

**FINAL EVALUATION REPORT  
THE CHILDREN'S SCHOLARSHIP FUND  
PHILADELPHIA PROGRAM**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Children's Scholarship Fund Philadelphia (CSFP) is a non-profit organization dedicated solely to supporting the educational progress of economically disadvantaged students. CSFP accomplishes this task primarily through the provision of scholarships to those disadvantaged students wanting to attend private schools in Philadelphia. In early 2003, Dr. Alex Schuh of FRONTIER 21 and Dr. Elaine Simon of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Urban Studies evaluated the progress that CSFP was making toward achieving their goals. This report discusses the findings and methods of that evaluation.

This evaluation study was completed as Philadelphia and the rest of nation are undergoing a period of tremendous educational change and experimentation. One aim of the evaluation was to assist CSFP with understanding their role in the larger context of school choice and school reform that is shaping the future of education in Philadelphia.

More than any other time in the past 100 years, parents are being provided diverse opportunities to choose the types of educational environments they want for their children. Under new federal "No Child Left Behind Act" legislation, parents are being offered a chance to choose the traditional public school to which they would like to send their child. Charter school legislation in 26 states, including Pennsylvania, is creating new types of privately run public schools, most of which choose their students by lottery. Private management companies have begun bringing new models for education to Philadelphia's public schools under the State takeover of the Philadelphia School District. In selected states and major cities, government agencies have begun providing money towards vouchers that allow students to attend private schools, though this approach is currently being challenged in state and federal courts. The Pennsylvania Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) law is allowing corporations to donate tax-free funds to scholarship programs that assist families wanting to send their children to private schools. Finally, the number of students being home schooled across the country is estimated at two million, and is growing rapidly. Each of these options presents a unique set of advantages and challenges to parents, educators and policymakers. One of the primary advantages of scholarship organizations such as CSFP has been their ability to connect economically disadvantaged students with institutions that serve their unique needs and interests.

The majority of this study's activities focused primarily on the contexts and achievements of the CSFP program during the academic year 2002-03, and on the educational experiences of the scholarship recipients and their families. This final project report provides an overview of the goals of the evaluation, the methods used during the data collection (with additional information in the Appendix), results from the surveys, interviews, focus groups and observations, a discussion of the findings, and recommendations for the program's future.

## **Goals of the Evaluation Project**

As the first evaluation of the CSF Philadelphia program since its inception in 1998, this study was designed to accomplish three main objectives:

1. to assess the impact of the program on the students and parents who have received CSFP scholarships,
2. to provide CSFP with information that will help them to better achieve their goals in the future, and
3. to prepare CSFP to collect additional information that will be useful for tracking the progress of their participants over time.

Multiple evaluation questions were needed to investigate the nature of the contexts and experiences of CSFP scholarship students. The evaluators asked:

- a) How do the students' experiences in their new schools compare to their previous school experiences?
- b) How do the parents' experiences with the new schools compare to their previous experiences with their children's schools?
- c) What are the factors affecting successful participation in the program?
- d) What are the long-term outcomes of the program?

These questions were addressed through a series of surveys, interviews, site visits and focus groups. All of these data collection efforts were completed by early Summer, 2003.

## **Results from the Survey of Participating Schools**

All of the schools that were participating in the CSFP program during the 2002-03 school year were surveyed to obtain data on their programs, on their involvement with CSFP and CSFP's scholarship students, and on the progress of the CSFP students enrolled in their school in the Spring of 2003. Two hundred eight (208) schools were surveyed, nearly all of the estimated 220 private schools in the City of Philadelphia. A total of 169 schools (81.3%) returned completed survey forms.

### **School Characteristics**

#### **LONGEVITY**

Of the schools surveyed, the great majority (87%) had been in operation for more than 16 years. Only 8 schools (5%) had been in operation for five years or less. The longevity of the CSFP-participating schools reflects the fact that Philadelphia has a long and established history of private and religious education serving all sectors of the City.

#### **TUITION**

Tuition costs ranged from a low of \$1,100 per year to a high of \$22,000 per year. Of all the variations in the operations of the participating schools, tuition was the most diverse, with some schools only taking students who belonged to their associated church, some having special tuition for members of their religious organization who were not members of their church, and some having

special (higher) tuition for children who were not members of their religious organizations. In general, tuition costs were similar across grade levels within schools, with parents paying similar tuition amounts across age levels. Another area of variation was in the charging of fees. Twenty-seven schools (16%) charged no additional fees for services, whereas others charged a range of 5 dollars to 950 dollars over tuition costs. The average fee was \$190 per student. Fees included:

- Activity Fee
- Materials Fee
- Book Fee
- Uniform Fee
- Lunch Fee
- Application Fee
- Admission Test Fee
- Service Fee
- Registration Fee
- Extracurricular Fee
- Yard Supervision Fee
- Church Contributions
- School Trips
- Non-supporting Fee
- Non-Fundraising Fee
- Parent Association Fee
- Computer Fee, and
- Onetime Fee.

These fees can be a major source of funds for some schools, but may not be completely clear to parents when they are considering a program for their child.

Students and their families can offset their tuition costs and fees through tuition assistance from the school, CSFP scholarships, other scholarship funds, and sometimes a combination of all three. The surveyed schools indicated that an average of 17% of their families receive tuition assistance from the school. This ranged from a low of 0 % to a high of 100%. Responding schools reported a similar amount of families receiving scholarships from outside agencies other than CSFP: an average of 18% of families in those schools received assistance from non-CSFP scholarship programs including BLOCS (for Catholics), the Connelly Foundation, the Kremer Foundation, individual church scholarships, and memorial funds. Some schools reported having no scholarship programs other than CSFP (24 schools- 17%), while some reported having as many as seven different programs.

The average amount of CSFP scholarship funds provided per student for 2002-03 was \$863. This amount was just below half of the average amount of tuition costs charged by the participating schools (\$1,998).

## **SCHOOL CLIMATE**

Surveyed schools were asked about the characteristics of their environment, for CSFP's use in informing parents and students regarding the types of activities and services available in each school, and to determine the types of services that CSFP students were currently receiving. When asked whether they had an active parent association at their school, 148 schools (89%) indicated that they had that structure in place.

