

## **Children’s Scholarship Fund Charlotte Recipients Tracking Study 2011: Final Report**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Because high school graduation is a foundational achievement for long-term financial and occupational success, and because that goal is particularly difficult to attain for many low-income students, it is essential for CSF-C to know how many of its scholarship recipients attained that milestone. This tracking study addressed that question by identifying the number and percentages of CSF-C scholarship recipients who were eligible to graduate by 2010 and 2011 and those recipients who actually did graduate by that time. We explored the question: “Does having scholarship support that allows a family to place a student in a private school of their choice facilitate that student’s success in high school culminating in graduation?” The study also examined the pathways of the graduation-eligible students.

Since 1999, the CSF-C has been awarding scholarships to low-income elementary and middle school students to attend private or parochial schools of their choice in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, in order to increase their chances for long-term success. The program has awarded over 4700 one-year scholarships to Charlotte-area students at the elementary and middle school levels, the majority of whom received more than one year of scholarship.

This report presents findings from a tracking study of Children’s Scholarship Fund Charlotte (CSF-C) scholarship recipients.

### **METHODS**

The study is a cross-sectional “snapshot” survey that attempted to identify the successes and pathways—to high school and beyond--of former scholarship recipients. CSF-C contracted with FRONTIER 21 Education Solutions in Bala Cynwyd, PA to conduct the study as a follow-up to an initial tracking study they began in 2010.

FRONTIER 21 tracked CSF-C scholarship recipients’ graduation status and obtained contact information for the past recipients using a combination of mail, email,

phone and web-based surveys administered over the summer of 2011. Other publicly available information was also used, including information from local school websites and school recipients' web pages. Telephone calls and email contact were the most efficient methods to obtain information. Data collected was both qualitative, such as obtaining information about educational pathways, for example, and quantitative, such as calculating/determining the percentage of CSF-C scholarship recipients that graduated from high school. The tracking study focused on scholarship recipients who had received at least 6 months of scholarship assistance from CSF-C and who had completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade by June 2007.

Because much of the contact information for the recipients was outdated, the study centered on determining the graduation rate of the recipients for which FRONTIER 21 had valid contact information. FRONTIER 21 contacted many former and current scholarship families using a combination of telephone and email records.

CSF-C provided information for 727 students who had received a CSF-C scholarship between 1999 and 2007. The majority of recipients in the data files (52%) received their first CSF-C scholarship during the program's first year—the 1999-2000 academic year (Table # 1). CSF-C has a goal to maintain 400 scholarship recipients each school year. New scholarships are provided to maintain this level as former recipients leave the program. This accounts for the fluctuations in scholarship awards. Of the 727 students who received scholarships between 1999 and 2007, FRONTIER 21 determined there were 683 recipients eligible for graduation by 2011.

**Table 1. CSF-C Recipients by Starting Year from 1999 to 2007**

<b>Inaugural Scholarship Year</b>	<b>Number of Scholarship Recipients Starting in Each Year</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1999-2000	380	52%
2000-2001	86	12%
2001-2002	82	11%
2002-2003	64	9%
2003-2004	35	5%
2004-2005	39	5%
2005-2006	19	3%
2006-2007	4	1%
No starting date identified	18	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>727</b>	<b>100%</b>

Because the study was interested in determining to what extent CSF-C scholarship support to attend a private school facilitated a student's success in high school culminating in graduation, the study focused on recipients who had been supported at least one full

academic year or who did not have information on the length of their program participation. Private school enrollment support for 6 months or less was not considered long enough for a recipient to have had a substantial experience that would facilitate a student's success in high school. In other words, the "treatment" effect of CSF-C for that short a duration was not considered to be enough to have had an impact.

Also, for the purposes of the study, "participation" was defined as the number of years a student received a CSF-C scholarship. The maximum participation (or private school enrollment) was 9 years (e.g., from Kindergarten to 9<sup>th</sup> grade). The CSF-C scholarship was initially available for K-12<sup>th</sup> grade enrollment until 2008 when the scholarship became available for K-8<sup>th</sup> grade enrollment only. Table # 2 shows scholarship recipients by years of participation in CSF-C. A majority of recipients (approximately 66%) participated in the program (and were therefore enrolled in private school) for more than one year.

**Table 2. Number of CSF-C Recipients by Number of Years in the Scholarship Program**

<b>Years in Program</b>	<b>Number of Recipients</b>	<b>Percentage of Recipients in the study</b>
1	184	28%
1.5	28	4%
2	124	19%
2.5	26	4%
3	77	12%
3.5	16	2%
4	57	9%
4.5	12	2%
5	41	6%
5.5	4	1%
6	29	4%
6.5	3	0.5%
7	23	3%
7.5	7	1%
8	21	3%
8.5	7	1%
9	2	0.3%
<b>Total 1 to 9 years of scholarship support</b>	<b>661</b>	<b>100%</b>
< 1 Year	44	Not included in study

<i>Incomplete information</i>	22	Not included in study
TOTAL	727	100%

Of the 727 recipients, FRONTIER 21 determined there were 598 recipients who would be eligible to graduate from high school as of spring 2011 based on their birthdates or grade level while they were receiving a CSF-C scholarship. Of those 598, 584 had phone numbers or email contact information that researchers used to contact families.

