



CHALLENGE SCHOLARS

A Bold Idea for a Bright Future



CHALLENGE SCHOLARS
2013-2014 UPDATE REPORT

WITH GREAT WORK COMES GREAT REWARD

Education breeds engagement – it’s one of the boldest investments we can make in our community’s social capital. Neighborhoods with more college graduates are increasingly healthier, more productive and more diverse. Ripe with promise, they see possibility amid challenge and the limitless potential of people to do more, together.

We’re witnessing this transformation right here in West Michigan with Challenge Scholars. This novel approach to creating a college-going culture is readying our students, reinvigorating our teachers and stirring an unprecedented optimism in our West Side families.

On May 6, we recognized 137 sixth graders and hundreds more parents, teachers and donors at our inaugural induction ceremony for the Challenge Scholars Class of 2020. This bilingual celebration, which was followed by a family-style feast, commemorated two mighty milestones: reaching 84% enrollment and raising \$26 million toward our \$32 million *Rise With Us* Campaign goal (and since then, we’ve raised another \$2 million). This growing endowment – or, as we like to call it, “our community’s college savings fund” – enables us to keep the promise we’re making to hundreds of families who dream of higher education for their hardworking students.



Improving attendance continues to be a key focus – no matter their grade level, children must come to school, every day, ready to learn. Families play a paramount part in making this happen, and our Kent School Services Network partners make sure that, first and foremost, the basic health and human service needs of our families are met. The district’s Challenge 5 Student Attend Campaign reminds families of the importance of getting to school, and its Parent University equips parents with resources to support their children academically.

We’ve also strengthened our relationship with FSG, a consulting firm that shares our passion for creating lasting social change. Their strategic expertise is woven into the fabric of Challenge Scholars, and we’re proud to partner with them to engage in their developmental evaluation process. This innovative approach ensures that all Challenge Scholars partners collaboratively track toward our common goal.

Our work is just beginning and ever challenging. Yet with each enrolled class of Challenge Scholars, we come one step closer to achieving the rewards of equal access to quality education for all families. Thanks to champions like you, we are indeed realizing our dream.



Diana R. Sieger

Diana R. Sieger
Grand Rapids Community
Foundation president



Teresa Weatherall Neal

Teresa Weatherall Neal
Grand Rapids Public Schools
superintendent



WE LIFT OUR CHALLENGE SCHOLARS UP WITH:

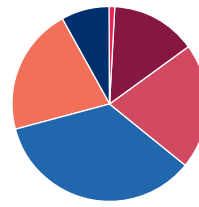
- A college-going school environment with high expectations and engagement
- In-school social supports to stabilize school attendance and home life
- Instructional coaches to increase academic achievement
- A family advisor to help navigate the unfamiliar path to college
- Summer enrichment programs
- Scholarships to earn a degree or vocational certificate from a Michigan public college or university and several private colleges.

FUNDING FUTURES

Donors are the lifeblood of Challenge Scholars. See our impressive list of college partners, businesses and community members who've rallied and raised \$28 million in support of the *Rise With Us* Campaign at www.challengescholars.org.

Thanks to you, our \$32 million goal is well within reach.

Here's who's giving to Challenge Scholars:



- Businesses 1%
- Foundations 14%
- GRCF 21%
- Higher Education 35%
- Individuals 21%
- Planned Gifts 8%

ROLL CALL

Chief Champions

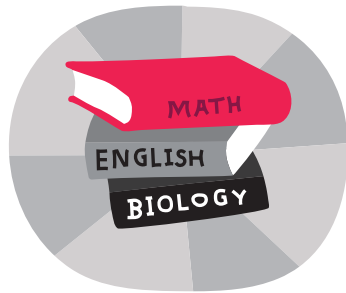
Diana R. Sieger,
Grand Rapids Community
Foundation president

Teresa Weatherall Neal,
Grand Rapids Public Schools
superintendent

Grand Rapids Community Foundation

Gina Bovee and Cris Kutzli,
Challenge Scholars co-directors

Ben Oliver,
Challenge Scholars family advisor



Harrison Park (Pre K-8)

Troy Wilbon, principal

Gwen Heatley,
Challenge Scholars college/career
coordinator

Alexsandra Kemperman,
Challenge Scholars instructional coach

Jullianie Mackey,
KSSN community school coordinator

Westwood Middle

Arthur Garner, principal

Shatawn Brigham,
Challenge Scholars college/career
coordinator

Renee Speed,
Challenge Scholars instructional coach

Jon Matias,
KSSN community school coordinator

Union High

Karl Nelson, principal

Tracy Benjamin,
Challenge Scholars college/career
coordinator

Jalilah Dukes,
Challenge Scholars instructional coach

All Schools

Mary Jo Kuhlman,
assistant superintendent,
organizational learning

Pam Wells-Marcusse,
Challenge Scholars college/career
consultant



"When I consider where my charitable dollars are invested, I look at a program's leadership, partnerships and evaluation, its long-term impact and sustainability, and the research and thought that went into the program's design. I want my dollars working hard to solve difficult, complex social issues. Challenge Scholars has all the right components to make it a success, and I'm proud to support it."



CHRISTINA KELLER,
PRESIDENT,
CK TECHNOLOGIES,
A DIVISION OF CASCADE
ENGINEERING

“WE’RE DOING THIS.”

HOW CHALLENGE SCHOLARS IS SHAPING ONE FAMILY’S FUTURE

“College has always been our dream for our kids,” smiles Stephanie. “Words can’t express what Challenge Scholars means to our family. Now we know they’re going to go. It has taken the financial worries away so we can focus just on being there for them as they grow up.” Proud stepfather Taurain agrees. “Education comes first – without it there is no success. Any good parent knows high school isn’t the end. Challenge Scholars keeps us on track. We’re doing this.”