The CSFP-participating schools were asked what percentage of their families were "low income" (less than \$20,000 per year). Although many schools did not have an estimate (29 schools-17%), those that collected that information or could make a reasonable estimate indicated that, on average, thirty-three percent (33%) of their families earned less than \$20,000. Half of the schools estimated that thirty percent (30%) or more of their families fell into that income bracket, while half indicated that less than thirty percent (30%) of their families earned that amount. The average income of CSFP families for 2002-03 was \$25,373.

Private schools are often cited as not having to "take all comers", as the public schools must, and therefore they can be considered to "cream", or take the best students, who would otherwise attend the neighborhood public schools (or be home-schooled). One area that private schools are felt to be particularly weak in is providing services to "special education" students. This survey found that, although the majority of surveyed schools (100- 62%) did not provide services to special needs students, 61 schools (38%) did provide those services.

The schools participating in CSFP were asked about the types of extra-curricular activities that they provided for students. The chart below indicates the types of activities available at the schools, and the percentages of schools offering those activities.

Table 1. Extra-curricular Activities Offered by CSFP- Participating Schools

ACTIVITY	After School Art	After School Music	After School Dance/ Theater	After School Sports	After School Clubs and Other Activities
PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS	5 %	45 %	86%	85%	37%

The majority of surveyed schools offer a variety of extra-curricular programs for their students, with the most popular being sports, dance and theater.

## TESTING

Private schools are often criticized for not holding students accountable to the same types of standards set for public school students. In particular, these schools are often portrayed as not assessing their students with the type of rigorous standardized assessments that the students would otherwise take if they were enrolled in the local public school. However, this study found that 161 schools of the 169 (95%) surveyed gave some form of standardized test to track their students' academic progress. Over half of the schools (88- 52%) tested students using the Terra Nova test, the same test currently being used by the School District of Philadelphia. The second most widely used test was the Stanford Achievement Test: 22 schools (13%) used this test, which was the test used by the School District of Philadelphia until the most recent school year. Six schools (4%) administered

the Pennsylvania System of School Assessments (PSSA), which is the statewide test used to assess progress in Pennsylvania public schools. Most schools tested students in every grade above Grade 2.

## RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Of the schools surveyed, ninety percent (90%) had some religious affiliation. The most prevalent affiliations were with the Catholic Church/Archdiocese of Philadelphia (59%) and the Society of Friends/Quakers (4%). Other religious affiliations included:

- Baptist
- Islamic
- Jewish
- Presbyterian
- Lutheran
- Episcopalian
- Church of God
- Catholic- Byzantine Rite
- Ukrainian Catholic
- Crooked Places Made Straight Ministries
- Anglican
- Mennonite and
- Seventh Day Adventist.

## ASSESSMENTS OF CSFP

The 169 schools responding to the survey were asked to assess the CSFP program and the CSFP scholarship students attending their school. They were asked to compare the CSFP students to other students in their schools on five key variables.

- With regard to Academics, ninety-four percent (94%) felt that the CSFP students were about the same or higher achieving than their fellow students.
- With regard to Family Income, ninety-nine percent (99%) of the schools felt that the CSFP students were about the same or lower income than their fellow students.
- In the area of Parent Involvement, an important factor for student success, ninety-one percent (91%) of the schools indicated that the CSFP parents had about the same or higher parent involvement in their child's education than their fellow parents.
- Ninety-six percent (96%) of the schools felt that their CSFP students were about the same or higher in Attendance than their peers.
- The large majority of the schools (93%) indicated that the number of CSFP students' Disciplinary Incidents was about the same or lower than their fellow students'.

The participating schools were asked in the survey whether they had seen any improvement or worsening in CSFP students' academic performance, attendance, or need for discipline since coming to school, which are strong indications of how well students are adjusting to their new environments. Regarding Academics, 100% of the schools felt that the CSFP students were doing about the same or better than when they first arrived. Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the schools felt that the CSFP students' Attendance was about the same or better since coming to the school. And all of the schools (100%) felt that students' needs for Discipline since coming to the school were about the same or

better, with thirty percent (30%) indicating that the need for discipline of the CSFP students had decreased.

When asked if they had ever referred parents to CSFP, most of the schools (87%) stated that they had done so. When asked if they would accept more CSFP students in the future, three quarters of the schools (76%) said that they definitely would, two schools (1%) said they would not, and nearly one-quarter of the schools (23%) said that their decision would depend on the characteristics of the individual CSFP student.

Finally, when asked whether the CSFP staff had been responsive to the needs and requests of the schools, nearly all of the schools (98%) reported that they had been Very or Somewhat Responsive, while three schools (2%) believed the staff had been Not Very or Not at All Responsive.

A comment section of the survey provided an opportunity for schools to provide feedback to the program. Most comments were positive and appreciative of the program. The following responses are typical of the feedback that the schools provided on the survey forms:

"THANK YOU VERY MUCH, WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL", and

"CSFP SEEMS TO HAVE DEVELOPED AN EFFICIENT MANNER IN WHICH TO HANDLE PAPERWORK & CORRESPONDENCE."

One school felt that it was "HARD TO REACH ANYONE IN THE CSFP OFFICE", however.

Several schools stated in their comments that they were closing in the Fall of 2003. The majority of those schools were run by the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

### **Student Attendance and Disciplinary Information**

All of the surveyed schools were asked to report on attendance and disciplinary actions taken regarding each of the CSFP students in their schools (In School Suspensions {lower level}, Out of School Suspensions {higher level}, and Detentions). Of the 1,333 CSFP students reported on (out of 1,640- 81%), only one percent (1%) had withdrawn. It is clear from this information that the CSFP students are being retained by their schools at very high rates, with only a very few withdrawing by the end of the academic year. Even if students withdraw from their school, the CSFP scholarship is portable from school to school: students can move within Philadelphia and take the scholarship with them. If families must move to a different neighborhood or otherwise have a need to attend a different private school, they do not risk losing their funding. There appears to be little need to exercise this option, however, at least during the course of the academic year.