FRONTIER 21 used an electronic calling system, One Call Now, to make several attempts to contact a survey respondent, and generate information about which numbers were viable so those numbers could be used for subsequent survey attempts. The One Call Now system made calls in June, and reported that 236 (40%) of the 584 recipients' phone numbers were either wrong numbers or disconnected. FRONTIER 21 was able to find correct numbers for some of those students and made contact with their families, and for others, FRONTIER 21 contacted families through email. For the 236 families, however, working contact information was unobtainable.

For the 348 (60%) recipients who had phone numbers that were possibly viable (e.g., hadn't been immediately reported as "wrong" or "disconnected"), up to 4 phone calls were made to each number. The call attempt concluded either when a person or answering machine was reached, or when the phone rang 4 times unanswered. In addition to telephone and email contact, FRONTIER 21 also used school records to verify high school graduation status.

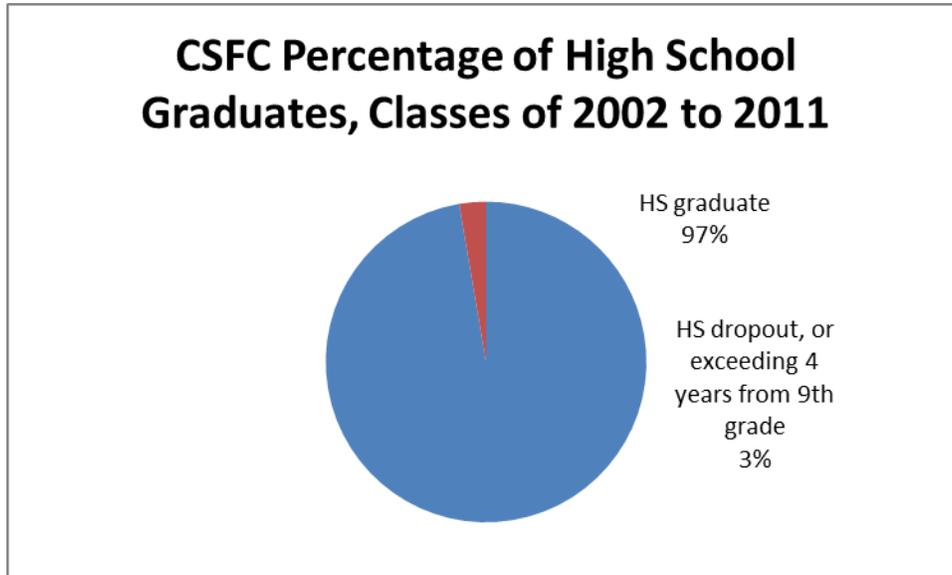
## RESULTS

The final population size for the study was the 598 recipients who were both graduation eligible by 2011 and who had at least one year of CSF-C program participation. FRONTIER 21's researchers were able to verify that 181 of 186 (97%) CSF-C recipients eligible for graduation in the spring of 2011 had in fact graduated by that time. This percentage is consistent with high school graduation rates of CSF scholarship recipients in other states, including Ohio (98%) and Pennsylvania (96%). Five (3%) had either dropped out of high school or were still working toward completing a high school degree. Based on the statistically valid sample size of 186 recipients, FRONTIER 21 is 95% confident that the high school graduation rate of CSF-C recipients is between 95% and 99% (range of the 95% confidence interval using the 186 student sample size).

**Table # 3. CSF-C Recipients High School Graduation Rate for Students Eligible for 2011 Graduation**

<b>Recipients status</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
HS graduate	<b>181</b>	97%

HS dropout, or exceeding 4 years from 9 <sup>th</sup> grade	5	3%
Total Contacted	186	100%



**Figure 1. Of the 186 students contacted, 181 graduated from high school.**

FRONTIER 21 also inquired about the college enrollment and attendance of CSF-C recipients. Only a small portion of the recipients or guardians were ready to share this information or had it available. Of the 22 recipients for whom post-high school activities could be obtained, 77% were in college currently, 9% had dropped out of college, and 9% had graduated from college.

