

CHALLENGE SCHOLARS



challengescholars.org



Big Dreams Coming True

"A DREAM YOU DREAM ALONE IS ONLY A DREAM. A DREAM YOU DREAM TOGETHER IS REALITY."
—YOKO ONO



Have a question about Challenge Scholars? Contact us!



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OVERALL, CHALLENGE SCHOLARS STUDENTS ARE MORE AWARE OF THEIR GRADES AND ATTENDANCE—IN FACT, MOST REPORT CHECKING THEM WEEKLY.

Celebrating Student Achievement



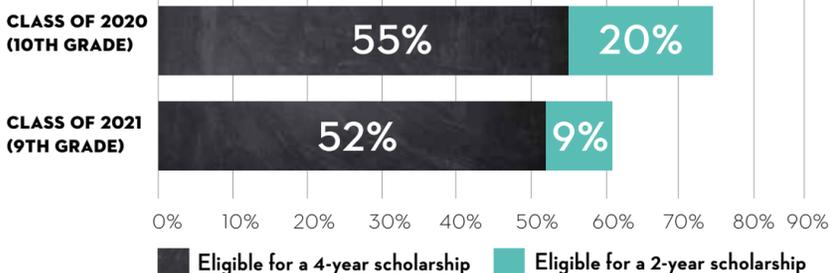
"THE BIGGEST ADVENTURE YOU CAN TAKE IS TO LIVE THE LIFE OF YOUR DREAMS."
—OPRAH WINFREY



UNION HIGH SCHOOL

To be eligible for a scholarship after graduation, Challenge Scholars in high school are working on goals for grades and attendance.

THIS CHART SHOWS SCHOLARSHIP ELIGIBILITY FOR CHALLENGE SCHOLARS DURING THE 2017-2018 SCHOOL YEAR.



A final determination of scholarship eligibility will be made in the student's senior year.

"HELP OTHERS ACHIEVE THEIR DREAMS AND YOU WILL ACHIEVE YOURS."
—LES BROWN



"A DREAM DOESN'T BECOME REALITY THROUGH MAGIC; IT TAKES SWEAT, DETERMINATION AND HARD WORK."
—COLIN POWELL

HARRISON PARK SCHOOL AND WESTWOOD MIDDLE SCHOOL

In middle school, we're looking at Challenge Scholars attendance. Getting in the habit of maintaining good attendance will help students meet scholarship eligibility requirements when they move up to Union High School.

STUDENTS WITH A 95% ATTENDANCE RATE (2017-18 SCHOOL YEAR)



"We feel optimistic about the data we are tracking related to grades and attendance, especially as our first cohort of Challenge Scholars near the finish line of high school. Students and parents report feeling hopeful because of this program and that is really powerful."

—CRIS KUTZLI, CHALLENGE SCHOLARS DIRECTOR



"LET US MAKE OUR FUTURE NOW, AND LET US MAKE OUR DREAMS TOMORROW'S REALITY."

—MALALA YOUSAFZAI



The Path to the Dream

Dear friends,

When Challenge Scholars was created, we knew it needed to be a comprehensive approach to long term student success. Challenge Scholars was built to be intentionally holistic, bold and transformative. At the heart of this program is a shared dream between our organizations—a dream that all children in Grand Rapids have an equal opportunity to succeed.

The path to this dream was paved with years of research, experience and relationship building. The journey along this path hasn't always been a straight line from point A to B. On the contrary, we've faced roadblocks. In some cases, we've removed the barriers, and in other cases, we've carved out entirely new routes.

Those closest to Challenge Scholars—parents, school staff, community partners and the students themselves—have an incredible amount of wisdom to share. In times when we've been unsure of our direction, we've turned to those we're serving, and we've listened.

We will continue to put children first. We will remain adaptive and will not shy away from taking calculated risks to benefit our community's future. We will walk alongside families and encourage students to reach for their dreams.

From the start of Challenge Scholars to today, so much has been accomplished. More than 800 bright and ambitious west side students have officially signed on as Challenge Scholars with hundreds more in the pipeline to follow them. School staff is embracing this opportunity. Community partners are building bridges in every direction to support young people. Families are deeply engaged and celebrating the achievements of their students.

Now more than ever we know that dreams really do come true.

This remarkable progress and momentum would not be possible without the support of people like you.

Thank you for dreaming big for our children and for our community!



Diana R. Sieger

Diana R. Sieger
President,
Grand Rapids Community Foundation



Teresa Weatherall Neal

Teresa Weatherall Neal
Superintendent,
Grand Rapids Public Schools

95% OF CHALLENGE SCHOLARS STUDENTS BELIEVE CONTINUING THEIR EDUCATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL IS IMPORTANT FOR THEIR FUTURE.



INTRODUCING THE CHALLENGE SCHOLARS DREAM FUND | FONDO DE SUEÑOS

This year, the Community Foundation convened a group of Challenge Scholars students, parents, school staff and community members to talk about student success in our community. We listened, and through a co-creation process, the Challenge Scholars Dream Fund was born.

The Dream Fund is an exciting new element of Challenge Scholars. It offers financial support to individuals, groups or organizations to launch new ideas and projects in schools and in the community that will accelerate student success.

GET TO KNOW A FEW OF OUR CO-CREATORS HERE.