Student absences reported by the schools were generally low, with students missing fewer than 6 days, on average, by the end of the school year. This corresponds with an estimated average daily attendance rate of ninety-six percent (96%). Seventy-five percent (75%) of the students missed 8 days or fewer. Several students (4%) missed over 20 school days (which corresponds to an average daily attendance rate of 87%), however, with the highest reported absence being 54 days (a 67% average daily attendance rate). Some schools appear to maintain students on their roles even when faced with very high rates of absence

Very few students were reported as having had serious discipline problems at their schools. Only 26 students (<1%) were given in-school suspensions, and 14 students were given out-of-school suspensions (<1%). Fourteen percent (14%) of students were given some kind of after school or Saturday detentions, with less than one-tenth of one percent (<.1%) receiving 30 or more detentions.

## Results from the Student Focus Groups

Two student focus groups were conducted with CSFP students in grades 3 to 5 and 6 to 8, respectively. Students from younger grades (K-2) were not requested to participate due to the difficulty of interviewing very young children in group settings, and students of high school age were not contacted because the program will be focusing only on serving students in grades K-8 in the future. Five students participated in the focus group of younger students, while 7 students participated in the older group.

The students were asked a series of questions about their adjustment to the school, their activities before, during and after school, their participation in projects or extra-curricular activities, and whether they are treated any differently from other students because they are on a scholarship to attend. Overall, students in both groups indicated that they enjoyed their schools, that the schools felt very safe, that they were generally accepted there, and that the schools had considerable projects and extra-curricular activities for them to be involved in. Most of the students interviewed attended their school with a sibling or cousin, making the school feel less remote, and more an extension of their family. This reinforces the concept that CSFP ascribes to that their scholarships are enabling parents to find and develop supportive educational communities for their children.

### Grades 3-5

The students were generally positive about their schools, pointing out features that they liked, including classes (science, spelling and computers were particularly attractive), teachers, and fellow students. One student described what she had done in her favorite class, Spelling, that day.

Interviewer: "So your favorite class is Spelling."

Student: "I really like Spelling. My teacher teaches all of my classes. But I like that the best."

Interviewer: "Tell me what you did in Spelling today."

Student: "Spelling, we had to write sentences with each spelling word."

Interviewer: "Do you remember any of the words?"

Student: "Um, Animals, However, words like that."

The students were asked about the resources available at their school, and how often they used them.

Interviewer: "We were just talking about computers. Does everyone have computers at their school?"

Students: "Yes."  
Interviewer: "How often do you use them?"  
Student: "Every day."  
Student: "Every Thursday."  
Student: "Every day and every Friday."  
Interviewer: "What do you use them for? Is it mostly for learning Math and Reading?"  
Student: "Projects. Powerpoint projects mostly."  
Student: "We're doing animation, making a movie on our computer."

A preliminary analysis of the focus group interviews finds that the students seem to be adjusting well to their schools, and to be making good use of the classes and materials available at those schools.

### **Grades 6-8**

The students in the middle grades focus group indicated that they generally felt safe and enjoyed their school. Their schools felt like communities to them, and they frequently mentioned the word "community" when describing their school. The students felt generally that the academic and social atmospheres were rewarding, and were a good fit with their interests. In keeping with the concept that middle school is a time when students begin to focus on the ideas of equity, social grouping and social opportunity, several students talked about the social atmosphere at the schools they attended.

Interviewer: "What is the best thing about your school?"  
Student: "The best thing is Spirit Day. Students are supposed to dress up in the school colors. Some don't but they don't send you home or anything. Our grade had an Olympic theme, where the students were different sports."  
Interviewer: "Did you do a sport?"  
Student: "Yeah. I chose boxing. We trained for a few weeks. I was supposed to go down and the other girl would win. It was great!"

Another student focused on the social atmosphere at their school.

Interviewer: "Do you like going to your school?"  
Student: "I enjoy it. Thanks to the scholarship fund, they've allowed us to go to the school. My two sisters and my brother also go there. What I like best is the teachers and the Principal. Even though they might get mad or yell, scream, they show they care. It's like a family school. The Principal is the mother of our teacher. My other teacher is the wife of the Principal's brother."

The Arts were particularly inspiring to the students.

Interviewer: "Tell me about your other classes."  
Student: "We have Art classes every Thursday at 11:30. I really like it."  
Interviewer: "What are you doing in Art these days?"  
Student: "We started out doing comic books. I have mine with me. I'm still working on it. But we might do a mural. We're just starting to plan it out. That will be cool."

**Student:** “Yes, in art class, they try to get you to do a lot of things, and there’s a lot of hands-on things that they teach you. Our mini courses, I think they’re really creative, hands-on. In one of the classes there’s dissection and you get to take trips places to go see, like maybe we’ll go out sometime and go to the park and go hear birds, and it makes you think, and then when we get back we have to remember what we hear. I think that it’s fun.”

Students in the “older” focus group generally felt safe at the school:

**Interviewer:** “Do you feel safe at school?”

**Student:** “Yes because we don’t have to worry about any violence or any weapons brought into school. There are no unsafe places. We have a safety program – they teach you about the dangers of having violence in the schools. We watched a movie about kids that brought a gun to school and shot a couple kids and they talk to us about how violence is bad.”

**Student:** “In my school we have the peace program, where the kids nominate peace people, like peacemakers, and they hang their pictures on the wall, and at the end of the year someone gets the peace medal. The teachers decide on who gets the medal.”

The academics for the older students were generally thought to be challenging and interesting.

**Student:** “My favorite class is science; it’s very hands-on and a lot of fun. I like doing experiments, that’s what we sometimes do. We did an experiment on leaves where we had to put stuff on leaves to see what colors they would turn. We did something similar to that with rocks, and we went to this place called ring rocks, and we took hammers and they made a ringing sound.”

**Student:** “I like Social studies- I like learning about different countries and their capitals. I like drawing the country or the continent and learn about the different things they have in their countries.”

**Student:** “Math is my favorite class because we get to do a lot of stuff and we learn a lot and I really like math, I’m really good at it. Anything – projects, I really like when our teacher gives us projects, when we work on the computers. This year we were learning geometry and we made a robot out of all different shapes and stuff.”

Because several of the students were attending religious schools, they were asked how they felt about the religious aspect of their school. Most indicated that the religion was a benign but relatively pleasant aspect of their school. A couple of students felt that their school was a bit “strict” and students were probably “not having much fun” to the extent that they would like. Other students mentioned that their attention to religion had grown stronger by exploring religious issues in their school.