**Table 4. CSF-C Recipients' Post-High School Status**

Recipients status	Numbers	Percentage of post-high school age with information
No college/Working/military/etc	1	5%
Ever in college	21	95%
• College current	17	77%

• College dropout	2	9%
• College graduate (graduate students)	2	9%
Total post-high school age students with information	22	100%

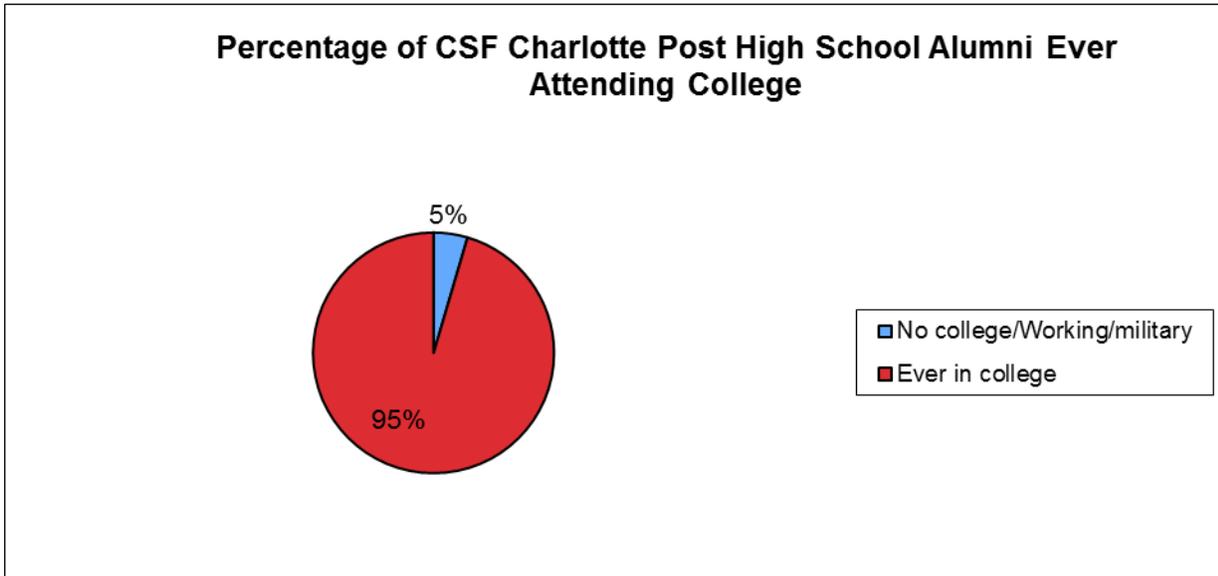


Figure 2. Post high school activity of the 22 students for whom post-high school information was obtained

## COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS

The researchers asked recipients and guardians to reflect on what the scholarship program meant to them either at the time that they were receiving the scholarship, or at the present time. The overwhelming majority of parents and guardians felt that the program had been very beneficial. The program was described as “a blessing” and “extremely valuable” by several recipients. A few of those responses are provided here.

### Quotations from parents and guardians about the program and their children’s success

“It was a huge help. [It was] wonderful but too small. I wish it went all the way through high school. It stops at 8th grade and I am struggling now with [my child’s] tuition.”

“I could not have done it without you.”

“The scholarship really helped my children. I called the CSF-C to try to set a scholarship fund up in Florida.”

"The scholarship was very helpful because we couldn't otherwise afford the school we wanted."

"The scholarship was a blessing. It allowed her to stay in private school."

"His grandparents and I were so grateful for the scholarship because a lot of times I was out of work."

"The scholarship was very helpful. It helped keep [my child] in private school for five years. We didn't want our children in public schools because of their learning challenges."

Several of the parents and guardians felt that the program had been helpful, but wished that it could have been more substantial in support of the relatively large costs associated with their child's private school. The median support the CSF-C recipients received per student was \$1,425.

## CONCLUSION

While there is no simple way to compare the graduation rate of CSF-C scholarship recipients who had experience with private school with their graduation-eligible peers in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools with no private school experience, the 97% graduation rate for students who were graduation eligible by May 2011 who had received a CSF-C scholarship was higher than the reported graduation rate for Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools for the same period. For 1999-2007, CMS reported an overall graduation rate of 66.1%. This suggests that having scholarship support that allowed a family to place a student in a private school of their choice facilitated a student's success in high school culminating in graduation.

FRONTIER 21 was able to obtain information about high school graduation status and to update the addresses of a fairly large number of recipients of the CSF-Charlotte scholarship, especially considering that much of the contact information was over 10 years old. In order to keep better track of the CSF-C recipients, to get an understanding of the long term impact of the program, and to provide more opportunities for the recipients to give back to the program in the future, it is suggested that CSF-C keep a strong database that is updated regularly. This process can be started using the database that has been developed by FRONTIER 21 as part of this study. Given the relatively high mobility of families with lower economic means, it is recommended that CSF-C conduct a frequent survey, perhaps once per year, that allows the recipients and their parents to update their contact information on an ongoing basis.