“We’ve never been so excited and proud. Now we want all our kids coming up to be Challenge Scholars, too.”

The busy couple has nine children, two of whom are Challenge Scholars at Harrison Park School. Chris, class of 2020, aspires to be an engineer. “It’s fun being a Challenge Scholar. I like math and taking things apart to figure out how they work.” This accomplished seventh grader was even chosen by his teacher, Mrs. Dams, to win a Reach for the Stars Award for representing the college-going dream. Following her big brother’s example, sixth grader Chrishantis recently joined Challenge Scholars Class of 2021. “I like science and want to go to college to be a nurse so I can help kids like me someday.”

Big dreams like these inspire Taurain. “I’m already so grateful that they will take the steps that I wasn’t able to. I can’t imagine how proud I’ll feel when they actually start college. It’s going to be incredible.” Yet navigating the unfamiliar path to higher education



Stephanie Carter and Taurain O’Neal, parents of Christayzha, 14, Christopher, 13 – Challenge Scholars Class of 2020, Chrishantis, 11 – Challenge Scholars Class of 2021, and Navon and Navia, 9 years old

can be unsettling. Stephanie credits Challenge Scholars Family Advisor Ben Oliver for putting her family at ease. “Letters, phone calls, he’s even shown up at our door! We have a large family and sometimes it’s hard to keep up. Knowing Ben is always looking out for us means everything.” “The year-round support has made all the difference – Chris can’t wait to go to summer camp,” Taurain adds.

Stephanie said that Challenge Scholars even made her family reconsider moving out of state. “When Chris signed up, we knew we had to stay here – the opportunity was too great.

Seeing his face up on the big screen at the May ceremony was a huge moment. We’ve never been so excited and proud. Now we want all our kids coming up to be Challenge Scholars, too.”

It’s a dream the whole family shares. “This program keeps us grounded and motivated,” notes Taurain. “Our kids are more focused than ever on their futures. They all want straight As and the bragging rights that come with them. We can’t wait to see where they’ll go to college and in life.”

“Challenge Scholars is a game changer. Many of our students will be the first in their families to attend college or a post-secondary school, let alone build a career they enjoy. It’s a powerful win for the West Side that can boost economic development and create a sense of community belonging.”

– BEN OLIVER, CHALLENGE SCHOLARS FAMILY ADVISOR

PROGRESSIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Having an evaluative partner elevates the credibility of Challenge Scholars and helps build a better model. Like Grand Rapids Community Foundation, FSG uses forward thinking processes to spark social change.

Developmental evaluation is the cornerstone of our work with FSG. Unlike traditional evaluation, which is linear and fixed, developmental evaluation empowers us to be adaptive. It is a deeper dive into what makes a



complex, dynamic initiative like Challenge Scholars succeed and thrive. It analyzes and anticipates the 'what's next' to ensure student success.

With FSG's guidance, we know we're asking the right questions; gathering the most timely and relevant results; taking ample time to reflect and reason; and making informed and insightful decisions about the future. It's intentional, purposeful work that's changing lives, not merely crunching data.

MAKING THE GRADE

You've put your funds and your faith in Challenge Scholars. We take our role as stewards of your support seriously, and we promise to be transparent with you. These five data points inform how, year after year, we will measure and share our success as we continue to ask ourselves key questions like:

Are our Challenge Scholars currently on track?

For most, the answer is **no**. And while that's critical to understand, it doesn't tell the whole story. Due to a host of factors, many of our scholars started school behind their suburban peers and have never really caught up. Compounding this fact are circumstances like fluctuating geographic school boundaries and the subsequent shuffle in student demographics. Challenge Scholars tenaciously tackles these issues.

Are our Challenge Scholars catching up?

For many, the answer is **yes**. Each year, our Challenge Scholars teachers and support staff strive to grow our scholars "more" than their peers, so our kids can get caught up and meet – and even exceed – their targets. Just three school years in, we're already seeing evidence of this happening.



OUR REPORT CARD

ABSENTEEISM

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
The percentage of students who have missed 12 or more days of school.			
Harrison Park	43%	28%	32%
Westwood Middle*			31%

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS BY GRADE LEVEL

	Harrison Park			Westwood Middle*		
The percentage of students at or above the 50th percentile, by grade level, compared to all students nationwide who participated in the NWEA/MAP assessment.						
Math (Grades 2-8)	23%	32%	31%			
Reading (Grades 2-8)	31%	33%	31%			
Math (Grades 6-8)						9%
Reading (Grades 6-8)						13%

GROWTH PERCENTILE

	Harrison Park			Westwood Middle*		
The percentile ranking of students' academic growth compared to all students nationwide who, one year ago, had the same scores on the NWEA/MAP assessment.						
Math (Grades 1-8)	64th	73rd	71st			
Reading (Grades 1-8)	65th	66th	62nd			
Math (Grades 6-8)						49th
Reading (Grades 6-8)						52nd

COLLEGE MINDEDNESS**

	Harrison Park	Westwood Middle
The percentage of students with a desire to pursue post-secondary education.	59%	63%

PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

	Harrison Park	Westwood Middle
The percentage of parents who attended at least one school event.	90%	61%

*Challenge Scholars began at Westwood Middle in February 2014.

**Data first gathered in the 2013-2014 school year.

“Challenge Scholars gives us a good start—70 percent of our sixth graders signed up in the first year. It gives us the opportunity to cultivate a college-going culture for students and parents. We’re building a toolkit to be successful not just in school, but in society.”

— ART GARNER, WESTWOOD MIDDLE PRINCIPAL



CHALLENGE SCHOLARS

Every dream begins with a challenge.

POWERED BY



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Grand Rapids Community Foundation

185 Oakes Street S.W.

Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

616.454.1751

www.challengescholars.org