**Student**        “We get religion essentials – they give you a word and you got to define the definition, in your regular classroom. We go to Mass every Friday. I’m Baptist, and I go to a Catholic school. It doesn’t make me feel any different because it’s mostly the same. Feelings about religion have changed a little bit because they teach you about what a Christian is and how to be a Christian and they get into more detail about Jesus and God.”

**Student**        “When I was in my old school, I really wasn’t into religion, but now that I’m in this school I’m more into religion.”

The focus group students were also asked about their plans for the future. The middle grades students all indicated some interest in attending college, though most were focused on the high schools that they would be attending. Most of the students named private high schools as their first choice after leaving their current school.

## Results from the Student Survey

One hundred fifty CSFP students in grades 4 through 8 were selected at random, and sent a one-page survey form to complete. A total of 74 (50%) of surveyed students returned completed surveys. The median grade of students returning the survey was 6, and the median age was 12 years old, with a range of 9 to 15 years.

The students reported attending their CSFP-sponsored schools an average of 4.5 years, with a low of 1 year of attendance and a high of 9 years. The large majority of students came to their scholarship school either from public school or as entering Kindergartners (80%). Only twenty percent (20%) of students who had previously attended private schools received the CSFP scholarship.

The students were asked what their academic grades had been in their previous school (if they had gone to another) and how their grades were in their current school. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the students surveyed who had gone to another school stated that their grades in their previous school were Good or Excellent, and a similar seventy-nine percent (79%) of those same students felt that their current grades were Good or Excellent. Eighty-five percent (85%) of students who had only attended their current school felt that their grades were Good or Excellent. Generally, the estimates of academic achievement levels were similar for both transferring and non-transferring students.

When asked how interested they were in their current schoolwork, fifty-four percent (54%) of the students stated that they were very interested. Only one student stated that they were not interested in their schoolwork. When asked whether they felt their school environment was safe, all but one student stated that they felt safe at their school (99%).

The students were asked whether they participated in any type of extra-curricular activity offered by their school. Two thirds of the students (68%) reported that they were involved in some type of after-school program at their school. The most popular activity was sports (38%), with the next most popular activity being tutoring assistance (22%). Table 2 below provides more details on students' extra-curricular activities.

**Table 2. Extra-curricular Activities of CSFP Students**

ACTIVITY	After School Art	After School Music	After School Dance/Theater	After School Sports	After School Tutoring	No After School Activities
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING	8 %	14 %	14%	38%	22%	32%

When the students were asked whether they could get extra assistance with their schoolwork at their CSFP-sponsored school if they needed it, the large majority of the students (96%) felt that they could get that assistance. When asked whether they felt that their CSFP school was too difficult, just right or too easy, seven percent (7%) felt that it was too difficult, eighty-eight percent (88%) felt that it was just right, and five percent (5%) felt that their school was too easy.

Regarding the social climate of the school, students were asked whether it was difficult or easy to make friends at their school. The large majority (90%) felt that it was easy to make friends at their CSFP-sponsored school.

The students were asked how they felt about seven important characteristics of their school: the teachers, the principal, the other students, their classwork, their homework, the afterschool programs at the school, and the computers. Students favored the computers most of all in their CSFP schools (77%), followed by the other students, the teachers, the afterschool programs, the principal, their classwork and homework (the lowest rated, at 37%). Over fifty percent (50%) of the students surveyed indicated that they liked "a lot" most of the important aspects of their schools. The responses to this question are provided in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Student Appreciation of Important Aspects of the School Environment**

School Aspect	Like it very much
The computers	77%
The other students	70%
The teachers	68%
The afterschool programs	66%
The principal	62%
The classwork	51%
The homework	37%

The students were asked what they would change about their schools if they could change just one thing. Fifteen percent (15%) stated that they would not change anything: "Nothing. It is perfect." The majority of other students focused on extra-curricular activities and lunch: "Better hot lunches. More after-school activities." Some focused on specific changes desired at the school: "We could have more music classes, because our music teacher quit."

When students were asked whether or not they were going back to their school next year, the large majority of students below eighth grade (90%) indicated that they were. Most of the eighth

graders (90%) were in their final year at their school, and would be required to go to another school for ninth grade. Several of the younger students who were not returning commented that they could not return because their schools were being permanently closed down. As one student stated: "I WISH MY SCHOOL WAS NOT CLOSING IN JUNE. I AM GOING TO A NEW SCHOOL IN SEPTEMBER."

## Results from the Parent Survey

Three hundred parents of CSFP students in grades Kindergarten through 8 were selected at random to participate in this evaluation study. All three hundred were sent a two page survey to complete. Of the 300 parents receiving the survey, 163 (54%) returned completed survey forms.

The parent survey was designed to determine some background information about the CSFP parents that the program had not already gathered, and to obtain feedback about the program's impact on their CSFP scholarship child(ren). The first part of the two page survey asked about their family in general, and the second part asked specifically about their youngest child in the CSFP program. Because the parents surveyed did not include parents of students only in the ninth grade and above, all of the youngest children about which the parents responded were in grades Kindergarten through 8.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

Some of the parents did have CSFP scholarship children in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and above (7%). While over half (56%) of the parents surveyed had only 1 child in the CSFP program, twenty-seven percent (27%) had two, fourteen percent (14%) had three, three percent (3%) had four, and one percent (1%) had five. The parents of CSFP 3<sup>rd</sup> graders represented the largest contingent responding to the survey (24%), while parents of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders were the smallest group responding (1% each).

In the coming year, new scholarships will only be given to three eligible students per household. Under these rules, only four percent (4%) of families currently participating would not be eligible for scholarships for all of their children.