PABLO ELISEO VILLALVAZO

Challenge Scholar, Union High School



One day, you will likely see yard signs throughout the community that read "Vote for Pablo Villalvazo!"

Pablo is a Challenge Scholar and a sophomore at Union High School. After graduation, Pablo's plans include going to college and launching a career in local politics. He's been inspired by his involvement in JROTC and the Community Foundation's Youth Grant Committee. Last winter, Pablo participated in the Michigan Youth in Government Conference, where he wrote a bill, debated it with other young people, and saw it all the way to the governor's desk.

"I'm seeing a lot of younger people get into politics and I want to do that too. As I'm growing, I'm developing my own thoughts and opinions, and I want to have an impact," Pablo said.

Pablo was asked to share his voice as a student representative for the process that led to the Dream Fund. Thinking back on the experience, Pablo said, "They treated me like an adult, which I loved. It was a cool experience to sit with the adults, to do what they were doing, and share my voice."

Pablo is encouraging his peers to submit their ideas to the Dream Fund, and he's working on one too. First up on his agenda? A debate club (no surprise). Go for it, Pablo!

DENNIS BRANSON

Principal, Westwood Middle School



In the time since Challenge Scholars was launched, Westwood has become a magnet school. "We now have an academic identity, and we're attracting students from other schools and districts," Dennis said.

Dennis brought his experience and perspective as the leader of Westwood to the Challenge Scholars Dream Fund process. "Being part of the process provided an interesting window inside to see how a community member can actualize a vision they have to help a Challenge Scholars school," he said.

Dennis believes the Dream Fund will provide a new funding stream that will help to bolster and support academic achievement. While the Dream Fund just recently launched, he's already approved the first school-based micro-grant project application, and he's excited to see what other ideas people bring to the table.



87% OF CHALLENGE SCHOLARS STUDENTS SAY THEIR PARENTS EXPECT THEM TO DO WELL IN SCHOOL.



94% OF PARENTS SAY THAT HAVING A SCHOLARSHIP AVAILABLE THROUGH CHALLENGE SCHOLARS IS AN IMPORTANT MOTIVATOR FOR THEIR STUDENT'S SUCCESS.

TENNILLE HARKNESS

Harrison Park School Parent



When Tennille Harkness and her family settled into their home on the west side four years ago, she didn't know about Challenge Scholars. Today, she feels blessed to be within walking distance to Harrison Park School where her daughters Jasmine, 7 and Journey, 9 are thriving.

Tennille had a dream to do something special for families in her community and this summer she saw her dream come true.

Tennille came up with the idea for the Fill A Backpack School Supply Drive that resulted in all Harrison Park School students receiving a new backpack filled with supplies for the start of the new school year. "I like that I accomplished something in my community and that my daughters could see it. It felt good to do something for my Harrison Park families," Tennille said.

On the heels of this experience, Tennille is thrilled to see other people's dreams come true through the launch of the Challenge Scholars Dream Fund. As a Challenge Scholars parent, Tennille was part of the process that created this new Dream Fund.

When asked about her biggest dream for her daughters, Tennille said, "I want to see them achieve their dreams. I want them to live, love and learn. And I want them to come back here and see their footprints throughout the community."

JEREMIAH WEISMANN

City Focus Director, Crossroads Bible Church



Crossroads Bible Church sits at the corner of Scribner and Sixth Street on Grand Rapids' west side. The church has partnered with Stocking Elementary for several years, and it was through this involvement that Jeremiah first learned about Challenge Scholars.

Each year, Crossroads connects as many as 50 mentors with students at Stocking Elementary. After learning about Challenge Scholars, Jeremiah and his team began exploring how they could expand their mentoring program. This year, they're pairing mentors with Westwood sixth graders.

"In our hearts, being a church in a community means loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. We want to be good neighbors, and the best way to do that is to be part of what's already happening here," Jeremiah said.

Because of his role as a community partner, Jeremiah was tapped to be part of the process that led to the creation of the Dream Fund. "The joy for me in the process was seeing all the different community members involved. It wasn't just one voice represented," Jeremiah said. "The collaboration and the valuing of each person at the table was a beautiful thing, and I'm excited about the end product."

DONOR PROFILE

From Challenge Scholars Teachers to Challenge Scholars Donors



Keith and Connie Harrison were teachers at Harrison Park School for many years. In fact, they were there when Challenge Scholars was developed and launched.

The Harrisons are now retired, but they remain personally invested in the future of "their students," those they taught and future Challenge Scholars on the west side. From following student successes on social media to donating to the Challenge Scholars Fund, the Harrisons are all in. "We are not millionaires and we cannot give a lot, but we give what we can," Keith said.

"I am just crazy about the kids and the Challenge Scholars program," Connie said. "To see the kids actually have a chance, the ones that will actually do it, and who might not have the opportunity otherwise, it makes our hearts different."

Read more about the Harrisons in the Community Foundation's Fall 2018 edition of *PARTNERS in community*.



YOUR GIFT OF ANY SIZE WILL HELP MOVE CHALLENGE SCHOLARS ALONG THE PATH TO SUCCESS.

When a community unites, no dream is too big.

If you'd like to include Challenge Scholars in your long-term giving plans, please contact our development team at 616.454.1751 to discuss your gift.



76% OF CHALLENGE SCHOLARS SAY THEY'RE WORKING HARDER IN SCHOOL SO THEY'RE READY FOR COLLEGE.