiding, communicating, pushing, inspiring, and motivating.*

Representative comments about CFES professional staff:

- Frequently used descriptors when referring to professional staff include *patient, available, professional, responsive, flexible, and organized.*

Representative comments about the CFES central office:

- *Smooth and timely feedback. Straightforward answers. Friendly ‘service.’ We appreciate all the support from the entire staff at the central office throughout the several years we have been involved with CFES...from helping us make arrangements for the students we bring from Hawaii for the National Conference to re-sending us ‘forms’ we have deleted.*
- Frequently used descriptors when referring to central office staff include *supportive, available, efficient, and responsive.* Tara, Andrea, and Janet are all praised for their efforts.

## CONCLUSIONS REGARDING ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

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

1. *To what degree have CFES program directors, professional staff, and the central office been accountable to the schools and students they serve?*

Both interview and survey data indicate that CFES program directors, professional staff, and central office employees have been exceptionally accountable and responsive to the schools and students they serve. The interview data show how the collective efforts of CFES program directors, professional staff, and the central office produce accountability-producing dynamics in schools such as (1) integrating, institutionalizing, or “regularizing” CFES activities and practices into the core curricular design; (2) designing of activities that take place outside of the school setting that lead to development of a holistic, lifelong learning attitude among Scholars; and (3) designing of experiences that produce feelings of celebration, affiliation, and affirmation. The survey data show that very nearly all schools experience exceptionally high ratings of satisfaction with program directors, professional staff, and the central office. It can be concluded that CFES has achieved a high degree of organizational accountability to the schools and students it serves.

2. *How can CFES program directors, professional staff, and the central office change to produce more effective implementation of the program?*

Though in general, program implementation by program directors, professional staff, and the central office is highly effective, there are pockets of schools that perceive less than excellent accountability and responsiveness. CFES needs to continue to collect and analyze data regularly in order to identify these pockets and address discrepancies swiftly and thoroughly.