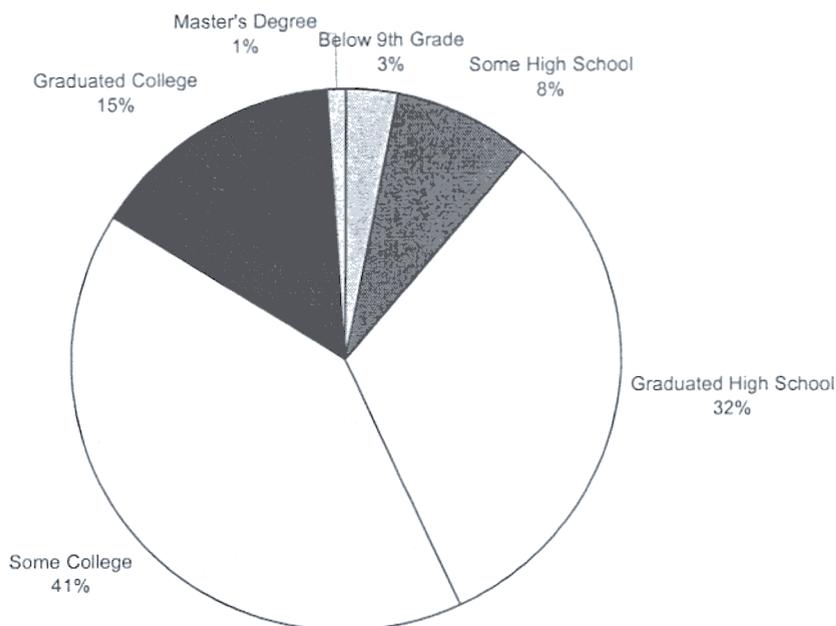
Forty-one percent (41%) of parents surveyed were raising their children in two parent households. Eighty-one percent (81%) of parents surveyed cared for more than one child in their house. Nearly one half (48%) of parents reported that they had two children in their household, with a few parents (2%) reporting they had as many as 7 children altogether in their household. The average number of children per scholarship household was reported to be 2.7. The numbers of children in the households varied from 1 to 7.

Parents were asked how many miles they lived from their CSFP sponsored school and how many miles they lived from a regular public school. Parents lived, on average, three miles from their CSFP child's schools, and, on average, one mile from the nearest regular public school. Considering that traffic in the City can be difficult, parents and students are making substantially more effort in terms of transportation to connect to their CSFP school than they would otherwise need to connect to their local public school.

When asked about their ethnic backgrounds, nearly one-third (34%) indicated that they were Caucasian, nearly one half (48%) were African-American, thirteen percent (13%) were Hispanic and the remainder (6%) were Asian-American.

Parents' formal schooling levels differed significantly, as well. Over half (57%) had taken some college coursework. Eighty-nine percent had graduated from high school. More information on parents' levels of formal schooling is provided in Chart 1 below.

**CHART 1. CSFP PARENTS' EDUCATION LEVELS**



The parents' reportedly high levels of academic achievement relative to the general population in Philadelphia is consistent with findings that parents who pursue educational choices are more devoted to education as a means of upward mobility (Howell, Peterson et al., 2002, *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools*, Brookings Institution).

The CSFP parents surveyed were asked to respond to questions about their youngest child in the CSFP program (students in grades K-8). When asked if they knew the mission of their child's school, ninety-one percent (91%) stated that they did know that school's mission. When asked if they volunteered their time at their child's school, sixty percent (60%) indicated that they volunteered for the school. When asked if they were involved in fundraising at the school, nearly all (90%) stated that they were involved in fundraising activities. Note that several schools charge additional fees if parents do not volunteer or contribute to fundraising efforts.

When asked whether they had concerns about their child's safety at their CSFP-sponsored school, one-fifth of parents (22%) stated that they did have safety concerns. The CSFP parents were asked whether their child's behaviors had improved in four key areas since coming to their CSFP-

sponsored schools. Every parent (100%) reported that their child's behaviors had been better or about the same in the following areas: academics, attendance, the need for discipline at school, and the need for discipline at home. The academic behaviors of students were reported to be most improved, with nearly three quarters of parents (71%) stating that their child's academic behavior was better than before they attended their CSFP-sponsored school.

The CSFP parents were asked to rate the importance of various factors in choosing their CSFP child's school. The most important factors reported by parents were the academic reputation of the school (97%) and the presence of good teachers and high quality instruction (96%). The least important factor, though still important to almost half of the parents (48%), was a child's poor performance in their previous school. For more information on the reasons parents provided for choosing their CSFP child's school, see Table 5 below.

Table 5. Parents' Reasons for Selecting their CSFP Child's School

REASONS	Important/ Very Important
Good teachers and high quality of instruction	97%
Academic reputation of this school	96%
I prefer the emphasis and educational philosophy of this school	92%
Safety for my child	90%
Religious instruction	88%
Cost of the school	83%
Promises made in the school's literature	83%
Financial aid from the school for my child	79%
Recommendations of a teacher or official	
Convenient location	
My child wanted to attend this school	
Recommendations of friends or neighbors	
I was unhappy with the curriculum & instruction at his/her previous school	62%
My child has special needs that were not met at his/her previous school	50%
My child was performing poorly at their previous school	48%

As can be seen from the table above, safety is a major concern for parents when choosing a school. However, a school's academic reputation and educational emphasis is sometimes more important when parents are making school choices than the perceived level of school safety. It is interesting to note that the majority of parents did not choose to place their child in the private school because they were doing poorly academically, but because they felt the school could offer a certain kind of educational atmosphere and opportunity than they would otherwise have gotten. This supports the notion that educational choices are often being made to connect parents and students with a unique type of educational and social community- a concept referred to as "social capital" (Coleman, J, 1990, *Foundations of Social Theory*, Harvard University Press). In keeping with that observation, a large majority (88%) of the parents surveyed indicated that religious instruction was an important factor in choosing their child's school. Religious schools offer the opportunity to connect parents and students

to a larger community of like-minded people, introduce students to religious principles and thought, and have a reputation for emphasizing ethical behavior and discipline (Bryk, A., Lee, V, & Holland, P., 1993, *Catholic schools and the common good*, Harvard University Press).

The CSFP parents were asked about important characteristics of the environments of the schools their children were attending. The large majority of parents surveyed felt that their child had access to computers and other new technologies (87%). A similarly large percentage of parents also felt that their child was motivated to learn at their CSFP-sponsored school (87%). Fewer parents felt that their child's school had small class sizes (54%), and that they were able to influence instruction and activities in their child's school (53%). The majority of CSFP parents surveyed felt that their schools possessed all of the characteristics identified by the researchers as key areas of parental concern. For more information on parents' responses to questions about these characteristics, see Table 6 below.

**Table 6. CSFP Parents' Responses to Statements Regarding School Characteristics**

<b>School Characteristic</b>	<b>True</b>
My child has access to computers and other new technologies	<b>87%</b>
My child is motivated to learn	<b>87%</b>
The quality of instruction is high	
My child's achievement level is improving	81%
There is good communication between the school and my household	81%
The school has effective leadership and administration	78%
My child receives sufficient individual attention	<b>71%</b>
Support services (i.e., counseling, health care, etc.) are available to my child	
The school has small class sizes	54%
I am able to influence instruction and school activities	53%

The fact that relatively few parents (although still a majority) felt that their school had small class sizes, a characteristic often emphasized as a benefit of private education, further supports the notion that the CSFP parents are choosing their schools primarily because of the particular characteristics of the school environment and in the interest of connecting their family with a particular type of community and social capital (Coleman, J, 1990, *Foundations of Social Theory*, Harvard University Press).

The CSFP parents were asked to provide their opinions regarding several additional statements about their child's school. Parents generally described their schools as being safe, well-disciplined schools with strong instruction and curriculum, but were lacking resources that would help with areas such as reducing class sizes and providing more extra-curricular activities. For example, one-third of the parents surveyed (36%) felt that their child's school did not have enough extra-curricular activities. Less than half (43%) felt that their child's school had sufficient financial resources. A large majority of parents felt that their child's school had high standards and expectations (88 %), that they were satisfied with the quality of instruction (89%), that they were satisfied with the school's curriculum (91%) and that students felt safe at their child's school (93%). Most of the parents felt that they were

receiving the services that they had been seeking in a school. For more information regarding CSFP parents' opinions of their children's schools, see Table 7 below.

**Table 7. CSFP Parents' Opinions Regarding their Child's School**

<b>School Statement</b>	<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>
Students feel safe at the school	93%
I am satisfied with the school's curriculum	91%
The school has a good discipline policy	90%
I am satisfied with the instruction offered	89%
This school has high standards and expectation for students	88%
This school has good administrative leadership	83%
The school feels like a part of my family	76%
This school has good buildings and grounds	75%
This school has small class sizes	70%
This school is in a good neighborhood	68%
This school has sufficient financial resources	43%
The school does not have enough extracurricular activities	36%

In order to begin to assess CSFP students' levels of academic success, CSFP parents were asked to provide their child's report card grades from their latest report (end of year or just prior to the end) in Mathematics, English/Language Arts, History/Social Studies and Science. A wide variety of grading conventions were reported, particularly from parents of students in the early grades (K-2). Students received numerical grades, traditional letter grades, grades of satisfactory and unsatisfactory, grades of Good or Needs Improvement and similar types of reports. The large majority of students were taking all of the subjects inquired into in the survey: Math, Language Arts, Social Studies and Science. From parents' reports, CSFP students appeared to be doing quite well academically in their schools. The CSFP students' reported numerical grades and traditional letter grades are provided in Tables 8 and 9 below. The scores show students achieving mostly As and Bs, or scoring between 80 and 100 points. Scores are fairly consistent across subjects (and across grading methods), with no particular problem areas standing out among the students. Mathematics appears to be the weakest subject for the CSFP students. The scores for the other students in the Very Good or Satisfactory categories were determined to be too difficult to set on a hierarchical scale.

**Table 8. CSFP Students' Letter Grades as Reported by CSFP Parents**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Math</b>	36%	49%	10%	3%	2%
<b>English</b>	46%	46%	8%	0%	0%
<b>Social Studies</b>	51%	39%	10%	0%	0%
<b>Science</b>	41%	43%	16%	0%	0%

**Table 9. CSFP Students' Numerical Grades as Reported by CSFP Parents**

Subject	90-100	80-89	70-79	60-69	0-59
Math	38%	42%	20%	0%	0%
English	42%	48%	10%	0%	0%
Social Studies	45%	45%	10%	0%	0%
Science	47%	47%	6%	0%	0%

When asked whether they would be sending their child back to their CSFP-sponsored school the following year, ninety-one percent (91%) of parents indicated that they were planning to. Of those who would not be sending their students back to their CSFP schools, one stated that they needed more financial help, one stated that their income increased and they were therefore no longer eligible, one was moving out of town, and seven (4%) were no longer eligible because their child was entering high school and CSFP was no longer awarding scholarships to secondary students.

## Results from the School Site Observations

The researchers visited two of the CSFP-participating schools that were attended by the largest numbers of students for the purposes of observing the activities at the schools and interviewing key staff members about the nature of the school and their interactions with CSFP.

Both schools visited shared a number of characteristics, including:

- Clean, bright facilities
- Orderly movement
- Uniforms
- Respected principals and teachers
- Respect for visitors
- Emphasis on traditional learning methods
- Clear expectations broadcast verbally and in print throughout
- Colorful classrooms
- Nearly 100% African American students
- Dedicated teachers with low turnover and
- Celebrational cultures.

The schools' staff members indicated in interviews that the schools were increasingly pressed for funds, and had been forced to reduce some services or cut staff in recent years due to pressures from declining enrollments and hesitancy to raise tuition to cover costs. The schools were still managing to provide students with high quality teachers and relatively up to date computers, although there was some doubt about how long this could continue. The charter schools, providing a free education often packaged as a private school type of opportunity, have been contributing to declining enrollments in both schools in recent years.

The schools were clearly focused on creating a community that was open and welcoming to students, parents and outsiders interested in the school. Parents were seen sitting in several of the classrooms at the schools, teachers took time to explain the work that their students were doing and to introduce visitors to the class, and student work was displayed proudly throughout both schools.

## **Interviews with CSFP Staff**

The CSFP staff were interviewed formally for this study in order to assess the history, current organization, and future directions of the program, and to obtain staff members' input into the design of the evaluation. The program's Executive Director and Program Director, CSFP's entire staff at the time, were interviewed, as well as the President of CSFP's non-profit Board. The CSFP staff and Board President were questioned regarding their previous experiences, the history of the program, the philosophy of the program, the calendar of operations of the program, the current evaluation and data collection efforts of the program, and the data collection and evaluation needs of the program in the future. The interviews outlined considerable change in the organization since its founding five years previously. The program was begun as a division of the national office of the Children's Scholarship Fund, headquartered in New York City. The program's creators hired an initial staff for the office who managed the scholarships in the first three years. As CSFP developed its own identity, and the national office encouraged their independence, a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation was established and a new Executive Director and Program Director were hired. Changes were made to the mission and organization of the program, including a stronger focus on supporting scholarship students in the younger grades (K-8).

The CSFP office still gleans much support from the New York CSF office, with fundraising at CSFP matched dollar for dollar by the New York program. CSFP's administrative staff is funded by the CSFP Board of Directors and CSF national office, which allows every dollar raised at the Philadelphia office to go toward scholarships.

CSFP does not impose criteria on their scholarship recipients, other than that they must earn below the income limits set by the program, the students must attend an accredited school in Philadelphia and they must reside within the City limits. This sets CSFP apart from several other scholarship organizations in town that use various criteria to select students to receive their scholarships (for example, the BLOCS scholarship is only reserved for Catholic children). The result of this neutrality is that the recipients of CSFP's scholarships are incredibly diverse, and come from all parts of the city.

The staff of the program is very small considering the large number of families that the program serves. The advantages of the small staff are evident in their high levels of communication, their efficiency, and their sharing of some core duties. These duties are currently maximizing staff time, however, with time devoted to fundraising, raising program awareness, recruiting, communicating with schools, communicating with families, making site visits to schools, verifying student status, and working with the staff of the national CSF office. Any additional duties that might be considered, such as tracking students' progress, providing information to assist parents' school choices or connecting scholarship students to outside supportive agencies or organizations would require additional staff.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

CSFP is an organization dedicated to building stronger communities in the City of Philadelphia by supporting choices in education for low-income families. The approach that has been taken by CSFP is unique in Philadelphia, which is, in turn, an unusual environment for school choice. Philadelphia has had a long history of private education that stretches back to the founding of the City. The City's founder and principal designer, William Penn, originally asked the Society of Friends (Quakers) to provide for the education of the City's youth. Since that time in the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century, a large number of private schools has developed. The City now has over 200 operating private schools- a number nearly equal to the number of public schools- many of which have been operating for over 50 years. Private schools exist in nearly every neighborhood in the city, with tuition costs running from relatively inexpensive to extraordinarily expensive. Many private schools have educated several generations of family members and have become cornerstone institutions in their communities.

The CSFP scholarship program has developed a model that allows low-income families to choose from whichever private school they want to attend, provided the school is within the City of Philadelphia. Unlike some scholarship or voucher programs, which provide a set amount for families which may or may not cover the full costs of the private school, or which may be affiliated with a particular school or require a student to meet certain academic criteria, CSFP asks that families make a substantial financial contribution to their child's education in order to qualify for their scholarship. This requirement that parents take financial and personal responsibility for their child's education is a conscious decision intended to increase families' attachment and investment in the gift of education that they are receiving. The high rates of student and parent involvement in the schools and the perception among parents and students that they are a true part of a supportive school community provide evidence that the CSFP model is working well.

CSFP students appear to be doing well both socially and academically in their schools. Students are engaged in large numbers in extra-curricular activities at their schools. The schools tend to rate the CSFP students as having fewer discipline problems and being more academically involved than their non-CSFP students. Parents are enthusiastic about the opportunities that their children are receiving in their schools regarding their emotional, behavioral, academic and social growth.

One of the primary advantages cited with regard to providing educational choices to parents and students is the ability to connect families to the type of community and resources that suit their particular desires and perceived needs (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, *Blacks in the White Establishment*, 1991, Yale University Press; Cookson, P. and Persell, C., 1985, *Preparing for Power*, Basic Books). This study found that families and schools are indeed making strong connections that are enhancing their sense of community. This remains true despite the fact that their choices generally require more transportation and access to fewer educational resources and less desirable class sizes than they would prefer. Nearly all participating families are choosing to return their children to their scholarship schools each year, despite the sacrifices required of them to continue their relationships with the schools.

One of the main concerns among parents and students was determined to be a general lack of understanding of what they could do when the CSFP scholarship ended. Many parents and students expressed concern that faced an uncertain future when the scholarship ended, or when their school

closed with little warning at the end of the school year. Many expressed hope that the CSFP program could provide them with some guidance about where they might turn to connect with scholarship programs or supportive schools in the future. During the course of this study, CSFP staff and Board members also mentioned a desire to connect students and their families to additional resources beyond what CSFP was designed to offer.

Given the focus of the current CSFP staff and Board on tracking their scholarship students' progress and gathering feedback to support student growth over time, it is recommended that CSFP engage in an effort to gather information on student outcomes as they progress through the program and beyond. This study and the resulting tracking system would enable CSFP to develop and track information on student performance in school, participation in activities inside and outside of school, needs of students receiving scholarships and choices made after graduation from their schools. Such longitudinal information would be extremely valuable in helping to identify and connect participants with important resources that could assist their growth both during and after their participation in the program. Potential tasks that could serve this tracking project are outlined below.

### Recommended Student Tracking Project Tasks

<b>TASK</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
1. Develop Database of Participants	A database of all current program participants could be developed, including demographic and contact information, school performance indicators, lists of extra-curricular activities and involvement with outside organizations.
2. Select Participant and Comparison Groups	Participants for a more intense study of student experiences and outcomes could be selected from the current CSFP scholarship students. Comparison students from a group of candidates not chosen for the scholarship could be selected.
3. Track Participant and Comparison Group Activities	Current and former participants in CSFP and their comparison group counterparts could be contacted to gather complete and up-to-date information for the CSFP student database. Information could be gathered through written surveys, telephone contact and from CSFP's current participant records.
4. Identify Needs and Issues Facing Participants and Comparison Group	Current and former participants in the program might be asked to identify areas both in and outside of school that are affecting their ability to succeed academically. This information could be useful for providing participants with resources from outside organizations and institutions that could improve their chances for success.
5. Test Participants and Comparison Group	CSFP Participants in the study group and their comparison group might be tested annually for several years of the study using a nationally standardized academic test. Scores could then be compiled and

	analyzed allowing a sense of the academic success of students in the program.
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A database of student information that could be developed through the methods outlined below would be useful in helping to track student progress, to document successes within the program, and to connect students and their families to supportive services that cannot be directly provided by CSFP.

## APPENDIX

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### Data collection activities overview

#### Student Focus Groups

Two student focus groups were developed, one for students in grades 3-5, another for students in grades 6-8. Twelve (12) students were chosen at random from each group of participating students (out of 559 in grades 3-5; 390 in grades 6-8). Letters were sent to parents of those students, informing them about the times and dates for the focus groups, and asking them to respond by telephone. Positive responses were received from 5 parents in each group, and reminder phone calls were made to each parent as the date for the focus groups approached. The focus groups were held between 3:45 and 5:00 pm at the CSFP office in downtown Philadelphia. All five students attended the grades 3-5 focus group. Two students attended the grades 6-8 focus group. Follow up phone interviews were conducted with five (5) additional middle grades students, for a total of 12 students interviewed.

#### Participating Schools Survey

Survey forms were mailed in early April to all 208 private schools currently participating in the CSFP program. In May, a reminder post card was sent out to the 73 schools that had not returned their forms. Additional survey forms were mailed to several schools. A total of 169 schools (81.3%) returned completed forms. All 169 schools were included in the final analysis.

#### Parent Survey

Although the CSFP program currently serves student in grades Kindergarten through Twelve, the staff and Board have made a conscious decision to provide scholarships only to students in grades K-8 beginning in the 2003-04 school year. FRONTIER 21 and CSFP staff therefore decided to concentrate our data gathering efforts on the active students and parents in grades K-8. CSFP provided scholarships to 1491 students in those grades during the study year (2002-03). CSFP's records provided information on 996 parents of these K-8 students.

CSFP and FRONTIER 21 staff made a decision to survey 300 parents. A random sample of 300 parents was selected, and survey forms were sent out to them in early May 2003. Reminder postcards were developed and sent to non-responding parents in early June 2003. Several parents were mailed additional survey forms. Ultimately, 163 parents returned completed forms (54%). Analysis was conducted on information from all 163 responding parents.

#### Student Survey

CSFP and FRONTIER 21 staff surveyed 150 students in grades 4-8. The participants were selected at random from the 760 CSFP students in those grades. Survey forms were mailed to students homes in early May 2003. In early June 2003, reminder postcards were mailed out to the parents of the non-responding students. Ultimately, 74 students returned completed survey forms (50%). Final analyses were conducted using information from all 74 responding students.

#### Interviews with CSFP Staff

Interviews were conducted with CSFP staff members Ina Lipman (Executive Director) and Victoria Sambursky (Program Director), and Board member Evie McNiff (Board President) using

formal interview protocols in mid-February, 2003. Dr. Alex Schuh of FRONTIER 21 also made a presentation to the entire CSFP Board on April 8, 2003 regarding the design and progress of the evaluation up to that point, and collected feedback on the study from Board members at that time.

Program	Date of report	Population	Time	Controls	Design	Outcome Measures	Results – selected findings not everything
Charlotte Children's Scholarship Fund	8/30/00	Lottery assignment 2-8 <sup>th</sup> grades 1,143 sent invitations, 452 participated in the study	One year	Yes	Lottery assignment – those that win the lottery are study group, lottery losers are controls	Standardized national tests Parent Satisfaction Student satisfaction	Math 5.9 percentile improvement Reading 6.5 percentile improvement Parental satisfaction – higher (comparison to controls) Parents felt school was safer Student satisfaction – higher (compared to controls)
Florida A-Plus Program	2000	Students (from 'failing schools') are offered vouchers or the opportunity to go to another public school 4-10 <sup>th</sup> grades	Two years	No	Looked at the effects of an accountability system. No control. Pre-test, post test comparison for failing schools	Schools are given a grade based on performance of Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests in reading, math, and writing.	After two years all schools passed the standardized test May be some weaknesses in this study
Milwaukee Parental Choice Program	Program 1990-1994	Students come from families with incomes not exceeding 1.75 times the national poverty line – 850 enrolled last year	5 years	Yes- students eligible but not enrolled vs. enrolled students	Families meeting criteria are given the choice to receive vouchers	Achievement test Parent survey	Test scores – mixed results Parent opinion – very positive
Cleveland Scholarship & Tutoring Program (CSTP)	1997 program report 2003 - report	First grade cohort followed to grade three N=7 still looking	3 years	Yes- students eligible but not enrolled vs. enrolled students	Followed cohort over time. Compared with control group	1) Who participated the teachers & students in the program 3) Academic Achievement – measured by test scores, attendance & behavior	No significant impact on academic achievement
San Antonio Texas	Program started 1998	Those receiving Horizon vouchers – not sure how they were chosen		Yes Compared to non-voucher students in the same district, and also to students in three comparison districts	Compared Horizon voucher students to control groups	Questionnaires ITBS Test in reading and Math	Voucher student test scores were not significantly better in math, were significantly better in reading Voucher students' Mother tended to be a bit more educated and more likely to work full time Voucher parents reported less problems with fighting, guns and dangerous weapons at school Voucher parents tended to be more satisfied with academic quality of their children's schools
School Choice in Washington D.C.	Report 2000	6,000 offered scholarship – 1,000 elected to take the scholarships lottery assignment 2-8 <sup>th</sup> grades	7-8 mins	Yes, Lottery Participants compared to non-participants	Comparison with control group	Tests scores Characteristics of participants Parent questionnaires -	Grades 2-5 2-5 Grades 6-8 AA (African American)– Math better (non significant) Grades 6-8 AA Reading worse – significant Parent report better perception of private schools Parents report destruction of property, tardiness, fighting cheating, etc worse in public schools More appropriate amount of homework in private schools
New York City Voucher Program	Report 2002	20,000 applicants, 1,300 vouchers. Lottery	2 years	Yes	Comparison with control group	Student Questionnaire Parent Questionnaire Test scores	See the power presentation prepared by Mathematica
San Francisco	2001	1,000 offered, K-8 low income	One year?	Yes, Accepted vs did not accept and vs public school counterparts	Parent and student survey results compared to control group results	Survey	Parent & students more satisfied Less fighting, cheating, stealing, racial conflicts Given more homework More parent conferences, & voluntarism